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Great Power Rivalry In the Arctic and India

Deepak Mehra

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



**Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC
1914-2008**

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

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Great Power Rivalry In the Arctic and India

Abstract

Arctic, home to almost four million people is warming three times faster than the global average, resulting in receding ice cover, increasing accessibility to rich deposits of Hydrocarbons, minerals and progressively navigable New Arctic Sea Lanes of Communication. Climate change, transforming geopolitical security environment and technological advancements in the extraction of resources from extremely cold areas, has turned this Zone of Peace into an area of great power contest and geopolitical interest. Russia, with over half of Arctic coast line has been upgrading its civilian and military infrastructure in the Arctic and in response, the US and its NATO allies have also stepped up their regional Military activities and exercises. Not only for circumpolar countries, but for resource-hungry countries like China, India, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea, Arctic has great significance. As an emerging power, India's interest in the Arctic are driven by its economic, strategic, scientific and diplomatic engagements. In the current geopolitical milieu, Russian Arctic in particular, could provide India with long term investment opportunities, ameliorate India's deficiency of rare earth minerals, address its energy needs and provide Russia and the World an alternative to China.

Introduction

Arctic, the northern most part of the Earth, is one of the world's least populated, unspoiled and undeveloped areas. Consisting of

eight circumpolar states¹ it is home to four million people sparsely spread across one-sixth of the world's landmass with almost 2.4 million² living in the Russian Arctic alone. The region is extremely rich in both, renewable and non-renewable, resources and is drawing attention of resource hungry nations.

As per the United States Geological Survey (USGS) report published in 2008, Arctic contains approximately 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids (NGLs).³ Some other geological surveys estimate up to twenty percent of the world's natural resources are in the Arctic⁴.

The dissolution of the USSR in the 1990s led to a period of relative calm in this region with circumpolar countries cooperating and focusing on environmental and sustainability issues with traditional security concerns taking a backseat. However, a combination of climate change, resource-hungry great powers, a changing geo-political security environment and technological advancements in the extraction of resources from extremely cold areas, has turned one of the world's most stable regions into an area of great power contest and geopolitical interest⁵.

The growing economic and strategic importance of the Arctic, changing balance of power in the region with Sweden and Finland joining NATO and, Trump making a strong bid to buy Greenland, is transforming this once pristine 'Zone of Peace'⁶ into the new 'Arc of Competition' leading to its rapid militarisation.

Preview

The paper attempts to cover the rising significance of the Arctic on the World stage and analyse the role of major players in shaping the realpolitik of this Frozen North. The paper is laid out into five parts with each focusing on the specific aspect of the Arctic.

The first part deals with the recent developments shaping the strategic significance of the Arctic leading to the emerging great power competition which is covered in part two of the paper. Chinese forays in the Arctic and the US reaction thereto, constitute the third part. Repercussions of Finland and Sweden joining NATO and reassertion of 'Trumponomics' of Greenland which has the potential to shake the delicate balance of power in the Polar Region, is covered in detail in part four.

In the last and the fifth part, India's strategic interests in the Arctic and the way forward has been touched upon.



Map 1: Circumpolar countries and sea routes through Arctic

(Ref: https://www.ngu.no/upload/Aktuelt/CircumArctic/Mineral_Resources_Arctic_Shortver_Eng.pdf)

Part I: Developments Leading to Strategic Significance of Arctic

Geo-Economic and Geo-Political Significance

Global Warming. Global warming is having an extraordinary effect in the Arctic. Over the past few decades the air temperatures in the Arctic have been rising at a much faster rate of three times the global average⁷. This happens, *“when bright and reflective ice melts, it gives way to a darker ocean; this amplifies the warming trend because the ocean surface absorbs more heat from the Sun than the surface of snow and ice”*⁸. Hydro-meteorology and Environmental Monitoring report of 2022 from the Russian Federal Service indicates about Five Degree Celsius increase in the average temperature along the Arctic Coast of Russia since 1998⁹.

Emerging Economic Impact: Over the last twenty years, the impact of climate change, commodity price increase, and the discovery of vast potential of natural reserves in the region have become an attraction, not only to the circumpolar states but much beyond¹⁰. Permafrost thaw and better mining and extraction technologies have consequently, increased the accessibility of Arctic resources, both on land and on the Continental Shelf.

New Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs). The extent of sea ice in the Arctic has declined by 43 percent from 1979 to 2019¹¹ and it is transforming the Arctic Ocean into a navigable sea through the North West Passage (NWP) and the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Both these routes represent significant shortcuts for commercial shipping from Europe to East Asia and are being claimed by Canada and Russia respectively, as their internal waters. Opening of new Arctic SLOCs and attendant commercial and economic remunerations is fueling great-power competition between the archrivals, Russia and the United States, and also an emerging great power, China.

Geopolitical Significance: Alfred Thayer Mahan in his book 'The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1783' draws upon history to theorise that the use and control of the sea have been a decisive factor in the Nation's greatness and wrote, "*The ships that thus sail to and fro must have secure ports to which to return and must, as far as possible, be followed by the protection of their country throughout the voyage. This protection in time of war must be extended by armed shipping*"¹². As new lanes of shipping through the Arctic Circle become increasingly viable, competition to gain control over this resource-rich vast expanse of the Arctic, by the way of establishing outposts or by use of armed shipping is likely to escalate.

Military Significance of the Arctic

Military Significance of the Arctic during the Great Wars. During the First World War the military-economic significance of the Arctic was highlighted whence, the supplies of military equipment, ammunition and weapons, through the Barents Sea were delivered from allied countries to Russia¹³. Even during the Second World War, post the German occupation of Norway and invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Arctic Region was one of the key areas of military disputations, leading to the establishment of military outposts, intelligence detachments, and weather stations in many of the islands. During the Cold War Arctic region was considered as the shortest route for the missile attack by the USA and Russia on each other and was home to several satellite tracking installations.

Russian Special Operation in Ukraine and Revamping of Military Infrastructure in the Arctic. For the last two decades, Russia has been revamping its Cold War bases in the Arctic and equipping them with state-of-the-art equipment and infrastructure. With its impressive fleet of almost 40 icebreakers and the active

support of the Chinese, Russia seems to have outmaneuvered the US and the West in this region as they found themselves grossly underprepared to contest Russian advancements. During his keynote speech during the 10th edition of the Arctic Circle Assembly in October 2023, Admiral Bauer, the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, said:

“The increased competition and militarisation in the Arctic region, especially by Russia and China, is concerning. The melting ice in the Arctic is creating new sea routes that would facilitate the movement of large vessels and shorten navigation times. We cannot be naïve and ignore the potentially nefarious intentions of some actors in the region. We must remain vigilant and prepare for the unexpected”¹⁴.

It is felt that one of the reasons for the US and West to push Russia into the military conflict with Ukraine could be to weaken Russia, divert its attention and resources away from the Arctic and deny latest technology and investments to exploit Arctic resources. In the current circumstances, they seem to have been successful in achieving their aim. With Finland and Sweden joining NATO all seven circumpolar countries are today NATO members. It has resulted in substantial increase in Russian borders with the NATO creating significant challenges for Russia.

