

**“THE BENEFITS OF THE EMERGENCE OF NEW MARITIME ROUTES IN THE ARCTIC
FAR OUTWEIGH THE CONSTRAINTS”
DISCUSS THE VALIDITY OF THIS VIEW**

Ania Freymond
Terminale 2021-2022

Over the past few decades, climate change and globalization have dramatically transformed the Arctic. As a result of global warming, the Arctic sea ice has been melting rapidly, potentially easing access to natural resources and opening up new maritime routes in the region. These changes have increased global attention on potential commercial opportunities, research, and peace and stability in the region. Although the emergence of new maritime routes importantly contribute to globalisation, we shall see that the constraints are significant to consider.

POSITIVES

(+) Climate change in the Arctic may enhance trade, research, and travel opportunities due to increased potential access. The melting of sea ice means that new maritime routes can emerge, further interlinking countries together and increasing interdependence and free trade flows. This also means that many new resources can be exploited in more efficient and rapid ways.

CONSTRAINTS

(-) RESSOURCES COMPETITION:

The changing Arctic environment could lead to an Arctic Gold Rush, with states competing against one another to exploit oil and gas reserves and to claim the natural resources in sea areas by expanding the legal definition of the outer limits of their continental shelves.

The Arctic has an estimate 90 billion barrels of oil and 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, amounting to 22 percent of the world's oil and natural gas reserves.

ARCTIC MINORITIES:

The Arctic is also home to 4m people, including indigenous populations and other residents highly dependent on the Arctic ecosystem. Accelerated ice melting eases access to resources, aiding the economic development of indigenous communities, but increased offshore and onshore commercial activities endanger the traditions and lifestyles of indigenous peoples, who want to preserve the environment and develop it using traditional knowledge.

→ (-) Increased access will eventually lead to greater state presence in the region. In this way, climate change risks putting further pressure on bilateral and multilateral relations in the Arctic. Smaller states can become targets of geopolitically motivated foreign investment, such as China's interest in buying a swath of land in northeast Iceland.

INCREASED CHINESE PRESENCE

Indeed, China's is showing greater interest in the region, and states in the Arctic are targets of intensifying Chinese economic statecraft.

As elsewhere in the world, China's economic activity carries an undertone of geopolitical influence. This poses a dilemma for countries in the region that need foreign investment.

Beijing's multidomain polar strategy, which involves the planned development of a nuclear-powered icebreaker, reflects classic grand strategic objectives of resources, reach, and power. The Arctic has even been included in Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious development campaign to boost trade across Asia and beyond.

→ Problem exacerbated by visible tensions flowing from the rising strategic competition between the United States and China.

At a meeting of the Arctic Council 2019, Washington warned of China's growing interest in the Arctic.

ISSUE WITH RUSSIAN REMILITARIZATION

While NATO member states and Russia have significantly reduced the size of their navies, Russian development of new missiles in effect makes distances smaller and regions closer to each other. The range, speed, and precision of these weapons make it more difficult to separate the North Atlantic and the Arctic as distinct theaters of operations, as both the Baltics and the Norwegian Sea can be the targets of attacks from the Barents Sea as well as from land.

For Russia, increased militarization of the Arctic makes sense and is legitimate. With several straits and passages becoming more accessible, Moscow is gaining access to both onshore and offshore resources, such as fish and possibly mineral wealth.

NATO worried that militarization in the Arctic can become militarization of the Arctic, with ramifications beyond the region.