

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Freezes Moscow's Arctic Ambitions

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Abstract

This article explores how the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has upended and reshaped Arctic security, institutions, and partnerships. With Arctic governance institutions that include Russia, such as the Arctic Council, on pause and scientific collaboration with Russia interrupted, the military dimension has overshadowed Arctic cooperation—while highlighting the traditional security risks of dependence on fossil fuels and distracting attention from other key Arctic issues such as climate change and the socioeconomic development of Indigenous communities. Russia's ambitions for agency as Arctic Council chair have been thwarted, and Moscow's plans for economic development of the Russian Arctic and Northern Sea Route are in doubt. Although some regional cooperation continues through multilateral agreements, the path forward for dialogue on traditional and nontraditional security in the Arctic remains uncertain.

Just one year ago, after their 21 June 2021 meeting in Geneva, US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke of the Arctic as a region where the two countries might cooperate, despite their profound differences elsewhere.¹ One year later, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has turned what his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, had hoped would be a zone of peace into a new front in the confrontation between Russia and NATO.² This article will explore how the Russian invasion of Ukraine has upended and reshaped Arctic security, institutions, and partnerships.

Unlike Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and subsequent annexation of Crimea, which had a more limited impact—restricting Russia's participation in many organizations involved with Arctic affairs and reducing Russian access to Western investment and technology for Arctic development due to sanctions—Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has had a profound and almost insurmountable securitizing impact on the Arctic. Potentially all permanent Arctic Council states, with the exception of Russia, could soon be NATO members, as Russia's

willingness to ignore norms of territorial integrity and sovereignty led to widespread alarm in Nordic countries.

Efforts to isolate Russia's Arctic goals from its other security aims are now impossible, and revisionist aspects of Moscow's Arctic messaging are more likely to gain attention. The Arctic Council itself opted, by majority consensus, to pause its operations during Russia's chairmanship, which expires in May 2023, and other Arctic organizations followed the council's lead. In the short term, calls to reduce dependence on Russian energy are disrupting energy and climate goals for the Arctic, as states scramble to find alternative fuels, though in the long run those states that have been most dependent on Russian fossil fuels may be prodded to explore renewable energy and other alternatives.

Background

One year ago, on 20 May 2021, as Russia assumed its tenure as chair of the Arctic Council, there was reason for skepticism about the prospects for regional cooperation under its lead. Russia was under international sanctions due to its 2014 annexation of Crimea. There was growing international concern about the modernization of Russia's military bases in the Arctic, and Moscow's positions on territorial claims and the regulation of the Northern Sea Route were at odds with those of other Arctic states. The Russian government had a questionable record on Indigenous rights in the Arctic, having suspended in 2012–13 the operations of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), a permanent participant of the Arctic Council, and replaced that organization with what human rights activist and former advisor to RAIPON Pavel Sulyandziga terms a puppet of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor to the Soviet-era KGB.³ Some even questioned Russia's economic relevance to the Arctic Council, given its overall economic weakness and skeptical attitude toward policies to address the climate-change crisis.

Despite these reasons for skepticism, Russian Arctic scholar Alexander Sergunin argued in 2021, prior to the invasion of Ukraine, that Russia was a rather good Arctic Council citizen, contributing to the council's budget regularly and to discussions on major issues of concern to the organization.⁴ Marisol Maddox, Senior Arctic Analyst at the Polar Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, similarly contended that previously Moscow's interest in developing Russia's Arctic territories was "a huge incentive for Russia to engage" with other states in the region.⁵ As Russia began its chairmanship of the Arctic Council, its priorities were development, improving the life of Arctic inhabitants and Indigenous peoples, environmental protection and climate change, and strengthening the Arctic Council.⁶ In preparation for its term at the helm of the council, the Russian government released a key policy document in March 2020,

“The Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic through 2035.” The Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic submitted a draft implementation strategy for the government’s consideration in May 2020 and, in October 2021, outlined the mechanisms to implement the state’s Arctic policy and development strategy.⁷

