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**China's Arctic  
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a historical analysis**

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## 前言

当前，气候变化对于世界的影响比起以往任何时候都更加显著。其中，最备受人们关注的是北极地区的冰雪融化现象。这种现象发生得十分悄然却又暗藏危机。它是由全球变暖引起的，而全球变暖的主要原因是大气中温室气体的浓度变高。这些气体包括二氧化碳(CO<sub>2</sub>)和甲烷(CH<sub>4</sub>)，并且产生所谓的温室效应，这是太阳辐射到达地球大气层并加热其表面的自然过程。

不幸的是，自二十世纪以来，一些大量的人类活动，包括农业发展导致的土地过度开垦、森林破坏和集约式畜牧业造成了温室气体的过度积累。不断积累的温室气体聚集了热量，导致温度升高。这对北极造成了很多不利影响，例如北极冰盖面积的缩小影响着当地人和动物的生存。此外，北极地区冰川的融化导致海平面升高，这使北极地区国家乃至全球都产生了一系列严重的后果，例如湿地泛滥、洪水侵蚀、地下水污染和几数动植物灭绝。

这些富有戏剧性的事件引起了国际社会对北极地区的关注。最初，这即是为了保护环境，然后也是为了经济发展。近年来，无论是《北极国家》还是《北极域外国家》都意识到了极地地区的战略潜力，就像冷战时期一样。在谈到北极问题的时候，为什么我们准确地提到冷战时期呢？因为在冷战时期，北极地区是美国和苏联之间的战略和武装对峙地区。现在，最新的事件让人们相信这种情况可能会再次发生。

在这种以竞争和紧张为特征的背景下，此论文的目的在于分析中国在北极问题中发挥的作用。事实上，虽然中国是一个北极域外国家并没有领土主权，但是一直对这个地区保持着高度的关注。

这篇论文结构如下：

本论文的第一部分分为六段。

在第一段我向读者简要介绍了北极地区的地理特征，并重点介绍了我们定义北极的三个主要因素。在第二段，我列出了所有参与北极事务的国家。它们根据其作用分为：领导者、合作伙伴，新来者。在第三段，我着重说明了北极治理的重要性。北极治理是北极的法律体制，意指用最佳的方式管理北极地区。为了更深地了解这种管理体制，一些重要的法则是单独介绍的。第四段分析了北极地区引起大家关注的原因，意味着存在获得可再生能源并且开辟新航线的可能性。在第五和第六段，重点渐渐转移到中国上。事实上，第五段分析中国在北极

地区能够获取的利益（具体地指，经济、环境和政治利益），而第六段介绍了一些参与北极问题的主要机构。

第二部分回顾了中国参与北极地区问题的历史。为此，我决定把这个话题分为三个阶段：早年、积极参与、大踏步。一旦读过这个分类，我们就明白中国在北极问题中的探索是一个循序渐进的过程。早年，中国试图通过低调的方式来寻求参与北极事务的途径。这种行为是正当的，因为中国需要避免威胁或恐吓北极国家。在积极参与的时期，特别是九十年代，中国成功地开展了各种极地活动。例如，中国批准了几项协议，发起了它第一次北极科学考察，购买了一艘破冰船。然而，正是在本世纪中国在北极事务上迈出了伟大的一步。举例来说，中国获得了北极理事会常驻观察员地位，并且发表了《中国的北极政策》白皮书。准确地说，所有有关中国在北极地区的行动的历史信息都是在中国的历史背景下描述的。在这样做的时候，我尤其注意到在本世纪初时，中国在北极的活动很活跃，也是因为这个时期也是了解并分析目前情况的最好方式。

第三部分分析了北极地区发生的最新事件。《中国的北极政策》白皮书的出版是这些事件中最重要的一個。事实上，这是中国澄清其在极地地区意图的第一份官方文件。在这篇论文中，我向读者解释了《中国的北极政策》白皮书的由来和具体内容。为了深刻地了解中国的北极政策，最好的是能够正确认识“一带一路”的合作倡议。这是由中国国家主席习近平提出的倡议。该计划的目的是连接亚洲、非洲和欧洲大陆，以求发展政治、经济和文化的双边伙伴关系。除了上述国家外，北极地区也成为“一带一路”计划的一部分。具体地说，据白皮书介绍，中国愿依托北极航道的开发利用，与各方共建“冰上丝绸之路”<sup>1</sup>。这样做，中国不仅可以加强与俄罗斯的合作，而且可以在比较短的时间内将货物运输到欧洲。这个部分的最后一段介绍了地球上最强大的三个国家（美国、中国和俄罗斯）的北极战略。我决定把重点放在这三个国家的主要原因有两个：一，它们是最近关于北极地区的问题矛盾的中心；二，它们是所谓“北极新冷战”的主角。

北极新冷战的含义是什么？

由于北极地区越来越军事化，所以有很多学者认为目前的局势可能导致武装冲突。然而，如果我们以美国和俄罗斯为例，我们就会意识到它们有权将武器部署于北极地区。此外，维护和平并从诸如融冰等有害实践中找到积极的一面，符合国际社会的利益。

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<sup>1</sup> “China’s Arctic Policy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, January 2018.

目前很难说将来会发生什么，主要是因为北极地区的地缘政治状况在不断的演变。可以肯定的是，中国一直在努力争取“世界超级大国”和“北极利益攸关方”的身份。中国花了很多时间来学习那些发展成为一个极地强国所需的所有能力，包括研究、经济和外交能力。为此，我相信，虽然中国现在有需要面临其他严峻挑战的优先事项（例如，中美贸易战，新型冠状病毒的传播），但是它会尽最大努力在北极地区与其他国家进行投资和合作。中国最近为支持北极基础设施和研究项目，如亚马尔液化天然气（Yamal LNG）和马赛克北极探险计划（MOSAIC expedition）而进行的投资也证实了这一观点。

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

A8	Arctic 8
AC	Arctic Council
ACAP	Arctic Contaminants Action Program
AEPS	Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy
AERC	Arctic Environment Research Center
AMAP	Arctic Monitoring & Assessment Programme
ASSW	Arctic Science Summit Week
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
BRF	Belt and Road Forum
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAA	Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration
CAFF	Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group
CAP	China's Arctic Policy
CAS	Chinese Academy of Sciences
CIAO	China-Iceland Joint Aurora Observatory
CLCS	United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
CNARC	China-Nordic Arctic Research Center
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
COSCO	China Ocean Shipping Company
CPC	Communist Party of China
DMU	Dalian Maritime University
EPPR	Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
IASC	International Arctic Science Committee

IEA	International Energy Agency
IGY	International Geophysical Year
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IPY	International Polar Year
ISA	International Seabed Authority
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSC	Maritime Safety Committee
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NF	Northern Forum
NIPR	National Institute of Polar Research
NPC	National People's Congress
NSIDC	National Snow & Ice Data Center
NSR	Northern Sea Route
NWP	Northwest Passage
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OUC	Ocean University of China
PAME	Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment Working Group
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRIC	Polar Research Institute of China
PSR	Polar Silk Road
ROC	Republic of China
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDWG	Sustainable Development Working Group
SIIS	Shanghai Institutes of International Studies
SINOPEC	China Petrochemical Corporation
SME	Socialist Market Economy

SOA	State Oceanic Administration
SOE	State-owned Enterprises
TSR	Transpolar Sea Route
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
U.S.	United States
USGS	United States Geological Survey
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WP	White Paper

## INTRODUCTION

Now more than ever, the effects of climate change are physically observable. Among them, one of the most shocking is ice melting in the Arctic region, a phenomenon as silent as dangerous.

It is caused by global warming, which, in turn, derives from the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. These gases, among which, for instance, there are carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), cause the so-called greenhouse effect. It is a natural process through which solar radiations reach the Earth's atmosphere and heat its surface.

Unfortunately, in the twentieth-century, certain human activities including, e.g., agriculture, deforestation and intensive animal farming, caused an excessive accumulation of greenhouse gases, which has trapped heat, leading to higher temperatures. This has adversely affected the Arctic, where the shrinking of icecaps is seriously threatening the lives of indigenous people and animals. Furthermore, ice melting causes a rise in sea levels, which has a negative impact on all the surrounding countries, especially those known as "Arctic states". Some of the disastrous consequences of higher sea levels include: wetland flooding, erosion, pollution of aquifers and extinction of several types of plants and animals.

These unpleasant events have drawn the attention of the global community to the Arctic region. Initially it was only for environmental protection purposes, then also for economic ones. Indeed, in recent years, both Arctic and non-Arctic countries have become aware of the strategic potential of the polar region, exactly as during the Cold War. Why do we refer exactly to that period? Because during it the Arctic was an area of strategic and military confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR and nowadays, the latest events suggest that this situation could reoccur.

In this complex context, characterized by rivalries and tensions, the aim of my thesis is to analyze the role of China, a non-Arctic country with obviously no sovereignty rights that, despite this, has always shown great interest in the region.

My work is organized as follows:

In the first chapter, I provide the reader with a brief description of the geographical characteristics of the polar region, focusing on the three main factors according to which we define the Arctic. Immediately after, I mention all the countries involved in Arctic affairs, classified on the basis of their role, i.e.: leaders, partners and newcomers. Below is an explanation highlighting the importance of Arctic governance, which refers to the legal framework designed to manage the

region in the best way. Some of the most important bodies, laws and agreements that make it up are presented individually.

Going ahead with reading, the focus gradually shifts to China, first through the analysis of the country's interests in the region (economic, environmental and political interests), then through a classification of the main Chinese entities and institutions involved in Arctic issues.

The second chapter aims at retracing the history of China's presence in the Arctic.

For this purpose, I decided to "split" this topic into three main phases: the early years, the active engagement and the great step forward. Just by reading this classification, we understand that the history of China's Arctic engagement has been a step-by-step process.

In the early years, the country tried to find a way to be involved in Arctic affairs through a low-profile approach. This kind of behaviour was justified by the need of China not to threaten or frighten the major Arctic states. During its active engagement, especially in the 1990s, China successfully carried out various polar activities. For example, it ratified several agreements, launched its first Arctic expedition and even bought a polar icebreaker.

However, it is in the current century that China has taken a great step forward in Arctic affairs. Having obtained the status of observer of the Arctic Council and having published a White Paper containing its Arctic policy are examples of this. To be more accurate, all historical information concerning the country's presence in the Arctic are briefly framed in a more general context of China's history. In doing so, special attention has been given to the early years of the twenty-first century, not only because during this period China has been particularly active in the region, but also because it is essential to understand the present circumstances.

The third chapter focuses on the latest events occurred in the Arctic region. Among them, one of the most significant is certainly the publication of "China's Arctic Policy" White Paper, the first official document through which China clarified its intentions in the polar region. In this work, an analysis of the origins and the specific contents of the White Paper is provided to the reader.

Successively, after a brief explanation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the plan conceived by Xi Jinping to connect the Asian, African and European continents, the so-called "Polar Silk Road" is presented. This project, which is nothing but a shipping route passing through the Arctic, has been included in the BRI only later. The last part of the chapter is devoted to presenting the current Arctic strategy of the world's three greatest superpowers, i.e. China, the U.S. and Russia.

I decided to focus on these three countries for two main reasons. First, they are at the centre of the recent debate about the Arctic region and its exploitation. Second, they are the protagonists of the so-called "New Cold War" in the Arctic.

What does this term mean specifically?

There are scholars who firmly believe that the current international situation may result into an armed conflict, due to the increasing militarization of the polar region.

However, if we consider the case of Russia and the U.S., we realize that they have all the right to place their weapons in the polar region. In addition, it is in the interest of the global community to keep peace and find the positive side of an event as harmful as the melting of ice.

At present, it is difficult to say exactly what will happen in the future, mainly because the current geopolitical context is constantly evolving. What is certain is that China has worked hard to obtain the status of world superpower and “Arctic stakeholder”. It took time for the country to develop all the capabilities needed to become a polar power, including, for instance, research, economic and diplomatic capabilities. For this reason, I believe that, although China now has other priorities (e.g. the signature of a trade deal with the U.S. and the outbreak of the deadly Wuhan coronavirus), it will do its utmost to strengthen its presence and cooperate with other countries in the Arctic region. This view is also confirmed by the recent investments made by China to support Arctic infrastructures and research projects, such as the Yamal LNG and the MOSAiC Expedition.

## FIRST CHAPTER

### **Why is the Arctic gaining huge importance today, especially for China? Which are the background information in our possession?**

#### *1.1 What is the Arctic?*

The term Arctic comes from the Greek words *arctikos*, which means “northern” and *arktos*, which means “bear”. The word *arktos* refers to the Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, which are constellations typical of the Northern sky<sup>2</sup>. The Arctic is a polar region, located in the northernmost part of the Earth. It is composed of the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas and parts of eight different countries, i.e. The United States, Russia, Finland, Denmark, Canada, Sweden, Norway and Iceland.

