



The geopolitical significance of the Arctic region has been recognized for two centuries - first by the Russians, later by the Americans, writes Joseph E Fallon. Then and now, the principle reason to lay territorial claims to this inhospitable polar wilderness is not economic, but strategic. As J. Painter observed, "There can be no politics which is not geographical."

In 1763, Russian scientist Mikhail Lomonosov observed: "The power of Russia shall be increased by Siberia and the Arctic Ocean."

In 1935, U.S. General Billy Mitchell told the US Congress: "Alaska is the most central place in the world for aircraft. He who holds Alaska holds the world."

With the onset of the Cold War, the Arctic region went from a military void "to a military flank in the 1950-70 period to a military front in the 1980s".

It was viewed, not as the homeland of indigenous peoples, but merely a new frontier in a game of nuclear chess in which the indigenous communities were disposable pawns.

In Canada, indigenous families were relocated to Ellesmere and Cornwallis Islands to serve as "human flagpoles" for Ottawa's claims to the Arctic region. This was given a legal patina by the International Court of Justice, which "recognized that the rights of a state's indigenous peoples can contribute to the state's overall territorial claim."

In Greenland, indigenous peoples were expelled from their lands so the U.S. could establish an air base at Thule, located 700 miles north of the Arctic Circle, to counter the Soviet's presence in the region. Despite Denmark's prohibition on the presence of nuclear weapons in its territories, the U.S. "routinely [flew] planes carrying nuclear bombs over Greenland". On January 21, 1968, an American B-52G Stratofortress bomber, carrying four nuclear bombs crashed resulting in the radioactive contamination of Greenland's Wolstenholme fjord.

In Alaska, the U.S. conducted "Cold War-related scientific research" on the indigenous peoples. "These governmental activities included the deliberate seeding of the Snowbank and Ogotoruk catchments (adjacent to the Inupiat Eskimo village of Point Hope) with Nevada test site radioactive material, as well as US Air Force experiments conducted in the 1950s on 121 residents of Inupiat Inuit and Athapaskan Indian villages. Natives were given radioactive iodine (without their knowledge) to study the effects on the thyroid gland."

The Soviet Union similarly transformed its Arctic territory into a laboratory for "Cold War-related scientific research". "Novaya Zemlya became the site of some of the world's largest test explosions after the Soviet Union determined that its test site in Kazakhstan was too close to human settlements to test large nuclear weapons. Consisting of two islands approximately 450 km from the Arctic Circle, Novaya Zemlya was inhabited by nomadic peoples and reindeer before nuclear testing started. Roughly 500 people were relocated due to the testing programme. Most of the reindeer either died or were transported to the mainland. Testing on Novaya Zemlya represents the greatest single source of artificial radioactive contamination in the Arctic. From 1958 to 1962, the large number of high yield atmospheric tests on the islands resulted in radioactive contamination not only on Russian territory but also in Alaska and northern Canada."

But what is "the Arctic"? Simply stated the Arctic is a frozen ocean surrounded by three continents - Asia, Europe, and North America. It is the mirror image of Antarctica.

There is, however, no one official definition. The most common are: (1) the Arctic region is the area enclosed by the Polar Circle, an imaginary line circling the globe at approximately 66° 34' 39; N; (2) the Southern limit of permafrost, (3) the Northern limit of the tree line, (4) the maximum extent of winter ice, and (5) the 10 degrees Celsius isotherm where the average daily summer temperature does not rise above 10 degrees Celsius (50 degrees Fahrenheit).

As German Vice-Admiral Lutz Feldt observed in "The Arctic Ocean – A European Perspective", "All those lines enclose, however, a substantially common and essentially maritime region, as the surrounding arctic and sub-arctic land is directly influenced, climactically and developmentally, by the Arctic Ocean. An indisputable geographic definition of the Arctic Zone is, therefore, the sea-land region dominated by the Arctic Ocean."

Approximately, four million people live in the Arctic region, half of whom are Russian. Ten percent of the four million are indigenous peoples living in "small, widely scattered communities" who have inhabited the Arctic region for thousands of years.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are...those which having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems."

Indigenous nations, peoples, and communities of the Arctic region include "the Inuit in north-east Siberia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland; Saami, in Northern Scandinavia and western Russia; and the 'Small Peoples of the North of Russia', a mosaic of 41 other indigenous peoples... [Indigenous peoples] are widely dispersed, ethnically and culturally diverse and enjoy different rights and status in relation to the states that now govern their historic habitats."

With the end of the Cold War, the serious threat now confronting indigenous peoples in the Arctic is the impact of climate change.

NASA reports the "Arctic sea ice is now declining at a rate of 12.85 percent per decade, relative to the 1981 to 2010 average". This shrinking of the Arctic ice sheet is creating three new realities. Each poses threats to indigenous peoples from contamination of the environment to a more rapid melting of the Arctic ice sheet.

The first reality is the opening of five sea lanes for trade and commerce – the Arctic Bridge, the

Northern Sea Route, the Northeast Passage, the Northwest Passage, and the Transpolar Sea Route. "The Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Northwest Passage (NWP) ...As alternatives to the Suez and Panama canal respectively, each could cut as much as 40 per cent from distance costs."