Cooperative moves were just one feature of Russia’s Arctic policy, however. Pavel Baev, a research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and a senior nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, contends that Russia has always had multiple conflicting interests in the Arctic—some promoted cooperation, while others contributed to the region’s militarization. To compound the confusion over the nature and direction of Russia’s Arctic policy, Baev argues that some of Moscow’s interests promoted the status quo, while others were revisionist and sought to expand Russia’s power and standing at the expense of Western positions.⁸ Writing in 2018, Baev saw signs that revisionist approaches were ascendant, involving strengthening Russian military capabilities in the Arctic, expanding economic cooperation with China instead of seeking to resume collaboration with Western partners, enforcing greater Russian control over the Northern Sea Route, militarizing the Russian Arctic coastline, and abandoning arms control.⁹

One year before the invasion of Ukraine, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Troy Bouffard, and Ryan Dean underscored the common denominator in Russia’s seemingly conflicting Arctic goals: Moscow’s quest to legitimize its centrality to Arctic affairs and use its international legitimacy to justify its national priorities.¹⁰ After the 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it became clear to Western Arctic experts that Russia would seek to use its chairmanship to promote “business as usual,” which would mean that other Arctic states would be put in a position of accepting Russian territorial gains in Ukraine as a *fait accompli* as well as facing pressure to end Western sanctions, supposedly in the name of Arctic regional cooperation.¹¹

Impact of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Arctic Institutions

By deciding on 3 March 2022 to pause its operations indefinitely,¹² the Arctic Council managed to avoid the sorry spectacle that took place in the United Nations Security Council when the Russian government presided over the meeting regarding its own violation of another member state’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. James DeHart, US Coordinator for the Arctic Region, in the US Department of State, explained that

... the words ‘pause temporarily’ were chosen deliberately. This was not a withdrawal from the Arctic Council, it’s not an announcement that we’re trying to reconstitute the Arctic Council—the membership. It’s simply a pause in light of the horrific

events and Russia's egregious, unprovoked, completely unnecessary, war of choice against Ukraine. We don't know how long the pause will last. I think part of the logic here for simply pausing is that we are in a situation that is extremely fluid.¹³

If meetings of the Arctic Council were to proceed as scheduled, this would require member delegates traveling to Moscow for meetings, giving the impression that they were willing to engage with Russia diplomatically despite its invasion of Ukraine. This has proven untenable for the permanent Arctic states at a time when most democracies seek to impose economic and political costs on the Putin government. As Elana Wilson Rowe of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs explained, organizations like the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) did not want to be used for messaging that business was going on as usual.¹⁴

One month after the Arctic Council paused operations, the BEAC (which includes Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the European Union, as well as Russia) followed suit, suspending all activities involving Russia due to its "blatant violation of international law, breach of rules-based multilateralism and the principles and objectives." While Russian Arctic officials issued a fairly moderate response to the suspension of the Arctic Council, calling it "regrettable" and likely to increase regional risks,¹⁵ by April 2022 Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova was calling out Russia's so-called partners in the BEAC for their "unfriendly steps" and "unsubstantiated accusations," which she claimed ran counter to the organization's goals.¹⁶

Both the Arctic Council and the BEAC were designed to steer clear of geopolitics and focus on other aspects of Arctic governance. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the insufficiency of existing Arctic institutions to manage the reality of armed conflict involving one of its members, as well as threats of future incursions against fellow members. In a few short months, the military dimension has overshadowed other aspects of Arctic cooperation, while highlighting the traditional security risks of continued dependence on fossil fuel and distracting attention from other key Arctic issues such as climate change and the socioeconomic development of Indigenous communities.¹⁷ Former diplomat Ingrid Burke Friedman notes that the suspension of cooperation in Arctic regional cooperation shows the major governance gaps for nonmilitary issues that might be temporarily addressed via bilateral or multilateral agreements.¹⁸

In the past, others have pointed to the problem of confining Arctic security discussions to NATO bodies, which necessarily exclude Russia, leaving the region without a forum for discussing key security issues.¹⁹ As Rowe notes, current Arctic dynamics are more anchored in the military dimension, as discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, even if a forum to discuss Arctic security issues

with Russia existed, members would likely feel equally reluctant to engage with it at this juncture on hard security issues. In the case of Russia, it is challenging to distinguish between military and nonmilitary activities in the Arctic, as the Russian military participates in search and rescue (SAR) and the Russian Coast Guard, represented in the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, is subordinate to the FSB.²⁰