Part II: Emerging Great Power Competition in the Arctic

Russian Interests in the Arctic

In President Putin’s words, “Arctic is a concentration of practically all aspects of national security—military, political, economic, technological, environmental and that of resources”¹⁵. It is therefore, no coincidence that carefully staged images of the Russian President inspecting the Polar ice caves in the Arctic region¹⁶ or fishing bare-chest in Siberia¹⁷ are circulated in the media from time to time. As the siege of the Russian economy by the West continues, Russia’s

focus on the Arctic and its northeast, as the primary drivers of its economy, continues to expand. Denial of Western investment and technologies has forced Russia to turn to the Chinese for the creation of Arctic infrastructure along the NSR and exploitation of its resources. From the Chinese perspective this future polar Silk Road¹⁸ under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a prospective shortcut for its trade routes, a source of rich deposits of fossil fuels, and allows Chinese shipping to avoid maritime bottlenecks of Straits of Malacca and the Suez Canal. By developing these potential traffic and transport routes Russia intends to harmonise Eurasian Economic Union with the Chinese BRI and aims to position Russia, geo-strategically and geo-economically, from the margins of Greater Europe into the center of Greater Eurasia as a major global political actor¹⁹.

For any nation to become great, free access to the world's oceans is a necessity, as the majority of the trade passes through the world's highways on the oceans and Russia is no exception. Post disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Russia has been struggling to retain its unhindered access to the waterways of the world through the Black Sea, Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean against the ever-expanding NATO. The inclusion of Finland and Sweden into the folds of NATO has further restricted Russia's options.

Strategic Military Relevance: Out of the four naval bases of the Russian Federation, three i.e. the Pacific Fleet, the Baltic Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet are anchored in waters that are surrounded by NATO or NATO-friendly countries and are separated from the high seas through maritime bottlenecks, making them easy to detect and track²⁰. Russian Arctic coastline in contrast, provides relative freedom to Russian Naval and Strategic forces and serve militarily as a strategic stronghold for deterrence and defence. For Russia, Kola and Kamchatka Peninsulas in the Arctic have a prominent place in their security milieu, as these act as main bases

for Strategic Nuclear Submarines (SSBN), the crucial component of the 'nuclear triad'²¹. Also, the shortest trajectory for the missiles to reach from the USA to Russia or vice-versa goes across the North Pole, making this region vital for the deployment of the early warning and missile defense systems of both the Nations²².

Exposed Northern Coastline: "The Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation" (AZRF)²³ has about five million square kilometres of area rich in renewable and non-renewable resources and stretches from the Bering Strait to the Barents Sea including, the islands of Warangal, New Siberian, Severnaya Zemlya, Franz Joseph and Novaya Zemlya along the coast of, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea, East Siberian Sea, and Chukchi Sea²⁴. The 24,140 km long arctic coastline of Russia constitutes half of the Arctic's total coastline and almost two-thirds of Russia's total coastline of 37,653 km²⁵. Russia feels that due to the melting of the Polar ice cap, this resource-rich coastline stands exposed.

Rich Oil and Gas Deposits: Russia's land territory beyond the Arctic Circle is almost 3.1 square km and accounts for eighty percent of the country's natural gas production and sixty percent of its oil²⁶. Alexei Fadeyev, an expert from the Russian gas corporation opines that, "*about sixty percent of the World's hydrocarbons by 2035 will come from Arctic deposits*"²⁷. Since the mid-2000s, royalties and export tolls from oil and gas deposits of the Arctic (mainly from the Barents and Kara Seas, Khanty-Mansiysk, Timan-Pichora, and Nenets Regions), *have made up about half of all federal tax income and about a quarter of total tax income of Russia*²⁸.

Mineral Commodities: Besides hydrocarbons, Russia is amongst the leading Arctic countries in the production of mineral commodities²⁹. As the world prepares for the post-fossil fuel future with the help of rare earth metals and minerals, it once again finds Russia in a commanding position to supply these through its

abundant reserves in the Arctic. The area contains rich deposits of almost all economically valuable metals with, approximately twenty-five percent of the world's raw diamonds being produced in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) alone.³⁰

Disaster-prone Area and Treacherous NSR: With the escalation of tanker and commercial shipping traffic ferrying oil, gas and other commodities in the NSR, Russia is concerned about man-made disasters like accidents or oil spills along the treacherous NSR in Russian territorial waters. Apropos, the Russian Government has set up strict rules for ships travelling in the international waters along its northern coast or coming into the Arctic ports³¹.

Domestic Challenges: Russia has been classified as one of the worst affected areas on the Earth due to climate change and its effects on the Russian Arctic have been particularly severe³². It is estimated that every year 7,000 hectares of land of the Russian Arctic is lost to the coastal erosion³³ and the lives of its 2.4 million Arctic residents are vulnerable to climate change leading to a steep demographic downturn³⁴. In many regions like Yakutia of the Arctic, Natural disasters in the form of unprecedented wildfires, and flash floods have been increasingly noticeable consequences of global warming. Thawing of permafrost regions around the populated areas of Yakutsk, Norilsk, Pevek, Magadan and Vorkuta, has led to the unique challenge of the collapse of infrastructure³⁵ leading to the relocation of the population from these already thinly populated areas.

Strengthening Military Infrastructure in the Arctic. Russia has re-prioritised the role of the Arctic in projecting its status as the pre-eminent Arctic and a global power³⁶ and in 2008, new policies were formulated to transform Moscow's frozen North into a 'strategic resource base' for the development of the Russian Federation³⁷. To

protect this economically invaluable region and to monitor the increasing traffic along the NSR, Russia has embarked on the programme of reopening of previously abandoned Cold War-era military installations and complementing these with new ones.

In the recent years Russia has been upgrading its civilian and military infrastructure in the Arctic and in response, the US and its NATO allies have also stepped up their regional Military activities³⁸ and exercises. This has led to increase in the number of face-offs between the US and the Russian military vessels in the North Pacific/Bearing Sea region³⁹. Former US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo in the speech, delivered in Finland in May 2019 emphasised that the US would not allow any nation to make the Arctic their preserve and would counter them in the region⁴⁰. This new coliseum of competition and associated security concerns has forced circumpolar countries to allocate larger portions of their budget for defence, aiming to reach NATO's target of military spending of two percent of their national gross domestic product⁴¹. Not only for circumpolar countries and China, but for resource-hungry countries like India, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea⁴² Arctic has great significance. These countries, despite having accepted the sovereign rights of Arctic States in management of the Arctic⁴³, have been vying to increase their say in '*Matters Arctic*'.

Significance of the Arctic for USA, Canada and Nordic Countries

For the United States of America, Canada and the Nordic countries Arctic region with its rich repository of natural resources and strategic location holds immense economic and security potential.

The USA. The primary driver for the USA in the Arctic are its national security concerns. The Arctic sea routes to North America and Canada via the top of the Scandinavian Peninsula through the

Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap provide challenges to safeguard western approaches from the North Atlantic⁴⁴. Reactivation of Cold War military bases by Russia and increasing forays of the Chinese into the region has made the United States uncomfortable. The deployment of advanced aircraft and ground forces, establishment of missile and air defence bases and construction of dual-use infrastructure by Russia along its Arctic coast have brought the Arctic into the Strategic main frame of American Security establishment. It is looking to upgrade its military bases in Alaska and along with Canada, has been upgrading up its icebreaker fleet.