There are different definitions of Arctic, which depend on several factors that are going to be explained immediately below. In this case, we rely on the studies conducted by the Arctic Monitoring & Assessment Programme (AMAP), one of the six Working Groups of the Arctic Council.<sup>3</sup> AMAP is mandated:

- to monitor and assess the status of the Arctic region with respect to pollution and climate change issues.
- to document levels and trends, pathways and processes, and effects on ecosystems and humans, and to propose actions to reduce associated threats for consideration by governments.
- to produce sound science-based, policy-relevant assessments and public outreach products to inform policy and decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup>

Generally speaking, the Arctic can be defined as the area within 66°32'N, better known as Arctic Circle. However, this definition is oversimplified, since it doesn't take into account any physical, geographical and ecological characteristic. For this reason, the AMAP first provides three different definitions depending on climate, vegetation and marine boundaries and then it gives its personal one, taking into consideration these factors together with political and administrative ones. The definitions are: (1) the area north of the 10 degrees Celsius July isotherm, i.e. north of the region which has a mean July temperature of 10°; (2) the area north of the Arctic tree line, i.e. the northern limit beyond which trees do not grow; (3) based on oceanographic characteristics, the marine

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<sup>2</sup> “What is the Arctic”, *Arctic Facts and Information*, <https://www.arcticadventure.org>, 17-10-2019.

<sup>3</sup> The Arctic Council (AC), established in 1996, is the most important instrument of governance of the Arctic.

<sup>4</sup> “About AMAP”, *Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme Official Website*, <https://www.amap.no/about>, 3-10-2019.

boundary of the Arctic is situated along the convergence of cool, less saline surface waters from the Arctic Ocean and warmer, saltier waters from oceans to the south; (4) the terrestrial and marine areas north of the Arctic Circle (66°32'N), and north of 62°N in Asia and 60°N in North America, modified to include the marine areas north of the Aleutian chain, Hudson Bay, and parts of the North Atlantic Ocean including the Labrador Sea.<sup>5</sup>

This definition of the AMAP was developed to provide a geographical context for the assessment, in particular source-related assessment issues, i.e., consideration of sources within and outside the Arctic. Obviously the relevance of the AMAP boundary varies when considering different issues, and it has therefore been applied accordingly.<sup>6</sup>

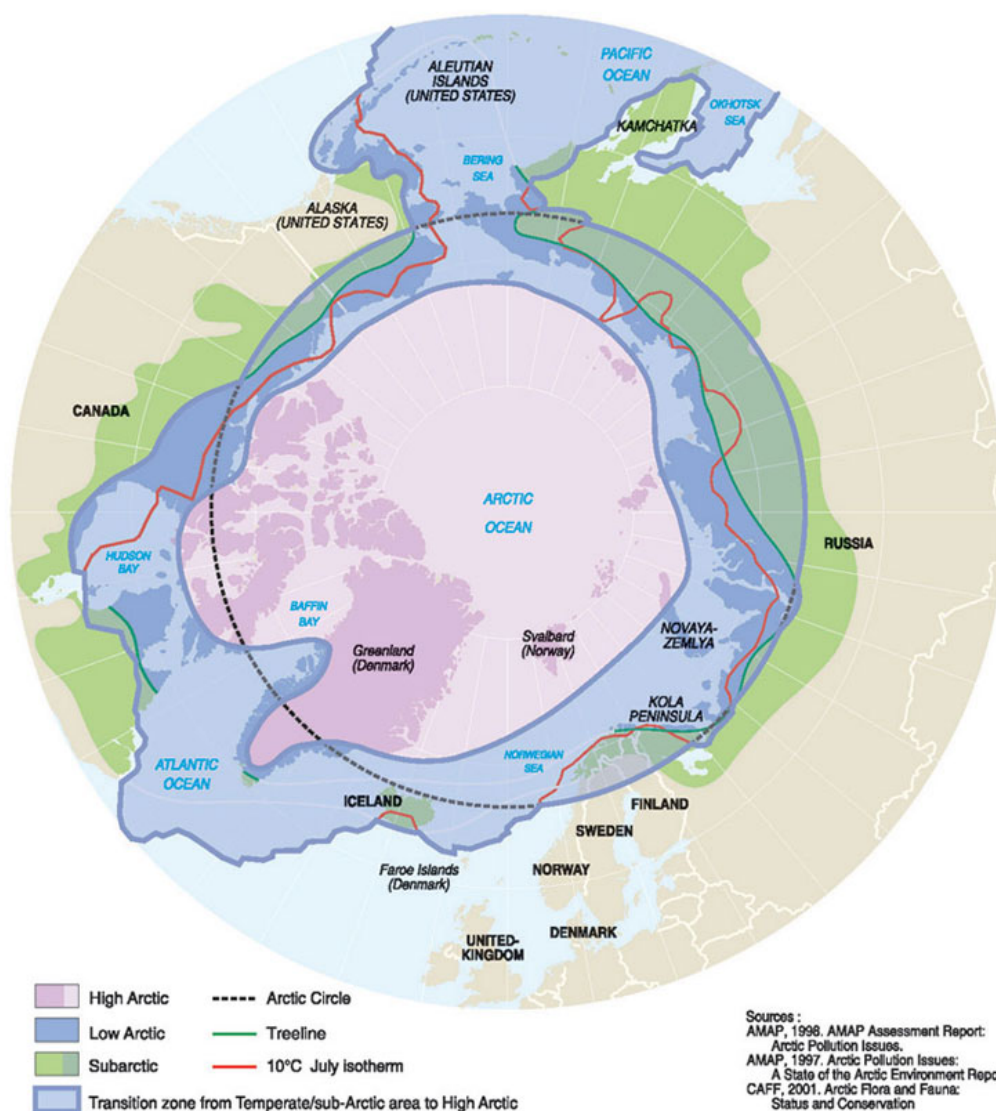


Fig. 1-Definition of the Arctic region (source: Arctic centre - University of Lapland official website).

<sup>5</sup> AMAP, 1998. AMAP Assessment Report: Arctic Pollution Issues. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Oslo, Norway, pp. 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



Even if it may seem far away, the Arctic region is crucial for the well-being of everyone, due to the fact that it regulates the climate of the whole planet. Indeed, global climate change leads to a progressive increase in ice loss, which, in turn, results in the Earth absorbing more heat from the Sun.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the melting of ice get worse even more quickly. That is the reason why all nations should collaborate to find and adopt appropriate solutions to these issues, in particular relying on renewable resources, responsible consumption and sustainable infrastructures.

### *1.2 Main actors in the Arctic region*

The importance and the role of the Arctic region in the global arena has changed in the past and is still changing today, especially due to climate change and its consequences. During the period of the Cold War, which took place between 1947 and 1991, the Arctic was an area of strategic confrontation between the so-called Eastern and Western Bloc, i.e. the USSR, the United States and their respective allies. At that time, a conflict in the Arctic region between those superpowers was considered completely possible, because of the fact that the region was heavily militarized and politically sensitive. However, with the passing of time, there has been a shift from confrontation to cooperation, then replaced in the mid-2000s by the hypothesis of a new conflict.

Together with the role of the polar region in the international context, also the actors involved in its affairs have changed over time. Nonetheless, what all of these have in common is a strong determination and willingness to invest their efforts in a place characterized by harsh and demanding conditions.

Against such a background, we have to keep in mind that there are basically two types of actors involved in Arctic affairs, i.e., Arctic and non-Arctic countries. They, in turn, can be further divided on the basis of their role in the region. In this respect, Lisbeth Aggestam, a professor of political science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, said that:

“role provides an essential link between agent and structure, as they incorporate the manner in which foreign policy is both purposeful and shaped by institutional contexts”. From this point of view, there are three main types of declared Arctic roles: leaders, partners and newcomers, which are respectively the roles of Arctic states, non-Arctic States that became observers of the Arctic Council before 2013, non-Arctic States, which joined the Arctic Council in 2013.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about this process, known as “Ice-Albedo feedback”, refer to: [https://climate.nasa.gov/resources/education/pbs\\_modules/lesson2Engage/](https://climate.nasa.gov/resources/education/pbs_modules/lesson2Engage/).

<sup>8</sup> Elena CONDE, Sara IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges in the Arctic Region*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 403.

Considering only the role of leaders, Michal Luszczuk, an associate professor of the Marie Curie-Sklodowska University of Lublin, Poland, explained that “the aspiration to become leaders in the Arctic is driven by two needs: first, to confirm their “Arcticness” and second, to differentiate and individualize.”<sup>9</sup>

Overall, there are eight countries belonging to this category. In order to understand more deeply why they are regarded as leaders in the Arctic region, a brief analysis of each situation is provided immediately below.

#### *Leaders:*

The **United States** own a territory in the Arctic which is geographically smaller and less populated compared to that of the other Arctic states.<sup>10</sup> Such territory consists of Alaska, obtained from the Russian Empire through an international agreement in 1867, and parts of the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. The relationship between the Arctic and the United States has always been quite troublesome, so much that in 2009 the latter has been defined a “reluctant Arctic power”.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the U.S. have always been unwilling to take the initiative in international Arctic policy, something which can be easily understood from their attitude toward:

- the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS)
- the Arctic Council (AC)
- the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

The first one is an agreement regarding the environmental protection of the Arctic, which initially was completely ignored by the U.S.; the second is a high-level intergovernmental forum for cooperation on a broad range of Arctic-related matters.<sup>12</sup> When it was conceived, the United States immediately let it known that they were against it to deal with security-related issues, develop an independent bureaucracy and raise revenues sources of its own<sup>13</sup>; the third one is a fundamental agreement pertinent to the Arctic Ocean, but we will discuss it in detail at a later stage. It is enough to know that the U.S. has not accepted it because of the opposition from Republicans in the Senate.

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<sup>9</sup> Elena CONDE, Sara IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges in the Arctic Region*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 406.

<sup>10</sup> Andreas OSTHAGEN, *The United States as an Arctic actor*, in “The Arctic Institute”, 2011, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/united-states-arctic-actor/>, 4-10-2019.

<sup>11</sup> Robert HUEBERT, *United States Arctic Policy: The Reluctant Arctic Power* (May 13, 2009). University of Calgary, The School of Public Policy – University of Calgary Publications Series, Volume 2, Issue 2, May 2009. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3053702>.

<sup>12</sup> “About us”, *Arctic Council official website*, 2015, <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>, 5-10-2019.

<sup>13</sup> HUEBERT, “*United States...*”, cit., p. 12.

In any case, with the passing of time, the American attitude toward the Arctic has changed together with the necessities and geo-strategic realities of each different period. For instance, nowadays the trend is toward a greater involvement, especially due to drives such as the competition with Russia and China, the impacts from climate change and the necessity to address global economic and security dynamics.

**Russia** is the largest of the five states bordering the Arctic Ocean and its northern shores encompass half of the total Arctic coastline.<sup>14</sup> The first document through which Russia defined its rights in the Northern Arctic Ocean was the Decree of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. The large Arctic sector belonging to Russia is one of the most important reasons why we cannot think about the Arctic and its governance without taking into consideration Russia. Conversely to what has been said about the United States, the Government of Russia has always been actively involved in Arctic-related issues, e.g., in the creation of the Arctic Council, the establishment of the International Maritime Organization<sup>15</sup>, the amendment of national law pertaining to the Northern Sea Route<sup>16</sup>, the environmental protection and the rights of indigenous people. The Arctic policy of Russia gives primary importance to issues relative to the use of natural resources, the exploitation of the NSR in compliance with the delicate environment, the protection of the ecosystem and the realization of mutual help and cooperation. In today's context, Russia's Arctic aspirations are deeply linked to its relationship with Asian countries, especially China and its huge monetary investments.

**Norway** is itself an Arctic nation, since it is located in the Scandinavian Peninsula. For this reason the High North has always been a priority of Norway's foreign policy, especially from 2006.<sup>17</sup> We can easily recognize such element from all the strategic documents released by Norway in the past years, i.e.:

- The Norwegian Government's High North Strategy (December 2006)
- New Building Blocks in the North (March 2009)

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<sup>14</sup> Frederic LASSERRE, Olga ALEXEEVA, "An analysis on Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic in the BRI era", in *Advances in Polar science*, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations established for regulating shipping.

<sup>16</sup> The Northern Sea Route (NSR), also known as Northeast Passage, is a shipping route between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean which runs from the Russian Arctic coast along Siberia to the Bering Strait.

<sup>17</sup> 2006 is considered an important year in Arctic-related matters. Indeed, it was in 2006 that Russia planted its country's flag on the seabed at the North Pole after a polar expedition, an event that drew the world's attention to the Arctic.

- Norway's Arctic Strategy - between geopolitics and social development (April 2017)<sup>18</sup>

These documents highlight all the key goals of Norway in the Arctic region, which include the development of knowledge, the improvement of international cooperation and a rational use of the resources in our possession. Most importantly, all of these documents emphasize Norway's desire to present the Arctic as a past, present and future priority. Indeed, even if certain goals have been achieved over the past years, Norway won't stop, but rather it will put much more effort in making the Arctic a peaceful, innovative and sustainable region.<sup>19</sup>

Due its efforts, the country is usually defined as a "leader in the field of knowledge" pertaining to the Arctic, as evidenced by Norway's Arctic Strategy paper of 2017:

"The Government will continue to provide good framework conditions for research relating to the Arctic to ensure that this research is of the highest international standards. Environmental and natural resource management, business activity and social development in the Arctic must be based on sound scientific knowledge".<sup>20</sup>

**Canada** owns an Arctic's portion named Arctic Archipelago, which is composed of islands located in the north of the Canadian continental mainland. Those islands are separated from one another by different waterways, the so-called Northwest Passages. In this respect, in the past years several disputes arose between Canada, U.S. and the European Union, due to the fact that Canada considered those passages as "internal waters", while the other countries saw them as "international straits", potentially exploitable by foreign vessels for transit. Consequently, all the documents released by Canada pertaining to the Arctic emphasize sovereignty as a pillar of Canada's Arctic Strategy. At the very beginning of the "Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy" of 2010 is explained that:

"The Arctic is fundamental to Canada's national identity. It is home to many Canadians, including indigenous peoples, across the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and the northern parts of many Canadian provinces. The Arctic is embedded in Canadian history and culture, and in the Canadian soul. The Arctic also represents tremendous potential for Canada's future. Exercising sovereignty over Canada's North, as over the rest of Canada, is our number one Arctic foreign policy priority".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Norway's Arctic Strategy" of 2017 is an updated version of "The Norwegian Government's High North Strategy" of 2006.