The interruption of planned Arctic activities will have far-reaching consequences. As Lawson Brigham points out, Arctic states are losing the opportunity to observe SAR along the Northern Sea Route, which will become a domestic passageway, not the internationalized shipping corridor Russian officials imagined. In Brigham's view, while liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Russian Arctic can still be shipped to China, there are real questions about the ability of global shipping companies, upon which Russia mostly relies, to participate in this trade given international sanctions. Despite the numerous obstacles, US Arctic experts argue that some areas of Arctic cooperation remain necessary—SAR operations took place with Russia during the Cold War, as did scientific cooperation. Although such cooperation continued after 2014,²¹ in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, many joint scientific projects have been suspended.²² Rowe contends that, despite Russia's absence from collaborative activities, "like-minded Arctic states will continue to meet and be engaged" and that a greater emphasis on subregional cooperation may offer a temporary solution.²³

Consequences for International Security in the Arctic

The concept of international security in the Arctic has historically been intertwined and bound to its regional dynamics and the greater global landscape. When considering its historical significance during the Cold War, the region was ripe for conflict as both the Soviet Union (USSR) and US/NATO had significant presences within the Arctic Circle, both in infrastructure and activity. For the USSR, the establishment of bases to provide early warning and to thwart potential infiltration was commonplace. The Soviet Navy made extensive use of the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom (GIUK) gap as a naval chokepoint for transiting the submarines of the USSR's Northern Fleet from its Arctic base to the North Atlantic, where they could deploy ballistic missile and attack submarines globally. The United States and Canada correspondingly established the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, later replaced by the North Warning System, across the entirety of the North American Arctic (Alaska, Canada, and Greenland) to track and intercept Soviet aircraft and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) targeting US and NATO allies. The Cold War period provided what some have described as a period of relative strategic stability.²⁴ This stability came about, as former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and

Americas' Security Affairs Paul Stockton notes, with neither side—US/NATO nor the USSR—wanting to provoke or directly attack the other's industry, population, or strategic forces.²⁵

The actions by the United States and NATO to provide stability during the Cold War and to maintain vigilance in the Arctic began to fade with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The new Russian Federation emerged as a significantly economically weakened state that no longer posed the same kind of threat to the Arctic. Many of the measures previously undertaken by the United States to maintain parity with the Soviet Union were dismantled as they were no longer considered to be necessary or economically prudent. In the 1990s and 2000s, Washington refocused US attention to Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁶

Col Robert Berls, USAF, retired, a nuclear expert and former US military attaché in Moscow, noted that, in the post-Cold War period of the 1990s, Moscow began to redefine and rediscover Russia's place in the new world order, focusing on a path to boost its stature to a point where it would once again be viewed as a global superpower.²⁷ As Russia slowly began to reemerge as a great-power competitor with newfound military and economic capabilities to assert its influence, Moscow also became more assertive in its foreign policy and military actions. This included investment in its military infrastructure in the Arctic.²⁸ In 2014, Russia's seizure of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine signaled a fundamental change of Russian international intentions—the United States and other NATO members now clearly saw that Russia was willing to invade a neighboring peaceful and sovereign country.

Nevertheless, in the years following the 2014 occupation of parts of eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, Russia continued to remain engaged in Arctic affairs, including the Arctic Council. Michael Byers of the University of British Columbia suggested that after 2014, while Arctic military cooperation among Russia, NATO, and the United States was suspended—with some economic sanctions having been put in place—other activities such as SAR operations, fisheries quota negotiations, and scientific cooperation continued to occur.²⁹ In fact, he contends that much of the cooperation seen before the invasion continued well afterward, while Moscow persisted in building up Russia's presence and capabilities in the Arctic.