Canada. Canada's Arctic makes up over 40% of the total Canadian landmass and more than 100,000 Canadians live there⁴⁵. It is an inseparable part of Canada's identity and is a rich source of marine life and natural resources including hydrocarbons. The North West Passage is another shipping route, apart from the NSR along the coast of the Russian Arctic, which passes through the Canadian coast and is of immense importance for Canada. This route will drastically reduce the distance between the Arctic and Pacific oceans and will allow unhindered switching of forces.

Nordic Countries. All the Nordic countries i.e. Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark are NATO members. Due to their proximity, the Arctic plays a vital role in the security of these countries. Russian special operation in Ukraine has made these countries increasingly nervous about the Russian military activities in the region and since 2014, they have been actively participating in NATO exercises like 'Trident Juncture' and 'Nordic Response'. The island territories and the waters around these countries contain sizeable amounts of oil, gas and minerals, including rare earth materials, which are becoming accessible with the reduction of the ice cap and is attracting interest from around the World.

Environmental concerns. Rising temperature due to global warming is disrupting the delicate ecosystem affecting the biodiversity in the Arctic. Uncontrolled and unchecked human activity associated with the extraction of natural resources by Arctic and Non-Arctic Nations, could further damage the fragile ecosystems which will have a direct bearing on the world's climate patterns.

Part III: Chinese Footprint in the Arctic

Increasing Chinese Footprint in Arctic

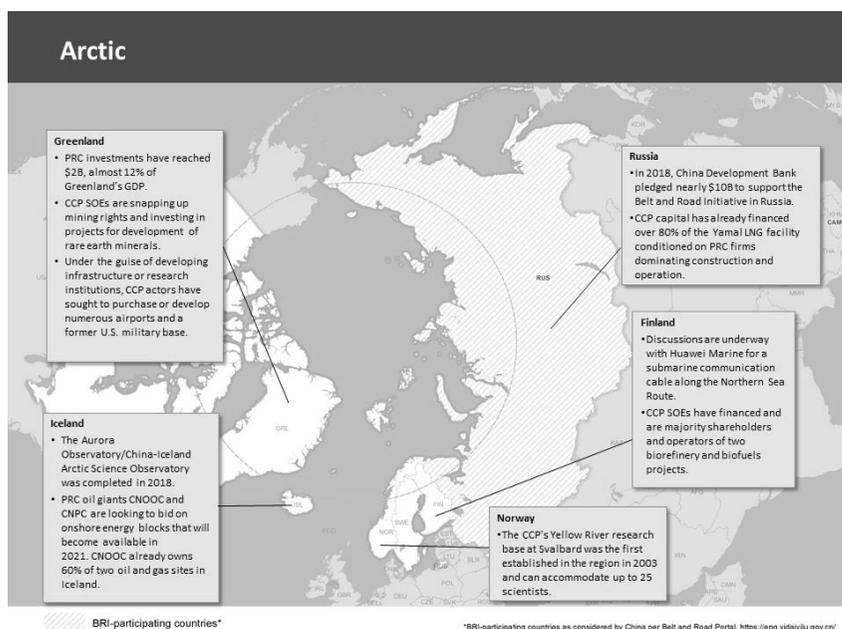
China published a white paper titled “China’s Arctic Policy⁴⁶” on January 26, 2018, and it self-declared itself a near-Arctic state. For China Arctic is not only a rich source of Hydrocarbons and minerals but a major economic and strategic imperative. It reduces the shipping distance from Europe to Shanghai by whooping 7500 kms approximately and obviates the Malacca dilemma for its carriers. Since the time China was granted observer status in the Arctic Council, it has been very active in participating in science diplomacy, collaborating with Arctic nations through research activities to legitimise its presence and enhance its influence in the Polar North by assimilating China into the Arctic governing circles⁴⁷.

Chinese interests in the evolving security architecture of the Arctic can be gauged from the statement in the ‘Science of Military Strategy’ a book published by the Chinese NDU in 2020, wherein, the author states that, “*Military power plays an important role in the competition between countries in the polar regions*”⁴⁸.

Western Sanctions on Russia and Increasing Chinese Footprint. In 2014, as international sanctions were imposed on Russia, Moscow’s initial reluctance to Chinese forays into the Arctic disappeared and it pivoted towards Beijing.

As per Yun Sun, a China expert at the Stimson Center, the idea of “Polar Silk Road”, though coined by the Chinese as part of BRI in 2017, had originated from a Russians when they invited China to jointly develop the NSR as early as 2015⁴⁹.

Withdrawal of European firms from various projects due to sanctions saw Chinese firms stepping in with investments, technology and equipment. Chinese imprint is also visible in many an Arctic-related agreements/projects like; delivery and transit of shipments of hydrocarbons from Russia’s Arctic oil and gas projects to China; building of new oil tankers and heavy-duty ice breakers (including nuclear) designed to operate in Arctic conditions; significant concessions in natural gas imports from Russia; agreement to outsource the bulk of equipment used in the Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG 2 (about 70 Kms from Yamal) projects from Chinese firms and; securing of almost \$12 billion worth of loans by the Novatek Corporation of Russia (Yamal Project) from Chinese state-owned banks.

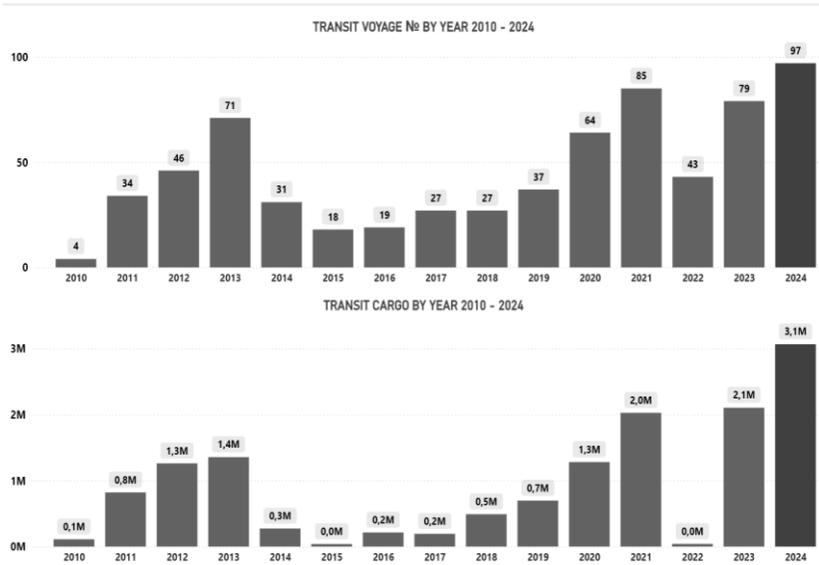


Pushback to Chinese Investments in Arctic Countries

Increasing Russian Dependence on China Post 2022.

Additional sanctions by the West post-2022 and the diversion of Russian resources to the Ukraine conflict forced Russia to soften its stand vis-a-vis Chinese initiatives. For Russia, Arctic development is dependent on the participation of foreign partners as it requires investment, technology, and stable trade relations. China, due to its financial capabilities, technological expertise, and substantial demand for resources, emerges as a key partner for Russia⁵⁰. Of late, Russia has been making several concessions to China in the 'Matters Arctic' and has in March 2023 established joint working groups to advance the NSR project. With these developments, China seems to be solidifying its self-proclaimed status as a "near-Arctic country". Concurrently, Chinese companies with the assistance of Russian polar experiences, continue to develop their expertise in polar technologies, Arctic ship and ice breaker construction and are likely to gain competitive advantages in the global market in the foreseeable future.