<sup>19</sup> "Norway's Arctic Strategy - between geopolitics and social development", *Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2017, <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fad46f0404e14b2a9b551ca7359c1000/arctic-strategy.pdf>, 7-10-2019.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy", *Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development*, 2010, [http://library.arcticportal.org/1886/1/canada\\_arctic\\_foreign\\_policy-eng.pdf](http://library.arcticportal.org/1886/1/canada_arctic_foreign_policy-eng.pdf), 8-10-2019.

Once having read these few words, we can easily understand why Canada is labeled as “leader in exercising Arctic sovereignty”.<sup>22</sup>

**Denmark** is a Nordic country formally known as Kingdom of Denmark. The three parts of the so-called “Danish Realm” are respectively Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland.<sup>23</sup> Being an Arctic nation, Denmark has several interests in the Arctic, which have been outlined in the “Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020”, the official strategic document of the country. Besides the willingness to cope with climate change, which actually is in the interest of everyone, the document highlights the polar goals of the country, which is often defined as a “leader in Arctic cooperation”<sup>24</sup>. This label originates from the particular emphasis placed on national and international cooperation.

**Finland**’s strategy toward the Arctic, released in June 2010 by the Prime Minister’s Office, starts by saying: “As an Arctic country, Finland is a natural actor in the Arctic Region”.<sup>25</sup> It is certainly true, but too simplistic, because of the fact that we also have to keep in mind that Finland, together with Denmark and Sweden, are all members of the European Union, which has its own policy toward the Arctic. In this respect, Finland actively supports the European Union’s entrance in the Arctic Council, which is something impossible to achieve since the EU Commission is a supranational body and not an intergovernmental organization.<sup>26</sup> Finland’s role as a “leading expert on Arctic issues”, explained in the section named “Economics and Know-how” of its official document<sup>27</sup>, is realized by the country through investments in education, research, testing and technology.

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<sup>22</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 408.

<sup>23</sup> “The Arctic”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark*, <https://um.dk/en/foreign-policy/the-arctic/>, 8-10-2019.

<sup>24</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 407.

<sup>25</sup> “Finland strategy for the Arctic Region”, *Finnish Prime Minister’s Office Publications*, 2010, <https://www.arcticfrontiers.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/FI%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Arctic%20Region%202010.pdf>, 8-10-2019.

<sup>26</sup> Being an intergovernmental organization is one of the main criteria to gain the status of Observer in the Arctic Council. Such criteria were defined in 2011. For further information consult: <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers>.

<sup>27</sup> The official strategy of Finland toward the Arctic, named “Finland’s Strategy for the Arctic Region” is available at this website: <https://www.arcticfrontiers.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/FI%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Arctic%20Region%202010.pdf>.

**Iceland** this year has assumed the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and will lead it till 2021.<sup>28</sup> When talking about its role in the polar region, we can say that Iceland has always sought its chance in playing the role of a “leading hub for maritime business in the Arctic”, particularly for trade with partners from Far East.<sup>29</sup> The most important document of Iceland’s strategy in the High North is “A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland’s Arctic Policy”, approved in 2011 by Althingi, the national parliament of Iceland. According to this paper, the Icelandic Government has to follow twelve guidelines in the creation of a detailed strategy document, e.g. strengthening the Arctic Council, supporting the rights of indigenous people, advancing Icelander’s knowledge of Arctic issues, building on agreements and promoting cooperation with other States and stakeholders.<sup>30</sup> Despite being somewhat outdated, this document is still the only one practical declaration of Iceland’s Arctic Policy.

**Sweden**’s role as a leader in Arctic-related issues is much more complex than the above-mentioned countries (exactly like Finland, it is a member of the EU). Swedish Arctic Policy is fully explained in “Sweden’s Strategy for the Arctic Region”, a document published in 2011 to present Sweden’s relationship with the Arctic.<sup>31</sup> After reading this paper, we can see the importance that Sweden attaches to cooperation and the stress on maintaining a positive attitude toward the opportunities (and the challenges) offered by the Arctic region.

#### *Partners and newcomers:*

In addition to Arctic States, whose role has already been clarified, also non-Arctic States deserve particular attention, mainly due to their increasing role in the polar regions. When we consider these countries, a distinction should be made between “partners” and “newcomers”.

Why do we refer to non-Arctic States using these different words?

There are basically three reasons for such a distinction. The first one has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and consists in the fact that when we talk about partners we refer to all those countries that became observers of the Arctic Council before 2013, while newcomers are

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<sup>28</sup> “Iceland assumes Chairmanship of the Arctic Council”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2019, <https://www.government.is/news/article/2019/05/07/Iceland-assumes-Chairmanship-of-the-Arctic-Council/>, 8-10-2019.

<sup>29</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 408.

<sup>30</sup> “A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland’s Arctic Policy” (Approved by Althingi at the 139th legislative session March 28 2011), <https://www.government.is/media/utanrikisraduneyti-media/media/nordurlandaskrifstofa/A-Parliamentary-Resolution-on-ICE-Arctic-Policy-approved-by-Althingi.pdf>, 8-10-2019.

<sup>31</sup> “Sweden Strategy for the Arctic Region”, *Government Offices of Sweden*, 2011, <https://www.government.se/country-and-regional-strategies/2011/10/swedens-strategy-for-the-arctic-region/>, 8-10-2019.

those accepted as observers during the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna in 2013.<sup>32</sup> The second reason lies in the types of roles associated with them, because partners are actual roles that have been individually specified and promoted by the states, while the role of a newcomer is not explicitly defined, but rather only generally expected by the Arctic community and its leaders.<sup>33</sup> Thirdly, while partners eagerly provide evidence of their long-standing and substantive engagement in the Arctic region, the newcomers usually restrain themselves from declaring or issuing any official policy statements and spotlight only the motives of their interests in the region.<sup>34</sup>

Once being clear about these differences, an explanation of each situation is provided below.

#### *Partners:*

**France** has a connection with the polar regions thanks to the different explorers who invested time and energies there. Its increasing interests in the Arctic come from the awareness of the need for global collaboration in dealing with the melting of ice. France became an observer of the Arctic Council in 2000, and since that moment the Arctic gained great importance in its foreign policy. This can be noticed in the “French White Paper on Defence and National Security”, published in 2013, but also through the analysis of the “National Roadmap for the Arctic”<sup>35</sup> of 2016. This latter aims at explaining and legitimating France’s interests in the Arctic region. In addition, being a member of European Union and NATO, helped France gain a strategic posture and a more active role in the polar region.<sup>36</sup>

**Germany’s** relationship with the Arctic approximately started in the mid-1800s, thanks to the activities of different researchers. Germany, along with the UK, Poland and the Netherlands, obtained the status of Observer in 1998, during the Arctic Council’s First Ministerial Meeting in

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<sup>32</sup> The Kiruna Declaration, held in Kiruna (Sweden) in 2013 at the conclusion of the first cycle of Chairmanships for the Eight Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council, defined several goals pertaining to the Arctic, including the acceptance of certain non-Arctic countries as observers.

<sup>33</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 409.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For further information about the document: [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fna\\_-\\_eng\\_-\\_interne\\_-\\_prepa\\_-\\_17-06-pm-bd-pdf\\_cle02695b.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fna_-_eng_-_interne_-_prepa_-_17-06-pm-bd-pdf_cle02695b.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> “France”, *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/france/>, 18-10-2019.

Iqaluit, Canada.<sup>37</sup> The country's Arctic policy was formalized only in 2013, through the publication of the "Guidelines of the Germany Arctic Policy".<sup>38</sup><sup>39</sup>

Germany's involvement in issues pertaining to the Arctic has increased over time, especially after the foundation of the German Arctic Office in 2017.

**Netherlands'** history in the Arctic takes us back to the 16th century, when Svalbard Archipelago was discovered by a Dutch explorer and Dutch nationals were already involved in industry and commerce in the region.<sup>40</sup> As already mentioned, the Netherlands' approval as observers in the Arctic Council happened in 1998. The "Strategy for the Netherlands Polar Programme 2016-2020" of 2014, an updated version of the previous strategy, creates a framework for Dutch research in the polar regions, which, together with international collaboration, is the main focus of Netherlands' Arctic Policy.

**Spain's** expeditions to the High North began in the 16th century, just like Netherlands, but it was only in 2006 that the country became an observer of the AC. Spain has different interests and goals in the Arctic, which are explained in its "Guidelines for a Spanish Polar Strategy" of 2016. Some of these interests include: providing environmental protection, defending the rights of indigenous people and promoting safe and environmentally-friendly trans-Arctic transit.<sup>41</sup>

**United Kingdom** has one of the longest histories of interest and activity in the Arctic of any country. Merchants, hunters, sailors and scientists have visited the Arctic from the British Isles since at least the 15th Century. However, in the 20th century, the relationship between UK and the Arctic deeply changed, since its focus of attention became Antarctica.<sup>42</sup> After a period of low engagement, the British interest toward the Arctic flourished again and, in 1998, the country was granted the status of observer of the AC. United Kingdom published the first document containing its Arctic Policy in 2013, but recently, in 2018, it uploaded a new version, titled "Beyond the Ice: UK policy

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<sup>37</sup> After the foundation of the Arctic Council in 1996, the Arctic Council's First Ministerial Meeting was held in Iqaluit, Canada. This was an event of great significance since different countries obtained the status of Observers and several goals pertaining to the Arctic were set.

<sup>38</sup> "Germany", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/germany/>, 18-10-2019.

<sup>39</sup> Link of the official document: [http://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/International/Leitlinien-Arktispolitik.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/International/Leitlinien-Arktispolitik.pdf?__blob=publicationFile).

<sup>40</sup> "Netherlands", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/netherlands/>, 18-10-2019.

<sup>41</sup> "Guidelines for a Spanish Polar Strategy", [http://www.ciencia.gob.es/stfls/MICINN/Investigacion/FICHEROS/Comite\\_Polar\\_definitivo/Directrices\\_estrategia\\_polar\\_espanola.pdf](http://www.ciencia.gob.es/stfls/MICINN/Investigacion/FICHEROS/Comite_Polar_definitivo/Directrices_estrategia_polar_espanola.pdf), 18-10-2019.

<sup>42</sup> "United Kingdom", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/united-kingdom/>, 18-10-2019.



towards the Arctic”. The key areas of UK policy are: protecting the global influence of Britain, protecting people and environment and promoting the Arctic as a prosperous region.<sup>43</sup>

**Poland**’s engagement in the polar region is characterized by several scientific research activities, which approximately started in the 1930s. It gained the status of Observer of the AC in 1996.<sup>44</sup> However, considering its role in the region we can say that Poland constitute a separate case, since it has not issued any comprehensive documents or current research plans.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Newcomers:*

China, Japan, Korea, India, Singapore and Italy are countries that can be classified as newcomers, since their Arctic interests are quite recent and obviously they don’t have any territorial claim in the region. Given the fact that we will extensively discuss the situation of **China** in the next chapters, now we focus our attention on the other five nations. Apart from Italy and India, whose engagement in the Arctic started with the signing of the Spitsbergen Treaty in 1920, the other countries’ presence began in 1990 or, as in the case of Singapore, they even have no historic polar tradition. But this doesn’t necessarily mean that these nations’ interest in the Arctic is merely economic or not sincere, as some scholars believe. Actually, the situation of each of these countries is much more complex than we might think.

**Japan** has heavily invested in Arctic and Antarctic research and this is confirmed by the establishment of several different research centres, including the National Institute of Polar Research (NIPR) and the Arctic Environment Research Center (AERC). In 2015 the country published its Arctic Policy, which addresses fundamental issues such as international cooperation, the rights of indigenous people and global environment.<sup>46</sup>

**Korea** also engaged in a number of unilateral and multilateral scientific studies and created its first icebreaker in 2009.<sup>47</sup> As regards **India**, its involvement in the Arctic started in the 1920s, but its interests are not driven by any official agenda, due to the fact that it has no published “Arctic Policy”. Since this country is becoming increasingly dynamic and ambitious, we can assume that it

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<sup>43</sup> “Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic”, *HM Government, Polar Regions Department*, 2018, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/697251/beyond-the-ice-uk-policy-towards-the-arctic.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/697251/beyond-the-ice-uk-policy-towards-the-arctic.pdf), 18-10-2019.

<sup>44</sup> “Poland”, *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/poland/>, 20-10-2019.

<sup>45</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 410.

<sup>46</sup> “Japan’s Arctic Policy”, *The Headquarters for Ocean Policies*, 2015, [https://www8.cao.go.jp/ocean/english/arctic/pdf/japans\\_ap\\_e.pdf](https://www8.cao.go.jp/ocean/english/arctic/pdf/japans_ap_e.pdf), 20-10-2019.