In the wake of the 2022 invasion, far more significant measures have been taken to penalize Russia and erode its economic, political, and military capabilities. While its chairmanship of the Arctic Council has been put on pause, it has also been excluded from all NATO and US military-centric meetings and related activities. In fact, military-to-military (mil-to-mil) dialogues such as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and the Arctic Chief of Defence Staff

(CHODS) have excluded Russian participation since the 2014 invasion.³⁰ The ASFR, a mil-to-mil event for flag and general officers, works to foster regional understanding and multilateral security cooperation in the Arctic. For the first time since its creation in 2010, the ASFR was conducted in the United States, in Alaska, from 3–5 May 2022, and hosted by US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).³¹ Against the background of tensions between NATO and Russia, Gen Glen VanHerck, USAF, the commander of NORAD and USNORTHCOM, told the ASFR, “Together, through our coordinated actions, we strengthen our collective deterrence capabilities. Each of the nations represented here are Arctic stakeholders who are essential to ensuring the Arctic is governed by a rules-based international order.”³²

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former prime minister of Denmark and ex-secretary general of NATO, noted in an essay that Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine may have led to unintended consequences, as his actions served to push Finland and Sweden further toward NATO membership.³³ Within three months of the Russian invasion, both Sweden and Finland submitted their formal application to join the alliance. Those applications are now going through NATO’s ratification process and as of mid-August, 23 of 30 NATO member nations had voted to approve Sweden’s and Finland’s applications.³⁴

NATO enlargement was an outcome Russia had long sought to avoid and a stated rationale for Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine, which he feared would join the bloc.³⁵ NATO enlargement will enhance the security of Nordic states, but its future impact on the Arctic Council remains unclear. Canadian Arctic scholar Rob Huebert argues, “The moment Finland and Sweden join NATO, I just don’t ever see the Russians coming back to the Arctic Council.”³⁶ Should this be the case, the inclusion of Sweden and Finland as NATO members may possibly lead to the demise of the Arctic Council itself. Even if the Arctic Council continues to operate, the dynamics within the organization would be significantly altered, as seven of eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States) will also be NATO members. At this writing Russia’s top Arctic official, Nikolai Korchunov, cryptically suggested that NATO membership for Sweden and Finland would lead to unspecified “adjustments in the development of high altitude cooperation.”³⁷

Fallout for Russia’s Economic Partnerships in the Arctic

Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine potentially will have a profound impact on the development of the Russian Arctic infrastructure and Arctic shipping along the NSR. With Western companies heading for the exits and countersanctions

threatening those firms that continue their investments, Russia's Arctic development plans will face major challenges. Nevertheless, on 13 April 2022, Putin chaired a meeting on the development of the Russian Arctic, where he proclaimed that "Russia is open for cooperation with all interested partners" and especially flagged the opportunities to engage with "extra-regional states and associations," presumably China and India.³⁸ While recognizing the logistical obstacles in moving forward with planned projects, Putin called for expediting them and developing plans for import substitution and localization of manufacturing to produce needed equipment.

After 2014, Putin proved relatively successful in retaining many investors in Russia's Arctic energy projects and attracting new investments. One year before, in 2013, China had gained a foothold in the Yamal Peninsula in the Russian Arctic when China's National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) acquired a 20-percent stake in the first Yamal LNG project, one of China's first major upstream energy investments in Russia.³⁹ In 2016, China's Silk Road Fund then bought a 9.9-percent stake and provided a USD 813 million loan. The Export-Import Bank of China and China Development Bank also provided Russia with another USD 11 billion in loans. In April 2019, CNPC and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) each bought a 10-percent stake in the Yamal Arctic LNG 2 project.⁴⁰ For China, the sanctions placed on Russia provided an opportunity for Chinese firms to supply equipment for the LNG projects. With Western technology difficult to access under the sanctions regime, several Chinese firms are among the subcontractors providing equipment for Arctic LNG 2.⁴¹

The People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry urged Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOE) to be circumspect about investing in Russia, but Chinese energy firms are looking for bargains in the Russian Arctic. Chinese SOEs are considering purchasing a stake in Sakhalin-2 from Shell US. However, CNPC, CNOOC, and Sinopec are exploring purchasing the stake Shell is vacating—its 27.5-percent stake in the Sakhalin-2 LNG project, which is 50-percent owned by the Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom.⁴² The company is not under sanction, though sanctions prevent the Russian firm from accessing new financing.⁴³ Nevertheless, in May 2022, five Chinese companies were instructed to stop providing modules for the Yamal LNG 2 project due to the threat of sanctions as well as uncertainties regarding transporting the units to Russia.⁴⁴