As per the report published by the Centre for High North Logistics (CHNL), already the year 2024 has seen a record number of ships passing through the NSR. The majority of these voyages were between the Chinese and Russian ports.

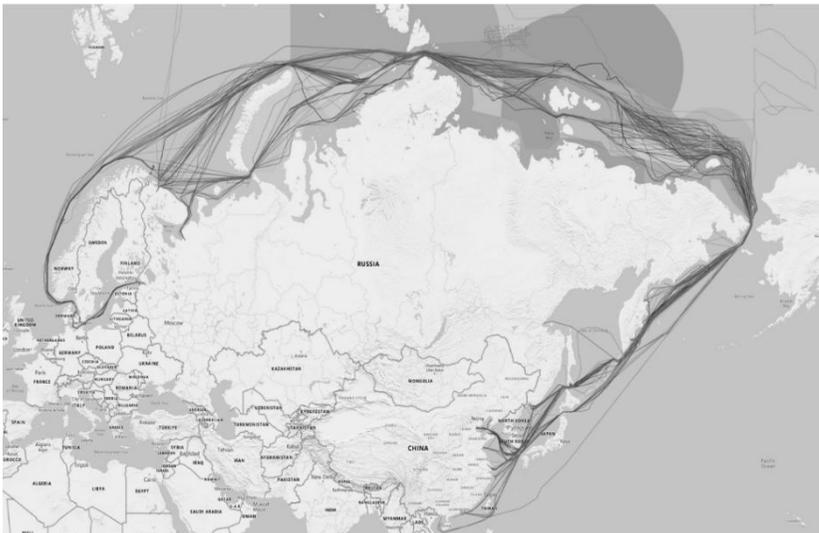


Graph 1 :Transit voyages through NSR from 2010 to 2024

(Ref: <https://chnl.no/news/main-results-of-nsr-transit-navigation-in-2024/>)



NSR 2024
Map of transit voyages



Map 2 :Map of Transit voyages through NSR in 2024

(Ref: <https://chnl.no/news/main-results-of-nsr-transit-navigation-in-2024/>)

China, as per some reports, feels that its active participation in the growth and expansion of the emerging balance of power in the Arctic, may lead to better opportunities for Beijing to mould the Arctic regional order to its advantage. In pursuance, China's has enhanced its scientific, diplomatic and infrastructure development activities with the Nordic countries⁵¹, signed Free Trade Pact with Iceland in 2013⁵², and is seeking resources exploitation rights in the High North. *It is felt that, with the increase in investments and interests in the Arctic China, could potentially justify the deployment of its military assets in the garb of protecting the shipping lanes, much like U.S. presence in strengthening defences along the global shipping lanes.*

Russia despite its increasing dependence on China and Western sanctions, is trying its best to diversify its partners for investments in the Arctic projects. Russian overtures to India to invest in the Russian Arctic in the last few years could be an opportunity for India in this region. (These aspects have been discussed in detail in subsequent parts.) In view of the events like the arrest of Valery Mitko, a Russian Arctic expert in February 2020⁵³, of apparently providing intelligence about Russian submarines to Chinese agents, it will be interesting to observe Russian willingness to provide assistance to China in augmenting its polar aspirations and capabilities.

China is vigorously pursuing investments in the extraction of mineral resources and infrastructure development in Nordic Countries⁵⁴ and the economies of these countries are increasingly becoming dependent on Chinese investments. This is leading to a three-cornered conflict of interest with the West led by the USA and Russia, both becoming wary of increasing Chinese involvement and investments in the region. Greenland is a case in point wherein, the Chinese attempts to buy a defunct naval base⁵⁵ and its eagerness to build a new airport⁵⁶ in Nuuk, were taken by such gravity in

Washington that US Secretary of Defense James Mattis had to step in to halt these initiatives⁵⁷.

Before the 2022 Russian special operations in Ukraine, Russian wariness of Chinese intentions could be made from the statement by Nikolay Korchunov, Ambassador of Russia for the Arctic Cooperation, when he asserted that “it is impossible to disagree with U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo’s statement made in May 2019 that there are two groups of countries – Arctic and non-Arctic...”. Incidentally, in the Arctic, Chinese technology and cooperation were not Russia’s first choice for its projects. Also, Russia had opposed granting observer status to China and others in the Arctic Council in the year 2013, until they agreed to respect the sovereignty of Arctic states⁵⁸.

US Reactions to Chinese Overtures

The USA in its National Security Strategy 2022 has dedicated a section to the increasing Chinese presence, investments and influence in the Arctic region⁵⁹. As China’s consolidates its economic and military muscle, United States perceives China as a potentially destabilising force which shall try and bend the established order to its liking. In the Strategy Report released in July 2024 by the US Department of Defense, the Pentagon opined that “*major geopolitical changes are driving the need for this new strategic approach to the Arctic. Increasingly, the PRC (People’s Republic of China) and Russia are collaborating in the Arctic across multiple instruments of national power*”⁶⁰. As per the report from the *Arctic and Global Resilience, U.S. DoD*, China and Russia have enhanced their joint Air, Sea and Coast Guard patrols in the areas of Bering Strait and off the coast of Alaska⁶¹. In October 2024, a bipartisan group of lawmakers in the US called on the government to do more to address China’s presence in the Arctic as some reports showed evidence of potential dual-use research by the Chinese that can

have both military and civilian applications. In response, President-elect Donald Trump in Dec 2024, highlighted the strategic importance of the Arctic and has been vocal in denouncing the increasing collaboration between Russia and China.

Part IV: Impact of Accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO & Geopolitical Impact of Trump's Bid for Greenland

Accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO

Accession of Finland and Sweden into the folds of NATO and Russian response thereto, will permanently change the security architecture of Europe and create additional security challenges for the Russian Federation and European Union.

Military Impact in Baltic Region. Finland and Sweden joined NATO in the years 2023 and 2024 respectively. Other countries in the Baltic region viz, Poland (1999), Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (2004), had already joined NATO thereby, effectively making the Baltic a NATO lake. Finland has a 1300-kilometer-long border with Russia and with its joining, Russia's border with NATO has almost doubled. St Petersburg or erstwhile Leningrad, the second largest city of Russia is now just 150 kilometres from the NATO border. Provocative statements by Baltic countries of blockading the Kaliningrad enclave and closing Russia's exit from the Gulf of Finland could raise the spectre of tensions to new levels⁶². Also, small but highly efficient and technologically savvy Armed Forces of Finland and Sweden will be a welcome addition to the arsenal of NATO.

Corridors for Quick Deployment. The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) consists of the 'Northern Five' countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

NORDEFCO Was created to synergise and facilitate efficient security solutions and strengthen the security posture of its participants. With Sweden and Finland joining NATO, all five countries of NORDEFCO have now become part of NATO. As a result of this, the entire Northern and North Eastern flanks of NATO will now be under a single command centre of Norfolk Joint Command, which will streamline corridors for rapid access of the NATO forces to the borders with Russia and towards the Arctic coast⁶³.