<sup>47</sup> “South Korea”, *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/south-korea/>, 20-10-2019.

will get more and more involved in Arctic-related issues. This view is demonstrated by India's latest investments in oil and gas assets in Russian sub-Arctic regions.<sup>48</sup>

As regards oil and gas, it is worth mentioning the case of **Italy** and in particular that of the Italian company Eni, which has a strong Arctic engagement and carries out several polar activities (e.g. shipping and mining) there. The Italian presence in the region started in 1920, but it was only in 2015 that the country published its White Paper on the Arctic, titled "Towards an Italian Strategy for the Arctic".<sup>49</sup>

As already mentioned, **Singapore**, the latest newcomer we are about to describe, doesn't have a historic tradition of polar science. It has not conducted any specific scientific research or expeditions in the Arctic, and has no icebreakers.<sup>50</sup> Singapore's most important polar concerns are the increasing exploitation of Arctic passages and the consequent rise of Chinese ports due to Arctic shipping, which can negatively affect its hub port status. Indeed, Singapore is one of the three most important ports used by ships transiting the Strait of Malacca<sup>51</sup> (the others are Malacca and George Town). However, the integration of Singapore in the Arctic governance system represents a means of hedging risk while understanding and influencing Arctic change.<sup>52</sup>

### *1.3 Arctic governance and politics*

When talking about the Arctic, we cannot leave out of consideration all those organizations, laws and agreements that regulate the activities taking place in the region. These institutions, agreements and laws constitute the so-called "Arctic governance". Given that the Arctic is a mixture of sovereign territories, internal waters and high seas, its governance is a complex combination of national law, established international instruments, and evolving regional management.<sup>53</sup>

As a consequence, an in-depth analysis able to include all these factors is very hard to achieve for someone who don't work precisely in this field. Thus, what it has been decided to do is putting together all those elements of the Arctic governance that not only had a profound impact on the

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<sup>48</sup> "India", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/india/>, 20-10-2019.

<sup>49</sup> "Italy", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/italy/>, 20-10-2019.

<sup>50</sup> "Singapore", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/singapore/>, 20-10-2019.

<sup>51</sup> The Strait of Malacca is the world's most traveled shipping lane between India and China.

<sup>52</sup> TONAMI Aki, *Asian Foreign Policy in a Changing Arctic*, London, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016, p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> Anne-Marie BRADY, *China as a Polar Great Power*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

polar region and its actors, but also on the role of China. For this purpose, I made a clear distinction between laws, agreements and organizations and put them in chronological order.

*Laws and agreements:*

There is a large number of international and national agreements and laws concerning the Arctic region. The importance of such regulations lies in the fact that they can coordinate states which are completely different from each other for their backgrounds, purposes, activities, territoriality, but share a common interest in developing and protecting the Arctic.

- **Spitsbergen Treaty**, now known as Svalbard Treaty, was signed in Paris in February 9, 1920. It recognizes full and absolute sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, while all the others contracting parties shall enjoy equally the rights of fishing and hunting in those territories.<sup>54</sup> Over the years, a huge number of countries became signatories to the treaty, especially non-Arctic states who had an interest in obtaining such privileges. For example, China joined the Treaty of Svalbard in 1925. Furthermore, in more recent years, many non-Arctic states that wish to have a say in Arctic governance, have set up research stations at Ny-Ålesund, a research town on Spitsbergen Island.<sup>55</sup>
- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** is an international agreement concerning to the Arctic Ocean. It was signed on December 10, 1982, but entered into force only later, on November 16, 1994. It can be considered one of the most important agreements about the Arctic, since it defines rights, obligations, responsibilities of States in regards of the use of seas, oceans and their resources.<sup>56</sup> According to UNCLOS, costal (littoral) states have undisputed sovereign rights to their territorial sea and exclusive economic zone, which extend to a distance of 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) from their coastal baseline (Articles 3, 57). On ratification of UNCLOS, a country has 10 years to make claims to extend its 200-natural-mile-zone (Article 4).

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<sup>54</sup> “The Svalbard Treaty”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France* (depository country), 1920, [https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/util/documents/accede\\_document.php?1570632140008](https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/util/documents/accede_document.php?1570632140008), 9-10-2019.

<sup>55</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> “International agreements”, *The Arctic Portal*, <https://arcticportal.org/arctic-governance/international-agreements>, 9-10-2019.

Arctic's littoral states are: Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States. This latter has not yet ratified UNCLOS.<sup>5758</sup>

- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** is an international environmental treaty, adopted on May 9, 1992 in New York. It was opened for signature at Rio de Janeiro only later, which is the reason why it officially entered into force in June of the same year, after a large number of countries signed it. As Article 2 of the Convention specifies:

“The ultimate objective of this Convention and any related legal instruments that the Conference of the Parties may adopt is to achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner”.<sup>59</sup>

Through such Convention, all parties agree to provide information about their measures and projects in dealing with climate change and also agree to regularly meet to discuss their ongoing progress.

- **Ottawa Declaration**, as the name suggests, is not an international agreement, but is a simple declaration made by the eight Arctic states on September 19, 1996. Although often omitted from the books on the subject, this document is extremely important because it was through it that the Arctic Council was conceived.
- **Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change** is an international environmental treaty adopted on December 11, 1997. It is considered an extension of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, because, on the basis of this

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<sup>57</sup> Linda JAKOBSON, *China prepares for an Ice-free Arctic*, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> “The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”, *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 1982, [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/11/19941116%2005-26%20AM/Ch\\_XXI\\_06p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/11/19941116%2005-26%20AM/Ch_XXI_06p.pdf), 9-10-2019.

<sup>59</sup> “United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change”, *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 1992, [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004-56%20AM/Ch\\_XXVII\\_07p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004-56%20AM/Ch_XXVII_07p.pdf), 10-10-2019.

previous agreement, it provides the signatory Parties with practical obligations for the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases<sup>60</sup> for the period 2008-2012. Such obligations include:

- implement and/or further elaborate policies and measures in accordance with its national circumstances
- cooperate with other such Parties to enhance the individual and combined effectiveness of their policies and measures adopted under the Articles of the Convention<sup>61</sup>

It should be made clear that the level of reduction of greenhouse gases' emissions that the Parties agreed to achieve is calculated in accordance with the levels of their emissions in 1990 (which is the so-called "baseline") and in variable percentages from state to state.

• **Ilulissat Declaration** is a declaration adopted by five coastal States bordering the Arctic Ocean — Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States — on May 28, 2008. It was conceived during the meeting of these countries in Ilulissat, Greenland, after the invitation of the Danish Minister of foreign affairs.<sup>62</sup> The aim of the meeting was to discuss some fundamental Arctic issues, such as the protection of its environment, the exploitation of its natural resources and how to cope with climate change. Among the key points of the declaration are the following:

- the continuous stress on the role of the Arctic Five, which through their sovereignty are in a unique position to address the possibilities and challenges of the Arctic;
- lack of necessity to develop a new comprehensive international legal framework to govern the Arctic Ocean.<sup>63</sup>

The meeting which led to the adoption of the Ilulissat Declaration, i.e. the Arctic Ocean Conference, was a source of resentment between the states members of the Arctic Council, because only few of them were invited. For instance, Finland, Sweden and Iceland were excluded from the conference.

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<sup>60</sup> The greenhouse gases are responsible of the greenhouse effect, which is a natural process of our atmosphere. Conversely, the recent increase of the greenhouse effect depends on human activities and is the direct cause of global warming.

<sup>61</sup> "Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change", *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 1997, [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1998/09/19980921%2004-41%20PM/Ch\\_XXVII\\_07\\_ap.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1998/09/19980921%2004-41%20PM/Ch_XXVII_07_ap.pdf), 10-10-2019.

<sup>62</sup> "Ilulissat Declaration", *Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs*, 2008, [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/080525\\_arctic\\_ocean\\_conference-\\_outcome.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/080525_arctic_ocean_conference-_outcome.pdf), 10-10-2019.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

- **International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code)** was adopted in 2015 by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), an agency we will talk about later. The Polar Code was conceived in order to increase the safety of ships' operations and mitigate the impact on the people and environment in the remote, vulnerable and potentially harsh polar waters.<sup>64</sup> The Code comprises many regulations, which are not merely related to shipping in general, but also include recommendations about the structure of the ship, how to implement a safe navigation and communicate with different ships during operations.<sup>65</sup>
- **The Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation** was signed by Ministers of the eight Arctic States at the Fairbanks Ministerial meeting<sup>66</sup> on May 11, 2017, but it entered into force only later, on May 23, 2018. Thus, it was only on this date that the agreement acquired legal force. As explained in Article 2, the purpose of the agreement is to enhance cooperation in scientific activities in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the development of scientific knowledge about the Arctic.<sup>67</sup> Scientific research and cooperation are both cornerstones of the relationship between the Arctic and the whole world, since they can lead to a deeper understanding of the region. This latter is fundamental in dealing with climate change, ice melting and for creating and implementing new policies.

#### *Organizations:*

- **Arctic Council (AC)**

The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.<sup>68</sup> As can be seen in the picture below, the Arctic Council is composed of

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<sup>64</sup> “International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters” (Polar Code), *International Maritime Organization*, 2015, <http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Documents/POLAR%20CODE%20TEXT%20AS%20ADOPTED.pdf>, 10-10-2019.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> The Fairbanks Ministerial meeting of 2017, held in Fairbanks, Alaska, marked the end of the second US Chairmanship and the beginning of the second Finnish Chairmanship over the Arctic Council.

<sup>67</sup> “Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation”, *Arctic Council*, 2017, <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/1916>, 10-10-2019.

<sup>68</sup> “The Arctic Council: a backgrounder”, *Arctic Council*, 2015, <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>, 11-10-2019.

eight member states —Russia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and the United States —, six organizations representing Arctic indigenous people and six Working Groups. The organizations representing Arctic indigenous people have the status of Permanent Participants, which was created in order to promote an active participation and consultation with indigenous people within the Council. These organizations are: the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North and the Saami Council. The work of the Council is carried out in six Working Groups, i.e.:

- the Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP), whose main purpose is supporting actions to reduce pollution.
- the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), whose main functions are monitoring the Arctic environment, examining the impact of pollution, giving advice to Ministers on actions aimed at improve the Arctic condition
- the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group (CAFF), whose task is taking care of Arctic biodiversity and helping in the creation of practices for the protection of living resources.
- the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR), which contributes to the prevention and potential response to emergencies and accidents, collects and share data and information.
- the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment Working Group (PAME), which takes care of all of the actions aimed at the right and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment.
- the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), whose main purpose is the promotion of a sustainable development in the Arctic, together with the improvement of environmental, social and economic conditions of the region.<sup>69</sup>

It's worth noting that the outer ring of the image on the next page is composed of countries and organizations which possess the so-called "Observer status". It was created to support the work of the Council and welcomes non-Arctic states, non-governmental, inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations. Observer states and organization are invited to the meetings of the Arctic Council and may propose projects.

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<sup>69</sup> "The Arctic Council: a backgrounder", *Arctic Council*, 2015, <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>, 11-10-2019.



Fig. 2- Illustration of the Council (source: Arctic Council Official Website).

Together with those that can be defined as the “pillars” of the Arctic Council (Member States, Working Groups and Indigenous Organizations), a permanent Secretariat was also created in 2013 in Tromsø, Norway. The idea behind it was that of giving administrative and organizational support to the Arctic Council.

Despite the expectations for the forum initially were modest, its role has grown extensively over the years, to such an extent that in 2018 it was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by several academics.<sup>70</sup> Anyway, we always have to keep in mind that, in order to take the correct actions and adapt to the current situation in the Arctic, which is in a state of endless change, continuous improvements of the Arctic Council are needed.

- **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS)** is an independent judicial body established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to adjudicate disputes arising out of the interpretation and application of the Convention. It’s composed of 21 independent members, elected from among persons enjoying the highest reputation for fairness and integrity and of recognized competence in the field of the law of the sea. The Tribunal has jurisdiction over any dispute concerning the interpretation or application of the Convention, and over all matters specifically provided for in any other agreement which confers jurisdiction on the Tribunal (Statute, Article 21). The Tribunal is open to States Parties to the Convention and to entities other

<sup>70</sup> “Form and Function: the Future of the Arctic Council”, *The Arctic Institute*, 2019, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/form-function-future-arctic-council>, 11-10-2019.



than States Parties, e.g. intergovernmental organizations, state enterprises and private entities.<sup>71</sup> The location of such Tribunal, actually in Hamburg, Germany, was chosen on August 1981, while the first judgement was held in 1997.