Although China has been the focus of attention in terms of countries that might capitalize on the exit of Western firms from the Arctic in 2022, other countries have become involved in Russian Arctic projects since 2014. India became a major investor in the Vankorneft project in 2016, when a consortium of state-owned Indian companies acquired a 49.9-percent stake.⁴⁵ Major South Ko-

rean shipbuilding companies, Samsung Heavy Industries and Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering, have been collaborating with Russia in building LNG carrier ships for the Northern Sea Route.⁴⁶

The United Arab Emirates, which, along with India and China, abstained in the February 2022 UN Security Council vote condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has concluded several Arctic deals with Russia. Dubai-based DP World has agreed to develop and operate cargo services with Rosatom, Russia's state operator, along the Northern Sea Route. DP World will also participate in the construction of ice-class container ships for the route and in the development of trans-shipment ports in Murmansk and Vladivostok.⁴⁷

Although Japan and South Korea have imposed sanctions on Russia, it remains to be seen whether Tokyo and Seoul will withdraw from their Arctic investments. For Japan, energy security is at stake—the island nation is highly dependent on energy imports and seeks to avoid a situation where China is a major investor in Russian energy investments. For this reason, Tokyo has been reluctant to abandon its investment in the Sakhalin-1 LNG project, from which Japan now receives 60-percent of the LNG produced.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Indian government appears eager to take advantage of “distress sales” of Russian energy assets such as Exxon-Mobil's stake in Sakhalin-1 to reduce its dependence on Middle East imports. India imports 85-percent of the energy it requires.⁴⁹

Russian experts note that their country still hopes to avoid excessive dependence on China in the Arctic, though this may be hard to prevent. According to China expert Alexander Gabuev, formerly a senior fellow at the Moscow Carnegie Center, China “will fill the void and find a way to be even more present, and Russia will not be able to push back.”⁵⁰ Ivan Zuenko, a Vladivostok-based analyst and senior research fellow at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), argues that China may succeed in acquiring a few more high-profile investments, in Yamal LNG, for example, but may not get the concessions it seeks. Zuenko contends that China was disappointed after 2014 and felt Beijing gave more to Russia than it received. He further points out that Chinese companies have more lucrative opportunities and better conditions in countries other than Russia.⁵¹

Russian experts also see their country adopting a pivot to Asia by necessity and hope to engage with a variety of states, including traditional partners such as India and Vietnam.⁵² Only Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are cooperating with the sanctions regime; so, Russia may have an opening due to the draw of low energy prices and the desire by many countries—even those that imposed sanctions—to avoid greater Chinese control over regional energy assets and shipping.

Nevertheless, sanctions will affect all Arctic investments, even those of countries that specifically implement them. The independent Russian gas producer

Novatek already is having difficulties financing Yamal LNG 2. Brigham notes that most Russian LNG shipments from the Arctic travel on international flag vessels that may be reluctant to take on Russian cargo given uncertainties about their ability to dock with it. Chinese shipyards have had to cease producing modules for Yamal LNG 2 due to the threat of countersanctions and potential shipping difficulties.⁵³

Nontraditional Security in the Arctic

The current hiatus of the Arctic Council has had numerous repercussions within the Arctic, well beyond traditional national security concerns. Environmental security issues affecting Arctic Indigenous peoples such as climate change, fishing, and pollution are now on hold, and scientific cooperation has been adversely impacted, as demonstrated by the Arctic Wildland Fire Ecology Mapping and Monitoring Project and the Circumpolar Wildland Fire Project.⁵⁴ These projects, with uncertain futures due to the Arctic Council pause, have supported research about the increasing numbers of wildfires within the Arctic and responses to such disasters. This research demonstrates that wildfires have impacts beyond the burning of forests, including on the climate.⁵⁵ These fires affect permafrost melt and contribute to carbon release into the atmosphere in ways not previously understood.⁵⁶ The Gwich'in Council International (GCI), a prominent Indigenous community that serves as a permanent participant of the Arctic Council, manages both projects.⁵⁷