Russian Response. The Kola Peninsula holds immense strategic importance for Russia and is home to the concentration of advanced conventional capabilities. It serves as the home to Russia's Northern Fleet Headquarters, military-industrial complex in the Arkhangelsk Region and has extensive transportation infrastructure. It hosts Russia's most advanced Arctic military assets including nuclear arsenal and second strike capabilities and is central to the defence of Russia's northern borders and power projection capabilities in the North Atlantic, Baltic and Arctic. Accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO further constricts Russia's power projection capabilities through these bases. With NATO borders creeping uncomfortably close to the Russian 'Core', Russia has no choice but to be proactive and be prepared for a *tough response* at an early stage to NATO's escalatory initiatives. As early as December 2022, the then Russian defence minister Sergey Shoigu, announced the creation of an Army Corps on the borders of Finland near Karelia and the establishment of Leningrad and Moscow military districts. He also mentioned the raising of two new motorised infantry divisions, converting seven motorised infantry brigades into divisions and other accreditations which is likely to take the overall strength of the Russian Armed Forces to 1.5 million⁶⁴.

Nuclear Threshold. It is likely that, the already stretched Russian defence forces due to their involvement in the Ukrainian conflict, may increase their reliance on nuclear deterrence thereby, bringing down the threshold of the use of these ultimate weapons of mass destruction. Since 2022, President Putin has increasingly used the threat of the use of Russian nuclear weapons and has placed them on high alert on a few occasions. Russia has also threatened to resume nuclear testing, and apparently, for the first time, deployed tactical nuclear weapons outside the country to Belarus. In the latest nuclear doctrine update, approved by President Putin in 2024, Russia seems to have lowered the threshold for nuclear weapons use in case of a threat. With Ukraine being allowed to launch intermediate-range missiles inside Russia and in response, Russia striking the Ukrainian targets with the non-nuclear ICBMs, the likelihood of miscalculation or misinterpretation in the fog of war by NATO or Russia, could lead to inadvertent escalations⁶⁵.

It may be recalled that one of the triggers for Russia's launch of special operations in Ukraine was the purported efforts of the latter to join NATO, which would have brought NATO forces to the Russia-Ukraine borders thereby, increasing Russia's vulnerabilities. The accession of Finland and Sweden has ironically, doubled Russia's borders with NATO and brought NATO Forces to its borders. This will further stretch the Russian Armed forces and may pose a challenge to the security of Russian assets in the High North.

Trump Bids for Greenland: Repercussions

In continuation of his bid to acquire Greenland during his first presidency, President-elect Donald Trump, during the press conference on 07 January 2025 reiterated his administration's desire to acquire Greenland through economic coercion or force. He

described Greenland to be vital in safeguarding the security of USA and to counter the developing influence of China and Russia in the Arctic⁶⁶. In his first remarks after taking over the Oval Office he even went to the extent of conveying that he was sure America was “going to have it” and remarked that Denmark would be committing a “very unfriendly act” if it decided to not let that happen⁶⁷. This was not the first time that the President of the United States had floated the idea of buying the strategically located world’s largest island. In 1865, post the purchase of Alaska from Russia at the cost of USD 7.2 million, President Andrew Johnson looked at the prospect of buying the islands of Greenland and Iceland from Denmark. Once again in 1910 under President William Howard Taft’s watch, the idea of buying Greenland or swapping it with American territories in the Philippines was floated.

Strategic Significance of Greenland. Greenland is the World’s largest Island strategically situated in the Arctic region with vast reserves of untapped natural resources. As the ice cover over the Arctic reduces and new Sea Lanes of Communication become viable, its importance, owing to its location will only increase.

- **Current Geopolitical Milieu.** Russian special operations in Ukraine and the subsequent accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO have enhanced the overall importance of the Arctic region. Greenland, due to its location in the High North, acts as the eyes and ears for the defence of the North American continent.
- **Availability of Critical Minerals and Hydrocarbons.** Large deposits of rare earth materials in Greenland are an opportunity for the world to transition from hydrocarbons to green energies and reduce their dependence on China, which dominates this market. Also, as per the US Geological Survey report of 2007,

along the coast of Greenland, there could be large deposits of untapped oil and gas reserves and melting ice is making Greenland's huge mineral resources and hydrocarbon reserves more accessible.

- **Military significance.** USA hosts Pituffik space base in Greenland which is a key military installation for missile early warning, defence and space surveillance. Greenland also sits at the mouth of the GIUK Gap and is a choke point for any submarine movement in the North Atlantic. The presence of US intelligence gathering detachments on the strategic gap will assist NATO in monitoring naval movements in the North Atlantic and Arctic.
- **New Trans-Arctic Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs).** Greenland is located at a unique location where the two new emerging SLOCs; the NSR and the NWP converge. In the coming decades as the polar ice melts, these new routes are likely to see enhanced shipping, bypassing the traditional choke points of the Malacca Straits, Suez and Panama canals. Greenland will then be a key player in controlling these Sea routes and attracting marine infrastructure.

Impact on Russia. Acquisition of Greenland by the United States will have a direct impact on Russia's strategic outreach in the Arctic and Atlantic. With the regions of the Black Sea, Baltic Sea and Gulf of Finland already surrounded by NATO members, the occupation of Greenland will grant the US enhanced surveillance, placement of early warning systems and ability to monitor Russian missile launches, further complicating Russia's defence strategy. Expansion of military presence and subsequent placement of missile defence systems will jeopardise the movement of Russian ships and submarines and would be detrimental to Russia's interest in the Arctic. Russia has been vying to control the rich mineral

resources of the Arctic and has built impressive dual-use infrastructure along its northern coast. The presence of the US in Greenland would increase competition and undermine the dominant position of Russia in the region.

Impact on China. Resource-hungry China has been eyeing the rich mineral wealth of the Arctic region and access to the new SLOCs to overcome its Malacca Straits dilemma and its vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean region. The US has been wary of Chinese presence in the region and with Greenland in its possession, it could further restrict China's access to these areas. China's Polar Silk Route may also be severely affected by the US occupation of this strategic island. This will add another chapter to the already tense relationship between the US and China.

Geopolitical and Territorial Expansion Norms. The US and the West have been vocal in their criticism of the Russian occupation of Crimea, its aggressive actions in Eastern Ukraine and Chinese claims on Taiwan. Given NATO's expansionist policies and Chinese security compulsions, US Occupation of Greenland by use of force or by the threat of use of force or even economic coercion, may seem to Russia and China as vindication of their stand. It may also give a signal to the world at large that, the territorial disputes in strategically important regions could be shaped by the influence of big powers. It could further encourage countries like China to take unilateral actions in South Asia, South China Sea and Taiwan. With Greenland, as part of the United States, the dominance of the US and the West over Russia's western and north-western periphery from the Black Sea to the Arctic would be complete. This could upset the delicate balance of power in the region and Russia, despite many misgivings, may be pushed to align with China and the other rising powers of the east.

Part V: India's Strategic Interests in the Arctic and Way Forward

Indian Government, in the recent years, has been actively promoting investments in Arctic energy and mineral resources and India took a major step when it received the first shipment of LNG from the Russian Arctic in March 2018⁶⁸.