- **International Seabed Authority (ISA)**

The International Seabed Authority or ISA is directly linked with the previous organization, since both were established by UNCLOS. ISA is an autonomous international organization created in 1994 to regulate mineral-related activities in the international seabed.<sup>72</sup> It is located in Kingston, Jamaica, and has 168 member states. The International Seabed Authority is actually engaged in the implementation of a Strategic Plan for the period 2019-2023, which is aimed at the protection of the marine environment and human life, a rational management of resources, the promotion of marine scientific research and the strengthening of the credibility and capability of the Authority.<sup>73</sup>

- **the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)**

The purpose of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf is to facilitate the implementation of the UNCLOS in respect of the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles (M) from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured. Under UNCLOS, the coastal State shall establish the outer limits of its continental shelf where it extends beyond 200 M on the basis of the recommendation of the Commission. The Commission shall make recommendations to coastal States on matters related to the establishment of those limits; its recommendations and actions shall not prejudice matters relating to the delimitation of boundaries between States with opposite or adjacent coasts.<sup>74</sup>

- **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**

The International Maritime Organization is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships. Its main task is to create a regulatory framework for the shipping industry that is

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<sup>71</sup> “The tribunal”, *International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea*, <https://www.itlos.org/the-tribunal/>, 11-10-2019.

<sup>72</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> “Decision of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority relating to the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019-2023”, *International Seabed Authority*, [https://ran-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/isa.org\\_jm/s3fs-public/files/documents/isba24\\_a10-en.pdf](https://ran-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/isa.org_jm/s3fs-public/files/documents/isba24_a10-en.pdf), 11-10-2019.

<sup>74</sup> “Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS): purpose, functions and session”, *United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea*, [https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs\\_new/commission\\_purpose.htm#Purpose](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/commission_purpose.htm#Purpose), 11-10-2019.

fair and effective, universally adopted and implemented.<sup>75</sup> IMO was conceived by the United Nations in 1948, but it officially entered into force only ten years later, in 1958. It has a quite complex structure, since its work is carried out by an Assembly, which is the highest governing body of the organization, a Council, elected by the Assembly, and Five main Committees. Among these Committees, it's worth mentioning the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), which is the highest technical body of the Organization and deals with equipments, construction of vessels, aids to navigation. The work done by IMO supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 global goals conceived by the United Nations about which we will talk later.<sup>76</sup>

- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**

The United Nations Environment programme is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.<sup>77</sup> UNEP's work is crucial also in the Arctic, since the polar region is part of the so-called "Regional Seas Programme", a plan formulated in 1974 that aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas through a "shared seas" approach – namely, by engaging neighbouring countries in comprehensive and specific actions to protect their common marine environment.<sup>78</sup>

- **International Arctic Science Committee (IASC)**

IASC is a non-governmental scientific organization established in 1990 to encourage and facilitate international consultation and cooperation for scientific research concerned with the Arctic.

It promotes and supports leading-edge interdisciplinary research in order to foster a greater scientific understanding of the Arctic region and its role in the Earth system. It was founded by the representatives of national scientific organizations of the eight Arctic Countries, but over time has evolved into the leading international science organization of the North and actually accounts for 23 state members, of which 15 are non-Arctic states (Austria, China, the Czech Republic, France,

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<sup>75</sup> "Introduction to IMO", *IMO website*, <http://www.imo.org/en/About/Pages/Default.aspx>, 11-10-2019.

<sup>76</sup> For more details about the Sustainable Development Goals, check the website: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

<sup>77</sup> "About UN Environment", *United Nations Environment Programme*, <https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment>, 11-10-2019.

<sup>78</sup> "Regional Seas Programme", *UNEP*, <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/what-we-do/working-regional-seas/why-does-working-regional-seas-matter>, 11-10-2019.

Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland and the UK).<sup>79</sup> The organization is composed of a Council, a Regional Board, five Working Groups, the Arctic Science Conference and a Secretariat. The members of the Council meet once a year in the Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW), the most important annual gathering of the Arctic research organizations.



Fig. 3 - IASC structure (source: International Arctic Science Committee Official Website).

• **the Northern Forum (NF)**

The Northern Forum is an organization established in 1991 as a result of several conferences held between representatives from different northern countries. During those meetings they examined several issues pertaining to climate, economy and environment and came to the conclusion that all of them share exactly the same problems. For this reason they decided to create the Forum, whose main purpose was to cooperate and create a “unified voice” of Northern Region. As explained in the official website of the organization:

“The mission of the Northern Forum is to improve the quality of life of Northern peoples and support sustainable development. The Forum’s precise purposes include:

- to provide Northern regional leaders a means to share their knowledge and experience in addressing common challenges
- to implement cooperative socio-economic initiatives among Northern regions
- to organize international forums and implement projects”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> “About IASC”, *International Arctic Science Committee official website*, <https://iasc.info/iasc/about-iasc>, 21-10-2019.

<sup>80</sup> “Northern Forum Mission and Purposes”, *The Northern Forum*, <https://www.northernforum.org/en/the-northern-forum/documents/category/3-bylaws>, 11-10-2019.

## • The Arctic Circle

The Arctic Circle is the largest network of international dialogue and cooperation on the future of the Arctic. It is an open democratic platform with participation from governments, organizations, corporations, universities, think tanks, environmental associations, indigenous communities, concerned citizens, and others interested in the development of the Arctic and its consequences for the future of the globe. It is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization created in 2013 in Iceland, where it holds its annual Arctic Circle Assembly.<sup>81</sup> Together with this Assembly, the Arctic Circle also organizes Forums on specific areas of Arctic cooperation.<sup>82</sup>

### *1.4 Reasons for increased attention toward the Arctic*

The Arctic region is gaining increasing attention in the global arena, a trend which is easily noticeable from the current extensive media coverage. This begs the questions: What are the main reasons behind this tendency? What are the implications for the international context?

Let's start from the very beginning, which takes us back to the years of the Cold War, from 1947 to 1997. As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, during the period of the Cold War the Arctic was an area of strategic confrontation, since it was very close both to the U.S. and USSR. Following the end of the Cold War, governments and people in the Arctic increasingly engaged in a range of cooperative activities designed to address issues of shared concern and to raise the profile of the Arctic as a political and geographical region.<sup>83</sup>

As Lassi Heininen, a Professor of Arctic Politics of the University of Lapland, Finland, pointed out in one of its publications, “the main goal in the Arctic after the Cold War period was to decrease the military tension and to increase the political stability of the region”.<sup>84</sup> This goal was achieved through the collaboration between people coming from the Northern regions or, to be more precise,

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<sup>81</sup> The Arctic Circle Assembly is the largest international gathering on the Arctic, held annually in October in Reykjavik.

<sup>82</sup> “About the Arctic Circle”, *Arctic Circle*, <http://www.arcticcircle.org/about/about>, 11-10-2019.

<sup>83</sup> Per Erik SOLLI, Wilson Elana ROWE, Yennie Wrenn LINDGREN, “Coming into the cold: Asia’s Arctic interest”, in *Polar Geography*, 36, 4, 2013, p. 254.

<sup>84</sup> Lassi HEININEN, “The end of the post-Cold War in the Arctic”, *Nordia Geographical Publications*, Oulu (Finland), University of Oulu, 2011.

the so-called A8<sup>85</sup>, which formalized their partnership by signing the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS)<sup>86</sup> in 1991 and establishing the Arctic Council in 1996.

It must be specified that behind these activities and, more generally, behind the increased attention to the Arctic there has always been an environmental concern. Indeed, it was since 1970s that the effects of climate change were physically observed in the Arctic: changes in sea ice, snow cover, air and water temperatures and in the extent of permafrost are just some of the alarming consequences which were (and actually are) taking place in the region.

Even the smallest change in the Arctic climate is extremely important, because the region acts as a refrigerator for the rest of the world. It gives off more heat to space than it absorbs from outside, which helps to cool the planet. For this reason, we can say that changes in the polar climate affect that of the rest of the world.<sup>87</sup> This explanation, provided by the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC)<sup>88</sup>, an organization that collects data about the environmental conditions of Arctic and Antarctic, makes us understand that our planet is in trouble and that there's a need for universal cooperation.

However, climate change is only one side of the coin, since there are several other reasons behind the increasing global attention toward the Arctic. Among these there is the awareness of the fact that the Arctic region is full of renewable resources. In this respect, the most comprehensive study was conducted in 2008 by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)<sup>89</sup>, which estimated that nearly one quarter of the earth's undiscovered recoverable petroleum resources are in the Arctic: 13% of its oil, 30% of its natural gas and 20% of its liquefied natural gas. Other precious metals such as gold, nickel, and rare-earth minerals are supposedly buried under the Arctic ice.<sup>90</sup> The possibility to access these resources has gradually attracted the attention of both Arctic and non-Arctic actors.

Another reason is the creation of new shipping routes. Indeed, ice melting has opened up Arctic shipping lanes previously inaccessible, i.e. the Northern Sea Route (NSR) over Eurasia and the

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<sup>85</sup> A8 refers to the so called "Arctic eight", i.e.: Russia, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, United States, Canada and Denmark.

<sup>86</sup> The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy is an agreement signed in 1991 by the Arctic eight, through which they declared to cooperate in the protection of the Arctic's environment. For more information, consult the official document of the agreement [http://library.arcticportal.org/1542/1/artic\\_environment.pdf](http://library.arcticportal.org/1542/1/artic_environment.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> "All about Arctic Climatology and Meteorology", *National Snow and Ice Data Center*, <https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/arctic-meteorology/index.html>, 13-10-2019.

<sup>88</sup> For further information about NSIDC, see the official website <https://nsidc.org/about/overview>.

<sup>89</sup> USGS is a scientific agency of the government of the United States.

<sup>90</sup> "Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle", *United States Geological Survey*, 2008, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/fs2008-3049.pdf>, 13-10-2019.

Northwest Passage (NWP) over North America. More precisely, the NSR would reduce the sailing distance between Rotterdam and Yokohama from 11,200 nautical miles — via the current route, through the Suez Canal —to only 6,500 nautical miles, a savings of more than forty percent. Likewise, the NWP would trim a voyage from Seattle to Rotterdam by 2,000 nautical miles, making it nearly twenty-five percent shorter than the current route, via the Panama Canal. Taking into account canal fees, fuel costs, and other variables that determine freight rates, these shortcuts could cut the cost of a single voyage by a large container ship by as much as twenty percent, saving the shipping industry billions of dollars a year.<sup>91</sup>

The current situation presents both opportunities and challenges. Taking resource exploitation and the increasing activities of ships as an example, they certainly bring economic possibilities to the countries involved, but can also cause serious damage to the already fragile ecosystem of the Arctic. In such context, there's an increasing global need for developing knowledge, improving scientific research and promoting an efficient collaboration. What we are seeing is a sort of “globalization” of the Arctic region, which is due to the fact that its large-scale changes cannot but receive attention from global community.

Given that the focus of this study is China, and, more specifically, the evolution of the country's policy and presence in the High North, some background information of its Arctic interests are provided immediately below.

### *1.5 China's interests in the Arctic region*

Until the release of “China's Arctic Policy” White Paper on January 26, 2018, which legitimizes China's growing presence in the Arctic, its goals and interests were not so clear. Indeed, despite China's polar engagement is deeply rooted in its history, it was only last year that the country finally announced its Arctic policy.

China has always kept a wait-and-see profile, trying to avoid confrontation with the eight Arctic states. This is due to the fact that it is an “Arctic outsider” with no sovereign rights. Nevertheless, China's Arctic ambitions have been extensively studied much earlier than 2018. According to the analysis of different experts, these interests can be classified into three main categories: economic, environmental-scientific and political interests.

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<sup>91</sup> Scott G. BORGERSON, *Arctic Meltdown - The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming*, “Foreign Affairs”, 87, 2, 2008.

*Economic interests:*

China's economic interests can be further divided into four categories, i.e.: shipping, energy security, polar fishing and tourism.

*Shipping* is of primary importance to China, since much of its commerce depends on sea. Interests in shipping routes across the Arctic as an alternative to the traditional southern maritime route through the Suez Canal are linked to its efforts to reduce its reliance on energy supplies from the Middle East by drawing more on Russian energy supplies.<sup>92</sup> It goes without saying that the partnership between China and Russia is destined to intensify, but we will analyze it in detail at a later stage.

Access to the polar seas will provide China with three potential new shipping routes:

- the Northern Sea Route
- the Transpolar Sea Route (TSR)<sup>93</sup>
- the Northwest Passage

This will not only increase the shipping options of China, but will also reduce China's dependence on the existing chokepoints, especially the pirate-infested Horn of Africa. In this respect, it has been estimated that by 2020, between five or fifteen percent of China's international trade might transit the NSR.<sup>94</sup>

Together with shipping, another priority for China is *resource exploitation*, due to the fact that it is completely dependent on the importation of energy and raw materials. For this reason China needs to rely on bilateral mining and energy agreements, such as the Yamal LNG project with Russia, an integrated project encompassing natural gas production, liquefaction and shipping based on the Yamal Peninsula, located above the Arctic.<sup>95</sup>

*Fishing* is another Arctic resource that China doesn't want to miss. Since temperatures in the Arctic are rising day by day, fish stocks are likely to move northwards. As a result, the Arctic may become a new fishing ground<sup>96</sup>, to which China, being the nation with the highest consumption of fish, is particularly interested.

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<sup>92</sup> Gisela GRIEGER, "China's Arctic Policy - how China aligns rights and interests", *European Parliamentary Research Service*, 2018, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)620231](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)620231), 14-10-2019.

<sup>93</sup> The Transpolar Sea Route is a future shipping route crossing the North Pole.

<sup>94</sup> Katarzyna ZYSK, "Asian Interests in the Arctic: Risks and Gains for Russia", *Asia Policy* 18, 2014.

<sup>95</sup> "About the project", *Yamal LNG website*, <http://yamallng.ru/en/>, 14-10-2019.