Alaska-based Tim Lydon provides a grim outlook on the continuation of Arctic research and enumerates examples of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine adversely impacting scientific research and information sharing. Maribeth Murray from the University of Calgary notes that the exclusion of Russian scientists from research events diminishes information sharing. She points specifically to lost opportunities such as the Arctic Observing Summit and the Arctic Science Summit Week where the contributions and recommendations of Russian scientists have served to assist numerous organizations within the Arctic.⁵⁸ Lydon provides examples of other collaborative research efforts on pollution that have been adversely affected, including ongoing studies of the presence of microplastics and the impacts of heavy fuels in the Arctic. He highlights the disruption to the International Year of the Salmon (IYS), when US researchers were barred from joining Russia-based research studies that focus on harmful algal blooms in the Chukchi Sea, detrimental to marine mammals and humans alike.⁵⁹

The current pause in Arctic cooperation has also impacted climate-change research affecting Arctic Indigenous peoples. For Arctic Indigenous peoples, climate change has become an overriding concern, as their remote communities are

becoming increasingly more impacted by the effects of erosion, flooding, displacement, and pollution.⁶⁰ As these changes have accelerated, Arctic Indigenous leaders have taken a more active role in advocating for increased awareness and action on climate-change issues.⁶¹ Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough, the International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), has stressed that issues such as climate-related research cannot be put on hold.⁶² ICC Canada President Monica El-Kanayuk has indicated that the ICC remains in contact with its counterpart ICC Chukotka populations in Russia and is committed to continued cooperation.⁶³

Conclusions: Policy Implications

Vladimir Putin has undone much of what his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, had set out to achieve as part of the Murmansk Initiative of 1987. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has served to further ostracize a nation with significant interests in the Arctic, well beyond the condemnation and sanctioning that it had experienced in the wake of its 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine. In response to Russia's brutal war of choice that has trampled on international norms of sovereignty and human rights, Arctic states imposed a swath of political and economic sanctions. Given that context, business as usual in Arctic governance and collaborative activities were not options, and the Arctic could not be a "zone of exception" in response to violations of the international legal order.⁶⁴ Evan Bloom, a former US diplomat who helped to establish the Arctic Council as a "safe space" for the conduct of Arctic issues, contends that in the wake of Russian activities cooperation in the normal mode is no longer possible.⁶⁵ Russian officials have bridled at their isolation, terming it irrational to exclude their country, which has 60-percent of the Arctic coastline and half the region's population.⁶⁶

The consequences for engagement in the Arctic will indeed be profound as diplomatic, economic, environmental, and security discourse remain fractured and the trajectory of future Arctic security dialogue remains uncertain. The impending accession of Finland and Sweden as NATO members will serve to consolidate all Arctic Council nations apart from Russia under the NATO umbrella. Once it becomes possible to resume the activities of the Arctic Council, it is unclear if Russia would want a seat at a NATO-dominant table, even if the organization lacks a mandate to discuss security issues. Moreover, Russia has been excluded from existing Arctic security dialogues since 2014, and the Arctic region now lacks a formal mechanism to address security issues involving Russia.

Despite the pause in Arctic governance institutions, there are multilateral agreements (involving Russia) that continue on issues such as central Arctic Ocean fishing, oil spill response, and SAR operations.⁶⁷ On 8 June 2022, the Arctic 7—all the Arctic Council members with the exception of Russia—agreed

to continue working on issues that do not involve Russian participation.⁶⁸ Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov retorted that any decisions taken by the organization in Russia's absence would lack legitimacy.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, regional experts are discussing a range of mechanisms to maintain cooperation in the Arctic without Russian participation. Proposals have included creating a new Arctic governance organization⁷⁰ or continuing the activities of the Arctic Council working groups, most of which Russia does not chair.⁷¹ Some experts have urged Russia to voluntarily sideline itself to allow important business to proceed,⁷² while others argue that Russia's participation is needed for effective responses to regional problems.⁷³

At this writing, the Russian military invasion seems a long way off from conclusion, and Western countries and their allies, Arctic states included, are maintaining their economic and political pressure on Putin. For Russia in the Arctic Council, this has been a lost chairmanship opportunity. Despite the current high level of tension between Russia and NATO, Norway, which will assume the chair in May 2023, has expressed confidence in the durability of the institution. At the May 2022 Arctic Frontiers conference, Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt noted, "The challenges in the Arctic will not disappear, they must also be dealt with in the future. . . . That requires multilateral cooperation."⁷⁴ ❄️

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