As Willy Ostreng noted in the Geopolitical Significance of the Arctic States: "None of the major industrial areas in Russia, North America, Europe or Japan are located more than 3,860 nm from the North Pole. That is to say that some 80% of world industrial production takes place north of 30 degree N. latitude, and some 70% of all metropolises lie north of the Tropic of Cancer. The Arctic Ocean is thus an industrial 'Mediterranean Sea' lying in between the world's most advanced and productive regions."

But as Laura Cole points out in Geo-Briefing: Arctic Tension, "...there are other costs to consider such as the high fuel consumption of ice-class vessels, icebreaker escort fees and paying for experienced (and therefore expensive) Arctic crew – costs which don't make economic sense for a standard shipping company. Instead, most shipping will be destinational, as opposed to dual directional, transporting Arctic hydrocarbon out of the Arctic to the rest of the world." This opens up the likelihood of ecological damage occurring as a result of oil leaks and spills from tankers and pipelines.

The second reality is the melting of the ice sheet opens up the sea bed of the Arctic Ocean, whose average depth is only 0.6 miles, to the mining of its rich deposits of "chromium, cobalt, copper, gold, iron, lead, magnesium, manganese, nickel, platinum, silver, tin, titanium, tungsten and zinc". But the promise is an abundance of oil and natural gas.

According to a 2008 assessment by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), "The Arctic holds an estimated 13% (90 billion barrels) of the world's undiscovered conventional oil resources and 30% of its undiscovered conventional natural gas resources." Roughly 84 percent of these deposits lie in offshore areas. Hence the importance of the continental shelf to territorial claims. But economic constraints limit drilling for oil. The International Energy Agency (IEA) "estimates that oil prices will have to average around \$120 per barrel for Arctic hydrocarbon development to be economic."

Such a price for a barrel of oil is not expected in the foreseeable future. Kimberly Amadeo writes in Oil Price Forecast 2019 – 2050, "Worldwide crude oil prices will average \$64/barrel in the second half of 2019 and \$65/barrel in 2020. That's according to the Short-term Energy Outlook by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. It's the same as the EIA's forecast last month."

Third, and what is motivating Russia in a race for sovereignty over the Arctic seabed, is the strategic implications of the shrinking of the Arctic ice sheet. The loss of the Arctic ice sheet exposes the coastlines, cities, and ports of Arctic countries to potential attack. Russia, with the longest coastline on the Arctic Ocean and a fifth of its landmass north of the Arctic Circle, is most vulnerable.

GPS/Geopolitical Futures noted in "The Arctic: A Russian Vulnerability", "Russia's vast holdings of territory in the Arctic do not help it deal with one of its fundamental strategic weaknesses: its lack of access to the world's oceans. Russia cannot exit the Arctic to get to the Pacific without passing the Chukchi Sea and the Bering Strait, both of which are off the coast of Alaska. The U.S....could easily shut down this shipping lane..."

To exit the Arctic Ocean to the Atlantic, Russia would have to traverse the waters between Iceland and Greenland, or between Iceland and the United Kingdom. These are larger openings than the Bering Strait by far – about 200 and 500 miles, respectively – but they are still eminently susceptible to a blockade from anti-Russian forces. Russia's position in the Arctic,

then, is something of a trap. If the U.S. so chose, it could block traffic coming into and out of the Arctic, and there is little Russia could do to retaliate."

In addition, Russia's Arctic cities are exposed and vulnerable to attack. "Approximately half of the Arctic population lives in Russia. The three most numerous population centres above the Arctic Circle lie in Russia: Murmansk (population around 300,000), Norilsk (over 170,000), and Vorkuta (around 60,000). Tromsø, Norway has about 71,000 inhabitants, and Reykjavík, Iceland has more than 100,000. There are no permanent settlements above 78° north latitude." Russia's arctic coastal cities have previously experienced invasion and occupation by American and Allied forces. In August and September 1918, to "subdue the Bolshevik revolution", British and American forces invaded Russia through its arctic coastline seizing and occupying the city of Arkhangelsk, later capturing Murmansk. To the east, American troops joined by Allied forces, which included British, Canadian, French, Italian, and Japanese troops occupied the Russian Pacific port of Vladivostok and attempted an invasion of Siberia.

The Allied interventions of the Russian Arctic, Siberia, and Pacific Maritime were military and political failures. In May 1919, American troops evacuated Russia's Arctic. The rest of the Allied forces left soon after. The next year, American and Allied troops left Siberia and Vladivostok. The Japanese remained until 1922. As historian Robert Maddock wrote: "The immediate effect of the intervention was to prolong a bloody civil war, thereby costing thousands of additional lives and wreaking enormous destruction on an already battered society."

The Russian political class has never forgotten this "historical footnote" to World War I. It explains their behaviour in the Arctic region from that day to this.