<sup>96</sup> Gisela GRIEGER, "China's Arctic Policy - how China aligns rights and interests", *European Parliamentary Research Service*, 2018, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)620231](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)620231), 14-10-2019.

*Polar tourism* is another economic interest of China. It is already carried out successfully in Antarctica, where there has been a huge increase in the number of Chinese tourists. In this respect, an interesting case is that of Huang Nubo 黄怒波, a Chinese real estate developer and entrepreneur who in 2011 proposed to set up a luxury resort in Iceland. Even though the idea was met with skepticism, he never stopped planning further tourism investments in the Arctic.

In this respect, China's Arctic Policy White Papers points out:

“Arctic tourism is an emerging industry, and China is a source of tourists to the Arctic. China supports and encourages its enterprises to cooperate with Arctic States in developing tourism in the region”.<sup>97</sup>

*Environmental and scientific interests:*

China's Arctic research programme officially started in 1989, when the Polar Research Institute of China<sup>98</sup> (PRIC) was created in Shanghai. Since then, different Chinese journals have published articles related to the Arctic<sup>99</sup> and an increasing number of researchers showed excitement for Arctic-related issues. China has a great interest in carrying out research in the polar regions, which has been clearly shown over time not only through its publications, but also through a great number of polar expeditions (34 to the Antarctic and 9 to the Arctic<sup>100</sup>). China continues to invest in Arctic research and is particularly concerned about the effects of climate change in the Arctic, even if it has been estimated that the region receives about one-fifth of the research funds.<sup>101</sup> According to China, scientific research is something which implies collaboration and the building of long-lasting relationships between countries. This is the reason why several academics talk about “science for diplomacy”, which consists in the use of science cooperation to improve international relations between countries.<sup>102</sup> This kind of instrument has been widely used by China, which signed a huge number of scientific agreements all over the world. For instance, in order to get closer to the Arctic,

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<sup>97</sup> “China's Arctic Policy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*, January 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Polar Research Institute of China is the most important Chinese research institute conducting studies in the Polar regions.

<sup>99</sup> Olga ALEXEEVA, Frederic LASSERRE, Linyan HUANG, “China's unfolding Arctic strategy: threatening or opportunistic?”, in *Defending Canadian sovereignty : new threats, new challenges.*, Canadian Ministry of Defense, 2019, p. 78.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Linda JAKOBSON, Jingchao PENG, “China's Arctic Aspirations”, *SIPRI Policy Paper* 34, 2012, p. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Cecile PELAUDEIX, “Along the Road China in the Arctic”, *Connectivity and Security Brief, Institute for Security Studies*, 2018.



China engaged in a number of scientific cooperations with the main Arctic actors. This kind of strategy is directly linked to the next category of Arctic interests, the political ones.

#### *Political interests:*

The “science for diplomacy” strategy used by China is part of a broader political plan. As China seeks global power status, it wants to be perceived as a responsible international stakeholder by participating in a number of international and regional organizations.<sup>103</sup> In this respect, the achievement of the status of observer of the Arctic Council in 2013 was very significant for China. Indeed, even though the observers are not entitled to vote, they have the opportunity to make their voice heard in matters such as exploitation of resources, the navigation system and the implementation of UNCLOS. Beyond this, China’s presence in the AC helped Beijing legitimate its active interest in the Arctic region.<sup>104</sup> Obviously this goal was pursued by China also thanks to different political and economic partnerships with smaller Nordic countries, including Iceland, Norway and Denmark.

In order to achieve its purpose of becoming a responsible stakeholder in Arctic affairs, China is increasingly involved in the development of international rules pertaining to the Arctic. During the past years, the country also joined all the most important Arctic treaties and agreements, including, e.g., the UNCLOS, the Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Being a superpower with increasing global role, partnerships, extensive foreign agendas and diplomatic activities, we can assume that China’s interest in the Arctic will keep on growing, primarily due to the great opportunities that this land has to offer.

The release of China’s Arctic Policy White Paper and the implementation of the new Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are just few of the different elements evidencing this trend, but they will be analyzed in detail at a later stage.

#### *1.6 China’s Arctic actors*

China’s Arctic actors increased together with the country’s involvement in Arctic-related issues. They can be classified into three main categories: government entities, research institutions and commercial actors.

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<sup>103</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 423.

<sup>104</sup> ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, HUANG, “China’s unfolding Arctic strategy...”, cit., p. 82.

*Government entities:*

When taking into consideration Arctic and Antarctic issues, we always have to keep in mind that there's not a unique department of the Government of People's Republic of China dealing with them, but, usually, Chinese administration jointly takes care of these issues.<sup>105</sup>

- **State Oceanic Administration (SOA)** was the main body of the Chinese Government with competence in polar issues until March 2018. It was subordinate to the Ministry of Land and Resources, which, after the 13th National People's Congress, was replaced by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Today this Ministry undertakes the responsibilities of both the Ministry of Land and Resources and the SOA.

What is the 13th National People's Congress?

China's Constitution states that power in the People's Republic of China (PRC) belongs to the people, which exercise it through two types of organs, the National People's Congress (NPC) and the local people's congresses. The National People's Congress has several duties, including the enforcement of the Constitution, the promulgation and amendment of basic laws, election and decisions on the leading personnel of the highest state organs of China.<sup>106</sup> It is elected for a period of five years, that's why 13th National People's Congress, elected in 2018, will be in session till 2023.

- **Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (CAA)** is a Chinese agency created in 1981 in Beijing. CAA is affiliated to the SOA and its function consists of organizing Chinese Arctic and Antarctic expeditions. To date, this agency has successfully coordinated a great number of Arctic scientific expeditions, carried out in 1999, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2018.<sup>107108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> JAKOBSON, PENG, "China's Arctic...", cit., p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> "National People's Congress", *China Internet Information Center*, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/27743.htm>, 16-10-2019.

<sup>107</sup> Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (CAA) official website, <http://ipolar.org/en/>, 15-10-2019.

<sup>108</sup> ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, HUANG, "China's unfolding Arctic strategy...", cit., p. 79.

- **the State Council** is the highest administrative authority of People's Republic of China, which also takes care of several Arctic-related issues. For instance, it deals with all the most important decisions pertaining to the Arctic and funding.<sup>109</sup>

*Research institutions:*

The task of Chinese research institutions and individual academics is to help policymakers understand polar issues from their specialized perspectives and to provide policy recommendations.<sup>110</sup> China has put a great deal of effort in the development of polar research capabilities, something which is consistent with its aspirations of becoming a global superpower. This purpose can be easily recognized from the number of institutions dealing with Arctic research:

- **Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS)** is a research institute established in 1949. It brings together scientists and engineers from China and around the world to address both theoretical and applied problems using world-class scientific and management approaches. CAS scientists conduct research in most areas of basic science and technology as well as strategic advanced technologies and areas related to the public welfare and the development of emerging industries.<sup>111</sup>
- **Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS)**, founded in 1960, is a government-affiliated high-caliber think tank dedicated to informing government decision-making by conducting policy-oriented studies in world politics, economics, foreign policy, and international security.<sup>112</sup> SIIS's Vice-president and Senior Fellow is Yang Jian 杨剑, a Chinese Professor of Political Science at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics and Director of China-Nordic Arctic Research Center<sup>113</sup>, something that reflects the increasing importance of the Arctic for China.

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<sup>109</sup> JAKOBSON, PENG, "China's Arctic...", cit., p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> "About us", *Chinese Academy of Sciences*, 2016, [http://english.cas.cn/about\\_us/introduction/201501/t20150114\\_135284.shtml](http://english.cas.cn/about_us/introduction/201501/t20150114_135284.shtml), 15-10-2019.

<sup>112</sup> "About us", *Shanghai Institutes for International Studies*, <http://www.siis.org.cn/Content/List/4TY1RYSCTRIC>, 15-10-2019.

<sup>113</sup> "Specialists and scholars", *Shanghai Institutes for International Studies*, <http://www.siis.org.cn/En/Expert?id=6>, 15-10-2019.

- **Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC)** was founded in 1989 in Shanghai. Its main functions in the polar regions are:
  - to conduct research of science, technology and strategic issues
  - to undertake environments monitoring and conservation
  - to operate research stations, vessels and aircrafts, provide logistic supports to Arctic and Antarctic research expeditions
  - to carry out education and outreach of polar science and promote international cooperation<sup>114</sup>
  
- **China-Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC)** was established in 2013 in Shanghai. Its function is to provide a platform for academic cooperation to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of the Arctic and its global impacts, as well as to promote cooperation for sustainable development of the Nordic Arctic and coherent development of China in a global context. CNARC's main research themes are: Arctic climate change and its effects, Arctic resources, shipping and economic cooperation, Arctic policy-making and legislation.<sup>115</sup>

Together with these institutions, there are several Chinese Universities conducting researches about the Arctic, e.g. the Dalian Maritime University (DMU) in Dalian, the Ocean University of China (OUC) in Qingdao, the Fudan University and the Tongji University in Shanghai.

*Commercial actors:*

The melting of ice in the Arctic region will create opportunities for different industries, especially for shipping and fishing.<sup>116</sup> It has already been mentioned the possibility of the opening of three different shipping routes through the Arctic, which will improve the commercial activities of shipping companies in terms of time, costs and security. Fishing industries also will take advantage from ice-melting, since the Arctic is going to become an important fishing ground. Obviously we should always keep in mind that, despite all these potential benefits, the priority of governments now is preserving the Arctic environment, which implies continuous developing of knowledge, investments in research and collaboration between the global community.

However, taking into consideration China's commercial actors actually working in the polar region, we cannot but mention large state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which sometimes exert a significant influence on foreign policy-making and whose leaders are members of official decision-making

<sup>114</sup> "Who we are", *Polar Research Institute of China*, <http://www.pric.org.cn/EN/detail/sub.aspx?c=29>, 16-10-2019.

<sup>115</sup> "Background", *China-Nordic Arctic Research Center*, <https://www.cnarc.info/organization>, 15-10-2019.

<sup>116</sup> JAKOBSON, PENG, "China's Arctic...", cit., p. 7.

bodies. In the case of the Arctic, mining companies have been included in the Chinese investment delegation.<sup>117</sup> An important example of Chinese commercial actor is COSCO (China Ocean Shipping Company), a state-owned enterprise founded in 1961 as the first international ocean shipping company. When reading documents and studies about the Arctic, we always come across the case of this enterprise, since it has been the first one to complete a return trip with a merchant vessel using the NSR in 2009.<sup>118</sup> This was an emblematic event, since it demonstrated the deep engagement of China in the Arctic and its investments in research. In 2016, COSCO merged with another enterprise, China Shipping, forming China COSCO Shipping Corporation.<sup>119</sup>

Apart from shipping and fishing companies, there is also a huge number of companies operating in the resources sector that have different opportunities in the polar regions, e.g. China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China Petrochemical Corporation (SINOPEC).

Generally speaking, it can be said that Chinese commercial actors will always be welcome in the Arctic, since they are an important source of monetary investments, especially in areas such as polar research and infrastructures.

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<sup>117</sup> TONAMI Aki, *Asian Foreign Policy in a Changing Arctic*, London, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016, p. 37.

<sup>118</sup> *Ivi*, p. 117.

<sup>119</sup> “About us: History”, *China COSCO Shipping Corporation Limited website*, <http://en.coscoecs.com/col/col6922/index.html>, 17-10-2019.

## SECOND CHAPTER

### History of China in the Arctic

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the history of China's presence in the Arctic, a subject often presented in a controversial and confusing way. This explanation doesn't claim to be complete, but actually tries to lay the foundation for understanding the ongoing relationship between China and the polar region. All the most significant events are briefly framed in a more general context of China's history.

The Arctic engagement of China can be divided into three main phases:

- **first approach and early years:** from 1882 to 1960
- **active Arctic engagement:** from 1960 to 2000
- **great step forward in Arctic affairs:** from 2000 to present

#### *2.1 Early years of China's Arctic engagement*

Even if without sending polar expeditions, China was involved both in the first and the second International Polar Year (IPY), respectively from 1882 to 1883 and from 1932 to 1933. They were sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), a specialized agency of the United Nations which takes care of the exchange of information and services related to environmental protection.<sup>120121</sup> The International Polar Year is a program through which different scientists around the world reunite and organize expeditions and scientific research activities in the polar regions.

Briefly taking into consideration the period of the First IPY, namely the second half of the nineteenth century, it should be said that these were difficult years for China. Indeed, after the two Opium Wars, the first from 1839 to 1842 and the second from 1856 to 1860, the Qing Dynasty, which governed China until 1911, was seriously weakened. At that time China was an exporting country and the increasing efflux of silver coming from the rise in opium sales brought a situation of general impoverishment and inflation.<sup>122</sup> As a result of these circumstances, such period was characterized by tensions and rebellions on both the national and the international level.

But the worst was yet to come, since disastrous events like the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Boxer rebellion (1899-1901) were about to happen.

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<sup>120</sup> WANG Zuoyue, ZHANG Jiuchen, "China and the International Geophysical Year", *Globalizing Polar Science: Reconsidering the International Polar and Geophysical Years*, ed. Roger D. Launius, James Rodger Fleming and David H. DeVorkin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 143.

<sup>121</sup> "About us", *World Meteorological Organization Official Website*, <https://public.wmo.int/en/about-us/who-we-are>, 22-10-2019.