India's Interests in the Arctic

The first mention of the Arctic in the Indian scriptures can be found in Rig-Veda as mentioned in Shri Lokmanya Bay Gangadhar Tilak in his treatise 'Arctic Home in Vedas'⁶⁹ wherein, he discloses the traces of an ancient Arctic calendar and Polar attributes of the Vedic deities. India's contact with the Arctic in the modern era began a century ago with its signing of the 'Svalbard Treaty' in February 1920 in Paris⁷⁰. The first scientific expedition to the Arctic was launched by India in 2007 and since then, it has shown commitment to the establishment of various stations including; the Arctic research base '*Himadri*' at Ny-Ålesund, Spitsbergen in 2008; a multi-sensor moored observatory '*IndArc*' in Kongsfjorden in 2014 and; setting up *Atmospheric laboratory in Gruvebadet* in 2016. India got the status of an observer state in the Arctic Council in 2013, and its ties with the Arctic further deepened⁷¹. As a member of the Arctic Council, India has been actively participating in various scientific forums, conducting expeditions, contributing effectively to six working groups of the Arctic Council and has currently 23 ongoing key scientific projects.

India Releases Arctic Policy. In the year 2022 India released its Arctic Policy based on six pillars⁷² which will not only assist India in perceiving the impact of climate change in the Arctic on India's weather patterns but, through inter-ministerial coordination, enable it to better analyse, predict and coordinate future courses of action on the implications of melting of the polar ice cap on India's

strategic interests in the fields of economic, energy and military securities⁷³.

India's Energy and Mineral Needs. As the Indian economy grows so does its rapacious appetite for energy and minerals. With almost 80% of its oil and gas being sourced from abroad, India is invariably on the lookout to diversify its energy sources. Arctic region is endowed with the rich deposits of mineral resources and joint exploitation of these resources fits into India's national interests harmoniously.

Geo-Political Considerations. As China gets access to vast Arctic oil, gas and mineral reserves and their transfer through NSR, it benefits from the reduced costs and its major vulnerability of Malacca Straits and Suez Canal, from where almost 80% of its oil passes, gets mitigated. In the words of Commander Neil Gadihoke (Retd),

"Were the Chinese vulnerability to lessen due to the Arctic route, then China may get more assertive not only with India but with other countries in the region, with associated impacts on regional security and broader geopolitics"⁷⁴.

At an international maritime seminar in New Delhi, in 2012, the Indian Defence Minister expressed that,

"The possible melting of the polar ice caps will have tectonic consequences for our understanding of what maritime domains constitute 'navigable' oceans of the world. Specific to Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, there may be a need to reassess concepts like chokepoints and critical sea lines of communication (SLOCs)⁷⁵."

Polar Research and India's 'Third Pole' Connections. The mainstay of India's engagement in the Arctic has been in the field of science. Since the year 2022, India has successfully conducted thirteen expeditions in the Arctic. Through these scientific

expeditions, Indian scientists have been exploring issues concerning climate change, earth sciences, glaciology and polar biology. One of the major objectives of India's polar research is to harmonise its rich experience in Antarctica and the Arctic with the Himalayas, also referred to as the 'Third Pole', and fathom the imminent effects of climate change in this region.

Climate Change and Food Security in India. India is an active participant in the Global efforts to fight climate change and is committed to its targets from the Paris Agreement. Both, Arctic and Himalayas contain large Cryosphere (ice covered regions) which are being adversely affected by melting glaciers due to global warming. Many of the studies, based on past climate data, observational studies and critical modelling, have linked Arctic temperatures and sea ice cover to Indian monsoon patterns through atmospheric and oceanic teleconnections⁷⁶. The resultant effect on precipitation and snowfall in Indian Subcontinent are having a severe impact on crop patterns and their yields. With a population of 1.3 billion, India can ill afford to risk its, food, population and economic security.

Melting Glaciers and Rising Sea Levels. Peninsular India's 6500 km coastline is dotted with densely populated centres and has almost 1300 island territories. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, Former President of Iceland and Chairman of Arctic Circle during his talk at the Sapru House on 04 Mar 2020 commented,

"If only a quarter of the Greenland ice melts, and it is melting very fast, sea level worldwide will rise two meters. Just look at the Indian coastal cities and start thinking about what will happen to Mumbai or other coastal cities in India with a two-meter rise in sea level"⁷⁷.

Combined with the unprecedented receding of Himalayan glaciers, India is already faced with extreme weather conditions, frequent floods, forming and bursting of Glacial Lakes, and

irregular water levels in Himalayan Rivers, bringing untold havoc to its population.

Powerhouse of Clean Energy and Sustainable Growth.

Northern European countries especially Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland are pioneers in clean energy and meet most of their energy needs through carbon-neutral elements like biomass, wind, geothermal and hydropower. As compared to other European counterparts these countries have invested heavily in clean energy and are technologically advanced in their green game. India aims to reach net zero emissions by 2070. The renewable energy sector in India has shown remarkable progress and is one of the fastest growing sectors anywhere in the World⁷⁸. India stands to benefit greatly from the experience and technologies of these North European countries.

China's Engagement in Arctic and India's Advantage. As China seeks to exploit the opening of new SLOCs in the Arctic and vigorously gobble up assets, there is a growing feeling amongst the Nations that China, rather than seeking equality with others in the Frozen North, is vying for a dominant position. China's loci on Island territories in East and South China Seas despite unfavorable ruling from Hague Forum; Xi Jinping's 2014 assertion of Beijing striving to become a Polar Great Power; its forceful projection through the 'White Paper published in 2018' of being a significant stakeholder in the Arctic and; its self-declaration of being a Near Arctic State; has led observers in the Arctic countries and the United States to express concern about the exact motivations and goals of China in the Arctic region. Mayuri Bannerjee, a research analyst at the IDSA opines that,

"...against China's hegemonic orientation in the Arctic, both militarily and in terms of its governance, the Indian approach is more

*inclined towards scientific collaboration, research, and joint natural resource exploration with Arctic countries*⁷⁹.

Thus, from the Moscow's viewpoint, increasing interest and investment by India in the Arctic could be a welcome development to counterbalance the escalating influence of China. Moreover, as compared to China, India has a more benign image in the world and Indo-Russian cooperation in the Arctic may invite less scrutiny and suspicions.

Russian-Indian Trade and Economic Corridors. Russia is cognizant of the dangers of depending only on China for developing trade and investments in the Arctic region. During the 22nd India Russia annual summit in July 2024 in Moscow, both the countries have agreed to enhance the capacity of infrastructure between the two countries including, the realisation of the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor (CVMC) , International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) as well as exploiting the potential of NSR in the Arctic⁸⁰. Russia has invited Indian investments in the Far East and the Arctic Regions and a delegation from the Russian Ministry of the Far East and Arctic development also participated in the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in January 2024. Prime Minister Modi during the interaction with President Putin at the Eastern Economic Forum in 2022, while talking about various trade and transit corridors commented,

*“Connectivity will play an important role in the development of relations in the future. India is keen to strengthen its partnership with Russia on Arctic issues. There is also immense potential for cooperation in the field of energy.”*⁸¹.

India has also made a commitment to Russia for the development of infrastructure along the NSR with the ultimate aim of joining it with the CVMC and turning it into a principal route for the supply of Russian energy to India⁸².