In reaction to the Allied intervention, the Soviets sought to secure the Russian Arctic. As noted by Joseph V. Micallef in *Polar Geopolitics: The Scramble to Control the Arctic*: "In 1926, the Soviet Union claimed sovereignty over all the islands and lands between 32° E and 168° W between its coastline and the North Pole. During the Cold War, Soviet era maps of the Arctic marked the USSR's northern boundary as a line along 32° E longitude from the Kola Peninsula and 180° E longitude from the Bering Strait extending toward the North Pole. Based on those coordinates, approximately a third of the Arctic Ocean were considered Soviet territorial waters."

The Russian Federation's current claims to the Arctic are based on this 1926 Soviet declaration supplemented by an extension of its continental shelf claims out to the Lomonosov Ridge, and its legal right under the 1982 United Nations' Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to territorial waters (defined as "seaward up to 12 nautical miles (nm) from its baselines"), a contiguous zone (defined as "adjacent to and beyond its territorial sea that extends seaward up to 24 nm from its baselines"), and an exclusive economic zone (defined as "beyond and adjacent to its territorial sea that extends seaward up to 200 nm from its baselines or out to a maritime boundary with another coastal State").

As reported in *Geo-Briefing: Arctic Tension*, "Based on Russia's extended continental shelf claims, roughly 460,000 additional square miles of the Arctic Ocean would come under Moscow's sovereignty. The area would extend to virtually the 200-mile EEZ of the U.S., Canada and Denmark/Greenland."

Moscow's territorial claims seek to establish a physical buffer between itself and neighbouring states sufficient in depth and breadth to prevent a replay of the Allied invasion of Russia's Arctic territory in 1918-1920. They represent the very definition of "geopolitics" - "the influence of such factors as geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of a state".

And the attempt to secure its Arctic coast from external threats includes consolidating Moscow's power internally by limiting sovereignty of indigenous peoples in the Komi and Sakha Republics of the Russian Federation. Even in a post-Cold War, geopolitics still influences the foreign and domestic policies of states.

The ending of the Cold War, however, did put a stop to some of the worst state sponsored abuse of the Arctic's indigenous peoples, such as the suppression of indigenous languages and cultures. Since then there has been growing recognition of the identity, rights, and homelands of indigenous peoples in the Arctic region.

By 2000, Inuit of Greenland had home rule, Inuit in Northwest Canada had sovereignty in Nunavut, Sami in Norway, Sweden and Finland had local parliaments, as well as a regional parliament, and Komi and Sakha in Russia had an extensive, if currently endangered, sovereignty.

In 2007, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted, which recognized these rights in 46 articles. They begin with "Article 1 Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law."

And the aspirations of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic was articulated in "Arctic Sovereignty Part II: The Arctic's Indigenous People and Sovereignty", Cornell International Law Journal Online, February 9, 2017. "The preference of the Arctic's indigenous peoples to be self-governing is not equivalent to 'independent statehood', but rather, to assert their right to self-determination as granted by the UN Charter. This translates to their respective states "accord[ing] [them] meaningful opportunities for political participation and local decision-making."

To that end, the Arctic Council was established in 1996 composed of Russia, the U.S., Canada, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland "as a forum for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic states, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection."

Six Indigenous Peoples Organizations are Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council.

- "Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) – representing 150.000 Inuit living in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Chukotka, and Russia;
- Saami Council (SC) – representing and fostering cooperation between Saami people of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia;
- Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) – representing the over 200.000 indigenous peoples living in the Russian Arctic;
- Aleut International Association (AIA) – AIA represents indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands. These peoples live on both sides of the Bering Sea, in Alaska and Kamchatka (Eastern Russia);
- Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC) – AAC representing the Athabaskan indigenous people of North America.
- Gwich'in Council International (GCI) – GCI representing indigenous peoples living on both sides of the border between Canada and Alaska."

But as the Arctic Research Centre, University of Lapland, notes: "Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic has no single international governance regime...Arctic governance is widely recognised as a complex system of fragmented international and regional regulations, which are complemented

by non-binding soft law mechanisms, usually as a result of Arctic Council initiatives." While "environmental protection" is a stated goal of the Arctic Council, no mechanisms exist to address the threat posed by climate change on the lives of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic. In *Living above the Arctic Circle*, Dr. Ilan Kelman warned: "With the changing environment, traditional knowledge is no longer as relevant as it used to be, challenging identity and livelihoods. Changing weather, seasonality, and species migration patterns disorient hunters and trappers who are used to relying on their knowledge and wisdom. In places where sea and land ice is weaker, options to hunt and travel are limited. These changes critically affect a hunter's ability to provide food for their family, creating a feeling of being vulnerable within one's own community and on one's own land."

In addition, The Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, warns "...changes in harvesting activities may have implications on the economy, society, culture and health. Eventually, the survival of many groups as distinctive peoples is endangered. Additionally, housing, infrastructure and transport connections of coastal indigenous communities are seriously affected by climate changes, with rising maintenance costs and sometimes even the necessity of relocation." To address the ecological crisis threatening indigenous peoples in the Arctic region, the Arctic Council, member and observer states, must first recognize preservation of the environment takes precedence over economic development. And any development, even "sustainable development", must reflect Hippocrates dictum - first do no harm.

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