<sup>122</sup> Wolfram EBERHARD, *A History of China*, Project Gutenberg EBook, 2004, p. 313.

Returning to China's polar engagement, the first most important event that symbolizes the relationship between the country and the polar region was the signature of the Spitsbergen Treaty (1920), which for China took place only in **1925**.

At the time, and in particular from 1912 to 1928, Beijing was under the Beiyang Government (in Chinese *Beiyangzhengfu* 北洋政府), the government of the Republic of China (ROC), then replaced by the Nationalist Government in Nanking. Nationalists were under the guidance of Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石, a military leader and a politician who, through a military campaign known as Northern Expedition (1926-27), defeated the warlords in the south, central and north of China and unified the country in 1928. Taking into consideration 1925, it can be said that it was a very meaningful year, mainly due to different episodes including:

- the death of Sun Yat-sen 孙中山, who was the first president of the ROC and the first leader of the Nationalist Party;
- a series of anti-imperialist struggles characterized by strikes and boycotts;
- the rising of the first tensions between nationalists and communists.

Returning to the Spitsbergen Treaty, also known as Svalbard Treaty, it takes its name from the Archipelago of Svalbard (once called Spitsbergen), a Norwegian archipelago located in the Arctic Ocean. Even if the Treaty states that only Norway owns absolute sovereignty over the region, it gives all the signing members the possibility to share equal economic rights there. Thus, it was through this treaty that China started to participate in Arctic-related affairs and to exert more efforts in the exploration of the polar region, expanding the scope of activities, gaining more experience and deepening cooperation with other participants.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Chinese official accounts highlight the Beiyang Government's signing of the Spitsbergen Treaty as a noteworthy justification for China's contemporary participation in Arctic affairs and indicative of China's longstanding interests in the Arctic region.<sup>124</sup>

It was in the **1920s** and **1930s** that the first popular books about polar explorations were translated into Chinese<sup>125</sup>, something that not only spread a greater knowledge of the Arctic, but also stimulated researchers' interest in the region. However, it must be said that in the 1930s, and in particular in 1937, China was facing serious problems internally. Its priority at the time was the

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<sup>123</sup> "China's Arctic Policy", *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*, January 2018.

<sup>124</sup> QU Tanzhou et al., *Beiji wenti yanjiu* [Research on Arctic issues] (Beijing: Ocean Press, 2011), 327n7.

<sup>125</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 44.

Second Sino-Japanese War, which took place from 1937 to 1945 and saw the victory of China over Japan. It broke out after the so-called “Marco Polo Bridge Incident” of 1937, when militaries from Chinese and Japanese forces exchanged fire near this bridge in the south of Beijing, for reasons that are still unknown. Fortunately China was not alone, since the Soviet Union in the same year and the United States in 1941 gave it financial and military support. Indeed, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States entered the conflict and the war merged with other conflicts of the World War II.

After the collapse of Japan in 1945, which followed the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, China had another issue to handle: the Chinese Civil War (1945-49). It is considered a ground-breaking event since communists gained the control of China, leading to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China under the guidance of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 on October 1, 1949. When considering the period immediately after the defeat of Japan until the foundation of the PRC we realize that most historians define it complex and confused. This is mainly due to the fact that domestically there were the Communist Party guided by Mao Zedong and the Nationalist Party guided by Chiang Kai-shek, while internationally China was representing a battleground between USSR and US within the framework of the Cold War.<sup>126</sup>

Once the PRC was established, several Chinese researchers and scholars studying in the United States took part in polar explorations and scientific research, understanding the meaning of the polar regions and bringing valuable information back to China. Unfortunately, these activities suffered a setback, due to the fact that China took the North Korean side in the Korean War (1950-53).<sup>127</sup> After this issue, the U.S., closely allied with South Korea, vetoed the recognition of the newborn People’s Republic of China and forced its allies to do the same.<sup>128</sup> This implied that several countries including Australia, France, the Netherlands and UK recognized only the ROC, which at the time retreated in Taiwan and was able to retain all of PRC’s seats on international organizations such as the United Nations.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Mario SABATTINI, Paolo SANTANGELO, *Storia della Cina*, Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2005, p.608.

<sup>127</sup> The conflict between North and South Korea escalated into war when the North, supported by USSR and China, invaded the South (U.S. administered) in 1950.

<sup>128</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*



Indeed, China, being one of the winners of the World War II, took part in the foundation of the United Nations in 1945 and, for this reason, joined the status of permanent member of the UN Security Council<sup>130</sup> until 1971.

During the situation of international isolation caused by the United States, it was almost impossible for Chinese scientists to enjoy research and explorations with Western counterparts.<sup>131</sup> However, despite difficulties, we have examples of scientists who succeed in conducting Arctic-related activities, e.g.:

- Gao Shiliu 高时浏, a Chinese scientist who arrived at the North Magnetic Pole<sup>132</sup> in 1951 and engaged in geomagnetic research, becoming the first Chinese entering the Arctic.
- Li Nan 李楠, a reporter of the Xinhua News Agency, the most important official press agency of the PRC, who became the first Chinese to reach the North Pole in 1958.<sup>133</sup>

Taking precisely 1958 as an example, we can state that it was a key year for China, especially due to Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward (1958-61), a social and economic plan aimed at speeding up production and development. The idea behind this plan was the achievement of a shift from an agrarian economy to a socialist society, which in Mao's opinion could be realized only through mass mobilization. It was in those years that people's communes were conceived. They were large collective units whose purpose was allowing the government to exercise more pressure upon farmers to increase production.<sup>134</sup>

Even if planned in detail, the Great Leap Forward turned out to be a failure, both from an economic and a political point of view. Its disastrous effects include the fact that Mao Zedong left his position of president, the economy initially seemed to grow, but then collapsed below the starting level and a lot of people died because of famine.

On the contrary, from the point of view of polar engagement, this period was quite positive. The **1950s** was the period when the CAS was founded in Beijing and the Third International Polar

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<sup>130</sup> The United Nations Security Council is one of the main organs within the United Nations. Its functions include maintaining international peace and security, recommending the admission of new members and investigating disputes or situation which may lead to international friction. For further information: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/what-security-council>.

<sup>131</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>132</sup> The North and the South Magnetic Poles are positions on the Earth's surface where the geomagnetic field is vertical.

<sup>133</sup> "Wo guo tansuo Beiji licheng" (China's history of Arctic exploration), [http://tech.sina.com.cn/focus/beiji\\_kekao/](http://tech.sina.com.cn/focus/beiji_kekao/), 23-10-2019.

<sup>134</sup> EBERHARD, *A History...*, cit., p. 362.

Year proposed, that time with the name of International Geophysical Year (IGY). Even if IGY was much more related to Antarctic research than to the Arctic one, it was a chance for Chinese scientists to be more involved in a global endeavour. Unfortunately, China's participation in IGY turned out to be a complex issue, due to the country's tension with the United States after the Korean War and with Nationalists in Taiwan, who also have been invited to join the project. Indeed, once Taiwan was officially admitted by the IGY's organizers, China's withdrawal didn't come as a surprise. It was the demonstration that China's participation to the project was seen as something merely political by the Chinese government and obviously those who suffered the consequences were Chinese scientists.<sup>135</sup>

## 2.2 China's active Arctic engagement

Even though in the **1960s** and **1970s** its internal situation deserved close attention, China succeeded in conducting several polar activities, related more to the Antarctic than to the Arctic. For example, it was in 1964 that the SOA was founded, something extremely relevant since it was responsible for the affairs concerning the polar regions, high seas and international seabed areas.<sup>136137</sup>

However, in those years the government's main focus was the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), a movement launched by Mao Zedong due to the weakening of his authority after the failure of the Great Leap Forward. The purpose of such movement was the removal of any remnant of bourgeois ideology and traditional element from Chinese society<sup>138</sup>, in order to reassert Mao Zedong's authority and ideology. Mao considered class struggle the best way to defeat its rivals, which is the reason why universities and schools were closed and students formed the so-called Red Guards. They were paramilitary units used instrumentally by Mao, which over time became more and more radical and split up into factions, because of the fact that Mao's ideology was interpreted in many different ways. What really matters is that the Cultural Revolution brought chaos, death, tortures, economical problems and persecutions. It formally ended in 1976, after the death of Mao Zedong,

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<sup>135</sup> WANG, ZHANG, "China and the International...", cit., pp. 143-153.

<sup>136</sup> "State Oceanic Administration", *The State Council of People's Republic of China*, [http://english.www.gov.cn/state\\_council/2014/10/06/content\\_281474992889983.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/2014/10/06/content_281474992889983.htm), 24-10-2019.

<sup>137</sup> The international seabed area is defined as "the seabed and ocean floor and the subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction" (source: International Seabed Authority official website, <https://www.isa.org.jm/faq/what-international-seabed-area>).

<sup>138</sup> Laura DE GIORGI, Guido SAMARANI, "La Cina e la storia", *Carocci Editore*, 2005.

but officially came to an end in 1969, when the leader realized that the movement was out of control and he sent millions of urban youth to the countryside.

If we take into account China's foreign policy at that time, what emerges is the country's desire to get out of isolation, which is also linked to the fact that it severed its ties with USSR. This led to a progressive collaboration between China and US, whose main symbol was Nixon's visit to China in 1972. The year before, in 1971, the lawful rights of the PRC in the United Nations were restored. It was a very meaningful event, because, after the recognition of PRC's representatives as the only legitimate representatives of China to the UN and the resulting expulsion of those of Chiang Kai-shek<sup>139</sup>, a new era of international diplomacy began for Beijing, through which it became more involved in international organizations and global governance.

As regards the Arctic, it should be noticed that in the 1970s, China's public discussion of Arctic issues focused mainly on US and USSR, who, at the time, were dominating the Arctic Ocean and Northern Pacific airspace with their planes, submarines and missiles.<sup>140</sup>

Coming to the beginning of the **1980s**, China's polar attention was directed mainly toward the Antarctic, something which is evidenced by different events, including the signature of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)<sup>141</sup> in 1983, the achievement of the first Chinese Antarctic Expedition, called the China National Antarctic Research Expedition (CHINARE), in 1984 and the establishment of the first Antarctic station in 1985.<sup>142</sup> However, there was a change in the air, primarily due to the fact that the Arctic was melting fast and the effects of climate change were physically observable. As a result of these circumstances, the global community started to turn its attention to the region and the role of Arctic research became even more important than before.

Unfortunately, during those years, China was facing another problem on the home front, the Sino-Vietnamese War. This was a conflict as short as destructive, since it lasted only from February to March 1979 but emphasized the unsuitableness of Chinese armed forces, leading to a huge loss

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<sup>139</sup> "Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations", UN General Assembly's 26th Session, 1971, [https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2758\(XXVI\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2758(XXVI)), 25-10-2019.

<sup>140</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 48.

<sup>141</sup> The Antarctic Treaty and its related agreements, also known with the name of Antarctic Treaty System, was signed in 1959 in Washington between twelve countries whose scientists had been active in Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58.

<sup>142</sup> TONAMI, *Asian Foreign...*, cit., p. 20.

of human life.<sup>143</sup> The reasons behind this war lie in the decline of a complex network of international relationships.

The leading figure of such chaotic context, a man who was able to take the reins of the government and deserves our special attention was Deng Xiaoping 邓小平. He was a politician who joined the Party in 1923, but during the Cultural Revolution was excluded twice from the political arena due to its reformist economic policies. After Mao's death in 1976 and the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee Congress of the Communist Party of China<sup>144</sup> in 1978, Deng became the *de facto* leader of the country, even though the official Chairman of the Communist Party and Premier of the PRC was Hua Guofeng 华国锋. Deng gradually became one of the most influential people of China, especially due to its plan known as "Four Modernizations".<sup>145</sup>

The Four Modernizations were part of a broader program known as "Reforms and opening-up" (in Chinese *gaige kaifang* 改革开放), thanks to which in 1984 people's communes were abolished, together with a huge number of other improvements, e.g. the rise of Chinese GDP, a successful agricultural production, the growth of industrial production, the increase of foreign trade and a greater integration into the world market. In addition, in 1982, China adopted its current constitution. During this period, taking advantage of the opening-up of China, several intellectuals introduced the concept of "Fifth Modernization". The idea behind this was that, together with the economic reform, also a political one was needed. The proposal for the Fifth Modernization, which is nothing but Democracy, was made by Wei Jingsheng 魏京生, a man who has fought for human rights throughout his life.

In such context, two main interpretations of the reform arose within the Communist Party:

- *liberal*: according to liberals the main purpose of the reform was the introduction of democracy on the model of Western countries.
- *conservative*: according to conservatives (also known as "Elders") there was a need for economic reforms but without affecting the socialist framework of the country.

The leader Deng Xiaoping initially sustained liberals, but after 1986 he changed his mind, mainly due to the pressure of conservatives and the student demonstrations which were taking place in the

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<sup>143</sup> SABATTINI, SANTANGELO, "*Storia della Cina*", cit., p. 632.

<sup>144</sup> The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is a body including the top leaders of the Communist Party of China. Its functions include representing internationally and guiding the Party.