Scope for Enhanced Indian Participation in Polar North

Olafur Ragnar Grimsson at the Sapru house on 04 Mar 2020 articulated that,

“the future of India will be to a large extent determined by the Arctic and the future of the Arctic will also be determined by what takes place in India and other Asian countries...The engagement of some Asian countries like Japan, Korea and China in the spheres of economic collaboration and investments, scientific research, and diplomatic engagements in the Arctic are now so extensive that they are better known as the Action States in the Arctic rather than the Observer States whereas, India was still standing at the Railway station. ... India, which has significant expertise in this area from its association with the Antarctic Treaty System and notable indigenous communities living in subzero climes in the Himalayas, can play a constructive role in securing a stable Arctic⁸³.

Over the last few years, India has substantially increased its cooperation with the Arctic states however, much more needs to be done.

Politico-Diplomatic Engagements. India having got the status of an Arctic Observer state needs to meaningfully engage with the region and be alive to the status of an offshore country in the Arctic Council. Along with the scientific engagements, there is a necessity to give desired importance to Arctic policymaking in the fields of diplomacy, energy, economic activity and other areas⁸⁴. To achieve this, it must enhance its visibility in this region by augmenting its diplomatic, military and expert staff at various Indian Embassies of the Polar Countries, actively participate in all six sub-groups of the council and contribute in various forums of Arctic Circle Assemblies. India can think of appointing a senior diplomat for polar affairs to coordinate its efforts on the world stage. Of late, with the participation of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India in the second Arctic Council Meeting⁸⁵ and visits by other high-level delegations to the Polar Countries and North European capitals, the desired

focus is slowly but surely being given to this region. This needs to continue.

Policy Implementation. With the release of its Arctic Policy first step towards planned Indian Government engagement with the Arctic has commenced however, to make it meaningful a lot more needs to be achieved. A dedicated inter-ministerial expert committee covering multi- disciplinary fields and perspectives to engage with the Arctic and accordingly steer, monitor and review New Delhi's Arctic policy would assist in streamlining the country's approach in a befitting manner⁸⁶. Separate Polar Engagement Budget allocation and yearly progress in the form of an Annual Arctic Report to the CCS could be one way to monitor the implementation of the policy and bring the desired focus to this region.

Scientific Engagements. Focused scientific work would assist India to better comprehend the impact of a changing Arctic climate on India's monsoon patterns and the effect of rising sea levels on coastal populations⁸⁷. India's scientific and research activities in the Antarctica and its rich experience in Himalayas could be leveraged in its Arctic explorations⁸⁸. There is a need for India to build up its capacity to undertake research in the harsh climes of the High North. Construction of Polar Research Ships and Ice Breakers with the assistance of friendly foreign countries will go a long way in strengthening India's potential to conduct such activities. To generate interest in the future generation and augment Arctic visibility in the country, India could offer incentives to the Indian students to study in polar research institutions in Europe⁸⁹.

Engagement with Russia in the Arctic Region. President Putin on 06 March 2020 approved the '*Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic for the period until 2035*'⁹⁰. Article 12 of the document invites investors to explore the Arctic shelf and set up various resource centers. During the 20th India-Russia Annual

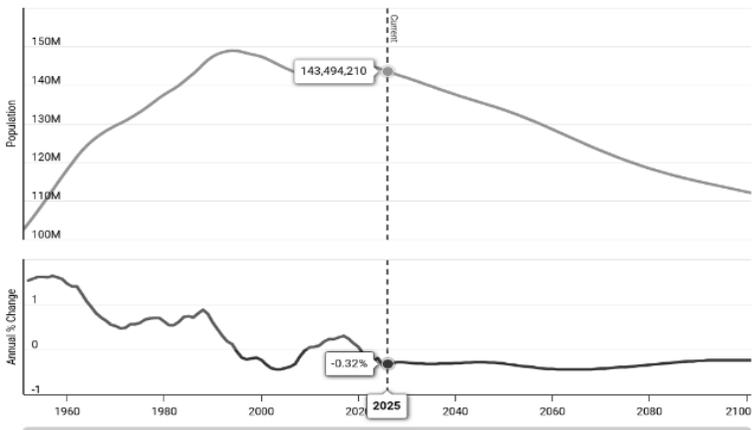
Summit at Vladivostok in September 2019, the Arctic was discussed and the Joint Statement mentioned,

“India looks forward to cooperate with Russia in the Arctic, India has been following the development in the Arctic region with interest and is also ready to play a significant role in the Arctic Council⁹¹.”

- **Investments in the Energy and Mineral Sector.** Russia has become an invaluable long-term associate for India’s energy requirements and plays an essential part in India’s quest for diversification of energy supply sources. Over the years, India has invested about USD 16 billion in various projects in the Russian oil and gas sector⁹². India’s ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) holds a 20% stake in the Sakhalin-1 Oil and gas project and consortium of Indian companies have acquired 23.9 percent and 29.9 percent stakes in JSC Vankorneft and LLC Taas-Yuryakh fields, respectively⁹³. Besides hydrocarbons, the rich Arctic regions of Russia consisting of abundant minerals, rare earth materials and diamonds, essential for the rapidly growing Indian economy, could be jointly explored by India and Russia⁹⁴.
- **New Trade Corridors.** In the recent years, India has been exploring Transportation and Connectivity in the Arctic, and it also forms one of the five pillars of India’s Arctic policy. In a pincer move, India has been investing in connecting the Arctic through the INSTC in the West, along with the development of the CVMC to connect Indian ports with NSR via the East Coast of Russia. INSTC, once connected to the Arctic, could integrate with various rail networks in Europe which will enhance the transportation connectivity of the rising Indian economy⁹⁵. Implementation of CVMC, apart from allowing Russia to diversify its energy and gas exports from China to India and other Southeast Asian countries, would enhance India’s strategic position in the Indo-Pacific as Indian naval presence to secure its energy and trade shipments would follow. These corridors will

also reduce Russia's dependency on Chinese imports and may act as a counterbalance to China's Polar Silk Road⁹⁶. These need to be pursued vigorously in changing geopolitical milieu.

- Skilled Work Force.** India is in the midst of the demographic dividend with its young working-age population likely to increase to 64% by the year 2035⁹⁷. On the other hand, the Russian population, as indicated in the chart below, has been on a relative decline with population density of only 8.58 people per square kilometre⁹⁸. In the inhospitable Arctic territories, the population average in Russia further reduces to 1.56 per sq km. To extract the rich mineral resources from the Arctic and Russia's Far East, skilled manpower and seafarers with expertise in polar operations, are required. Globally, India contributes approximately 9.35% of seafarers and is overall ranked 3rd in this industry⁹⁹. The Indian government can leverage its demographic dividend and contribute to the development of a resource-rich Russian Arctic and Far East¹⁰⁰. In conjunction with the Russian government, India could impart training and necessary skills to its existing as well as new generation and incentivise them to avail of opportunities in these sectors.



Graph 2: Russia's population over years

(Ref: Federal State statistics service of the Russian Federation)

- **Contribution to Russian Tourism.** Russian tourism ministry contributed nearly 7.47 Trillion Roubles (Approx 4.9%) to its GDP¹⁰¹. The Arctic region with its beautiful landscape and magical northern lights offers a unique experience. The rising Indian middle class could be tapped by the Russian tour companies by promoting the uniqueness of the Arctic to Indian tourists. Apart from this, the pristine and unique beauty of the Arctic would be an attractive destination for the Indian Bollywood.
- **Joint Projects for Exploration of Hydrocarbons and Minerals in the Arctic.** During St Petersburg economic forum in 2017 and at the Vladivostok Eastern Economic Forum in 2019, the aspect of complementarity between Indian and Russian energy sectors was addressed and it was mentioned that both countries will strive to build an “Energy Bridge”. Indian energy firms were invited to jointly participate in exploration of Hydrocarbons in the Arctic and in the Far Eastern LNG and Arctic LNG 2 projects¹⁰². Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking via video link at Vladivostok in September 2021 said, “India will help Russia to develop the NSR and turn it into an international trade artery”¹⁰³. Earlier Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal had stated that, “India is ready to conduct exploration work in the Arctic and both countries should jointly build ports as these projects will create new opportunities for both the countries”¹⁰⁴. As per recent reports published in the Arctic Business Journal, Russia has approached India for the construction of four Ice Breaker Ships in Indian shipyards¹⁰⁵.
- **IT and Space Solutions for the Arctic.** India and Russia have longstanding cooperation in outer space and India can invest in mutually beneficial projects to assist Russia in making NSR a success by establishing communication and SAR facilities through Indian Satellite systems. India has

been launching satellites at a fraction of the cost of the similar satellites being launched by the western nations. India can play a vital role through its cost-efficient satellites in providing digital connectivity to the Arctic region. As against the optic cables, this will provide greater resilience in harsh weather conditions. Also, Indian IT giants, could offer technological solutions to Russia in developing the software based technology infrastructure for the region. There is a need for India to leverage both its space and IT sectors to collaborate with the Russian governments in the Far East and the Arctic¹⁰⁶.

- **Nordic Plus Arctic Council or Easternised Arctic Governance.** Russia's special operation in Ukraine resulted in the remaining seven members of the Arctic Council who incidentally, are NATO members too, suspending their cooperation with Russia. There are talks of creating a Nordic plus model excluding Russia, in place of the Arctic Council. The Nordic Plus model could have countries having shared values and commitment to international law from Nordic, Arctic, Atlantic and even North Pacific¹⁰⁷ regions. Exclusion of Russia from such a council will be unfortunate, as almost half of the Arctic coastline under Russian possession would be inaccessible and could become the blind spot for scientific observations. Also, there may be a case where, Russia, based on its recent focus on Greater Eurasia, may form its own Arctic Governing mechanisms with the possibility of India and China becoming its members. This could further polarise the Polar North. Given its benign status, India in such a scenario, could act as a bridge between the two sides.

Engagement with Nordic Countries. Nordic countries straddling the Arctic, represent some of the most advanced economies of Europe and are significant partners for India in

sustainability, renewable energy, digitisation and innovation. Each of the Nordic countries has unique capabilities and capacities that is relevant to the Indian economy and can provide solutions to many development goals for India. Given its scientific and geopolitical interests, there is substantial scope for India's initiatives to engage with all the Nordic countries bilaterally and as part of annual India-Nordic Summits to increase its influence in the Arctic region. Jai Shanker, India's Foreign Minister addressing the second CII India Nordic Baltic Business conclave in Delhi on 22 November 2023 highlighted the enhanced cooperation between India and the Nordic countries and mentioned that apart from new embassies and consulates in various countries, appropriate institutional frameworks have been put into place with these countries in the field of sustainability, geothermal and wind energy, digitization, defence technology, etc¹⁰⁸.

Conclusion

Arctic today is emerging as a new vista of exploration and competition. Its rich natural resources, strategically located islands and emerging Sea Lanes of Communications, are attracting major powers of the World to this region. Melting of Polar Ice Cap is contributing enormously to the changing weather patterns around the World, including the Himalayas 'The Third Pole'. As an emerging power, India's interest in the Arctic are driven by its economic, strategic, scientific and diplomatic engagements. In the current geopolitical milieu, Russian Arctic in particular, could provide India with long term investment opportunities, ameliorate India's deficiency of rare earth minerals, address its energy needs and provide Russia and the World an alternate to China. Within the Arctic Council, India needs to enhance its engagements with various working groups and work towards expanded role of the observers. Its benign status and near universal acceptability, in the times to come, could be leveraged to act as a bridge between Russia and the West in the region.

Notes:

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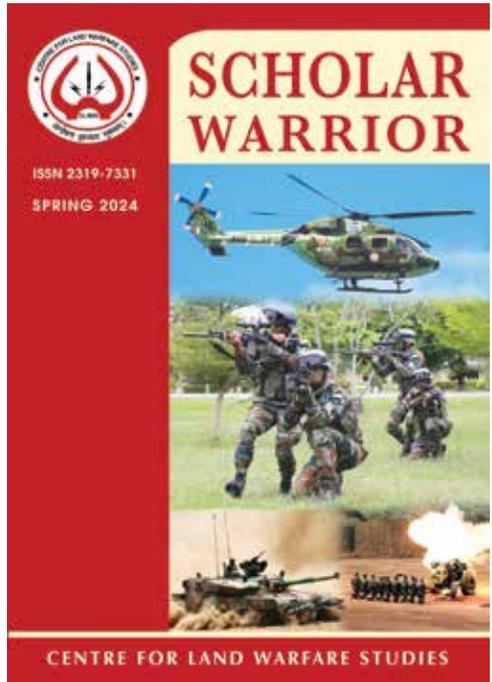
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The paper attempts to cover the rising significance of the Arctic on the World stage and analyse the role of major players in shaping the realpolitik of this Frozen North. Reduction in the Polar Ice Cap is transforming the Arctic Ocean into a navigable sea through the Northwest Passage (NWP) and the Northern Sea Route (NSR). These routes represent significant shortcuts for commercial shipping from Europe to East Asia and along with rich deposits of minerals and hydrocarbons in the region, are fuelling great-power competition between the arch-rivals, Russia and the United States and increasingly China. Stringent sanctions by the West on Russia have seen enhanced Chinese forays in the Arctic leading to push back from Nordic countries and increased wariness from Russia. Finland and Sweden joining NATO and Trump reigniting the process of purchasing Greenland from Denmark, the largest island of the World, has suddenly altered the delicate balance of power in the Polar Region. For India, Arctic has a special significance. Apart from strategic significance of the region and rich source of natural resources, Arctic assists India to better comprehend the impact of rapidly melting ice cap on India's monsoon patterns and effects of rising sea levels on coastal populations.

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Major General Deepak Mehra, Kirti Chakra, AVSM, VSM, is an Indian Army veteran. Commissioned into 5 Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force), he has served in varied terrains and theatre of operations in India. He has the distinction of being the Indian Military Attaché in Embassy of India, Moscow, Military Observer in Democratic Republic of Congo and was part of Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka. An accomplished scholar, Maj Gen Mehra specialises in Geopolitics with a focus on Russian Studies and is currently pursuing his PhD in the field, further enriching his depth of knowledge and global perspective. Founding Director and CEO of Thorsec Global Pvt Ltd, the consultancy firm for Security and Strategic Solutions.



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