<sup>145</sup> The "Four Modernizations" was a plan conceived by Deng Xiaoping aimed at the strengthening of four main fields, namely economy, agriculture, science and technology and defence.

largest Chinese cities. The situation of social dissatisfaction arisen in those years led to the Tiananmen Square massacre, which occurred in 1989 after the death of Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦, one of the main supporter of democracy. At the same time, Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the USSR, was in Beijing to achieve a reconciliation with China. He was hailed by protesters as a symbol of democracy, in opposition to the dictatorship of the Chinese government, which in May 1989 declared the martial law. In June, the army went to the Square and opened fire against protesters. The massacre not only had a disastrous impact at a national level, but also internationally, since all the countries that came into contact with China and began to appreciate it, saw the event as a barbarity.<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, the Chinese government continued to pursue its economic objectives, also in issues pertaining to the Arctic. For example, it was in this period that China founded the CAA, signed the UNCLOS, launched the Chinese Journal of Polar Research (in Chinese *beiji yanjiu* 北极研究) and established the PRIC.

The **1990s** can be considered the most active period of China’s Arctic engagement. There are several important events occurred in those years that need to be taken into account to understand the history of China in the Arctic. Before giving a detailed explanation of these circumstances, it has been decided to provide a table with all the major episodes symbolizing the relationship between the two areas.

Table 1: China’s Arctic engagement in the 1990s.<sup>147</sup>

1992	The first five-year scientific research programme in the Arctic Ocean is organized by China in cooperation with the German Universities of Kiel and Bremen.
1993	China purchases the icebreaker research vessel <i>Xue Long</i> (Snow Dragon) from Ukraine.
1994	The Chinese Advisory Committee for Polar Research is set up by the Ministry of Science and Technology.
1996	The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is ratified by China.
1997	China joins the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC). China is one of the founding members of the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).
1999	China launches its first Arctic expedition in the Bering and Chukchi seas.

<sup>146</sup> SABATTINI, SANTANGELO, *Storia della ...*, cit., p. 645.

<sup>147</sup> Inspired by ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, HUANG, “China’s unfolding Arctic strategy...”, cit., pp. 79-81, and ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, “The Snow Dragon...”, cit., p. 62.

The Chinese Arctic engagement of 1990 went hand in hand with a process of economic development, which, after a temporary setback following the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, accelerated in 1992. During the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party, held that year, it was stated that the economic system adopted by China would be the so-called “socialist market economy” (SME)<sup>148</sup>. Thanks to this system, which is still used in China, both the economic growth and international trade flourished, so much that the Chinese GDP increased by 13,7% in 1993. In such prosperous context, it’s worth mentioning the figure of Zhu Rongji 朱镕基, who first served as First Vice Premier from 1993 to 1998 and then as Premier of the State Council of the PRC from 1998 to 2003. During its first political role, lasted until 1998, he took different measures which integrated the ongoing reform, e.g. a decrease in the number of taxes, the extension of VAT and a banking reform. His actions are remembered for having led to a stabilization of Chinese economy, which allowed China to avoid the financial crisis affecting the majority of countries of East and Southeast Asia in 1997. In the same year, Deng Xiaoping, who retired from political life in 1992, died of a lung infection.

The last few years of the twentieth century were positive for China, both at a national and international level. An example of this is provided by the fact that in 1997 and in 1999 Hong Kong and Macau were handed over to China, the first by the United Kingdom and the second by Portugal. A special case is that of Taiwan, where, at the time, the first presidential elections were held. The elections once again saw the victory of the Nationalist Party, basically due to the pressure exerted by the PRC on the Taiwanese electorate.

Coming back to Arctic issues, it was during the 1990s that China began exploring the scientific and political links that it would need to become a polar player.<sup>149</sup> To achieve this purpose, China not only relied on increasing academic studies, but also on a physical presence in the Arctic. First of all, it engaged in a five-year scientific research program in the Arctic Ocean with the German Universities of Kiel and Bremen in 1992 and the following year purchased the Russian-made ice-breaker research vessel *Xue Long* 雪龙 (Snow Dragon) from Ukraine. This enabled China to become an independent researcher in the polar regions and organize several Arctic and Antarctic expeditions through the work of the CAA. In 1999, the country led its first Arctic expedition, aimed

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<sup>148</sup> The socialist market economy is an economic system in which private and public companies, market prices and planning prices, protection of private property and communist ideology, competition and state intervention simultaneously coexist. For further information: <http://www.bankpedia.org/index.php/en/126-english/s/23712-socialist-market-economy>.

<sup>149</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 54.

at conducting a comprehensive marine survey. Indeed, the main objective of China's Arctic research program was the study of interactions between the Ice Arctic Ocean, sea ice and the atmosphere.<sup>150</sup>

In 1994, the Ministry of Science and Technology of China established the Chinese Advisory Committee for Polar Research, which at the time was led by the SOA (actually dissolved). The importance of the Committee lies in the fact that it monitors, consults, and evaluates scientific expeditions and research.<sup>151</sup> More importantly, in 1997 China joined the IASC and became one of the founding members of the UNCLOS. The aforementioned events must not be underestimated, since they are symbols of the longstanding desire of China to participate in Arctic governance. Indeed, as previously explained, since the early 1980s, China has progressively joined every polar political, scientific or economic grouping it could possibly join.<sup>152</sup>

### *2.3 Chinese step forward in Arctic affairs: the Twenty-first Century*

Even though the very beginning of China's Arctic engagement takes us back to the early 1900s, it is only in the current century that China has engaged in extensive polar activities and has specified its interests in the region. However, despite China's Arctic agenda has been clarified only in 2018 through the publication of its White Paper, the country's interests and investments in the region have become explicit long before. For this reason, we can state without any doubt that the publication of the document laying out the Arctic Policy of China has been a way of justifying its ambitions, ambitions that were already clear to everyone.

As already pointed out previously in this chapter, there are numerous aspects of Chinese Arctic engagement that deserve our special attention. With regard to the twenty-first century, it has been decided to focus only on some of them, namely: *Arctic research activities, the Sino-Russian relationship, the partnership between China and the Nordic countries and Chinese public position on the Arctic*. Before providing the reader with a description of each of these sub-topics, a table containing the most important events of the current century is shown immediately below.

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<sup>150</sup> Olga ALEXEEVA, Frederic LASSERRE, "The Snow Dragon: China's strategies in the Arctic", *China Perspectives*, 2012, p. 62.

<sup>151</sup> Gørild HEGGELUND, Cheng HAN, "China's climate policy: does an Arctic dimension exist?", Norway, The Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI), 2016, p. 142.

<sup>152</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 176.

Table 2: China's Arctic engagement in the twenty-first century.<sup>153</sup>

2003	China launches its second Arctic expedition with the research vessel <i>Xue Long</i> through the Bering Strait.
2004	The Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration sets up a polar research station in Ny-Ålesund (Norway), called Yellow River Station.
2005	The Arctic Science Summit Week, the most important annual gathering of Arctic research organizations is held in Kunming, in the Chinese Province of Yunnan.
2007	China is accepted as temporary observer of the Arctic Council.
2007-2009	China joins the International Polar Year.
2008	China launches its third Arctic expedition with the research vessel <i>Xue Long</i> .
2009	- China applies for the status of permanent observer of the Arctic Council for the first time. - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sets up the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs.
2010	China launches its fourth Arctic expedition with the research vessel <i>Xue Long</i> .
2011-2015	China's Five-Year Plan is introduced. It schedules to build a new ice-breaker and invest in a polar plane.
2012	Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao pays an official visit to Iceland.
2013	- China obtains the status of permanent observer of the Arctic Council. - The China-Nordic Arctic Research Center is established in Shanghai. - The cargo vessel <i>Yong Sheng</i> , operated by China's China Ocean Shipping Company Group (COSCO) marks China's first commercial transit through the Northeast Passage off Russia's northern coast.
2017	China launches its second domestically-built polar ice-breaker, the <i>Xue Long 2</i> .
2018	China release its "China's Arctic Policy" White Paper.

### *Arctic research activities*

Chinese Arctic research is one of the fundamental aspects of Chinese polar engagement, since it has been through science, expeditions and investments in research that China succeed in being involved in Arctic affairs. Actually, there are many other factors that ensured China the role of a powerful polar stakeholder, among which there is its strong desire to actively participate in Arctic governance. To make an example, in 2007 China gained the status of temporary observer in the Arctic Council, then replaced by the permanent status in 2013, which allowed it to voice its positions and come in contact with Arctic states.

Taking into account the period from 1925 to 2018, we can affirm without any doubt that it is in the current century that Chinese Arctic research activities have reached their highest expression. Even though at the beginning of its engagement, the great majority of Chinese polar budget was

<sup>153</sup> Inspired by BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., pp. 57-58 and GRIEGER, "China's Arctic Policy...", cit., p. 2.



destined to Antarctica, in the twenty-first century the situation has changed considerably. For example, this can be noticed in the foundation of different Arctic research stations:

- In 2004, China set up a polar research station in Ny-Ålesund, a research town in the Svalbard Archipelago, where many other countries established their stations. This event was critical for China, because not only allowed it to acquire a certain degree of knowledge and understanding of the polar region, but also to broaden its contacts with Arctic and non-Arctic states. This research site is called Yellow River Station 黄河站 (*Huanghe zhan*) and today is under the management of the PRIC.
- In 2010, China established a ground receiving station for its meteorological satellites in Kiruna, Sweden, while in 2012, together with the Icelandic Center for Research (RANNÍS), it set up a joint research station in Iceland. The site is called China-Iceland Joint Aurora Observatory (CIAO) and its purpose is the scientific understanding on solar-terrestrial interaction and space weather by conducting polar upper atmosphere observations, such as auroras, geomagnetic field variations and other related phenomena.<sup>154</sup>
- In 2013, the China-Nordic Arctic Research Center was founded in Shanghai.

Arctic research was one of the guiding strategies of the 12th Five-Year Plan<sup>155</sup> of China (2011-2015) and also of the current Five-Year Plan (2016-2020). However, thanks to advances in technology, China is increasingly relying on ice robots, underwater robotic submarines and drones to carry out scientific research in the polar regions.<sup>156</sup>

Since Chinese interests in the Arctic are growing and becoming clearer day after day, it can be argued that this kind of scientific activities will increase, both through various research stations and vessels' polar missions.

### *The Sino-Russian relationship*

A key element of Chinese Arctic engagement in the twenty-first century has been the development of a closer relationship with Russia. Given that a careful analysis of the relation

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<sup>154</sup> "Aurora Observatory", *The Arctic Gateway*, <https://www.isaaffik.org/aurora-observatory-karholl>, 6-11-19.

<sup>155</sup> The Five-Year Plan (in Chinese *wunian jihua* 五年计划) is a political instrument used to plan economic growth and set several objectives that should be achieved within a period of five years.

<sup>156</sup> BRADY, *China as a...*, cit., p. 152.

between these countries is quite complex, this paragraph doesn't claim to be complete, but rather to briefly illustrate the dynamics which led to the present state of affairs.

At the very beginning of the current century, in 2001, the Chinese President Jiang Zemin 江泽民 (1993-2003) and the Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin (2012-present) signed the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation, whose aim was the maintenance of peace and security in the border between the two countries and the building of mutual trust.<sup>157</sup>

Generally speaking, the growth of Chinese activities in the Arctic region has always gone hand in hand with the strengthening of bilateral relations with several Arctic states, in particular with Russia. The premises of a Sino-Russian partnership have always seemed positive, especially due to the complementarity of their interests. Indeed, China is one of the largest energy importers, while Russia is the world's largest energy exporter. Actually, for this relationship to succeed, the two superpowers need to overcome their deep mutual mistrust:

First, both countries have an interest in not being locked in long-term relationships and in diversifying their relations, which is the reason why they develop partnerships with several other countries.

Second, they have different point of view on the Arctic, because China is trying to pursue economic goals related to the exploitation of resources and the use of the NSR, while for Russia, which is one the Arctic Five (the five Arctic littoral states), the region has always been extremely important, from a military, technological, political and environmental point of view.

Third, Russia has always been opposed to non-Arctic states gaining of observer status in the Arctic Council, reason why China kept a low profile and continually stressed the leading role of Arctic states in the decision-making process about the region.

Despite all these difficulties, the Sino-Russian relationship got better with the passing of time, especially with the deterioration of the Russian collaboration with the U.S. and EU after the Ukraine crisis of 2014. Indeed, after the annexation of Crimea to Russia, the U.S. and the EU imposed sanctions to Russia, which made the country putting a greater emphasis on the “pivoting to Asia”, a Russian foreign policy of 2013 aims at fostering its relations with the East, in particular with China.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> “Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation”, *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t15771.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t15771.shtml), 4-11-19.

<sup>158</sup> Camilla T. N. SØRENSEN and Ekaterina KLIMENKO, “Emerging Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Possibilities and Constraints”, *SIPRI Policy Paper* 46, 2017, pp. 23-26.

Focusing mainly on the Arctic, China and Russia are developing a strong cooperation in the region, which covers three distinct areas:

### *1. Oil and gas*

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), an autonomous intergovernmental organization managing energy issues, in 2010 China surpassed the U.S. and became the world's largest energy consumer. Since Russia is one of the world's largest provider of oil and gas, they seems to be perfectly matched in this field. Until 2017, these two countries signed several bilateral agreements and decided to work together on various projects. For example, in 2009 the Russian state oil company Rosneft announced the launch of a project of development and extraction of 30 new oil sites in the Arctic, while in 2013 Novatek, the largest Russian independent natural gas producer, visited China to discuss the possibilities of cooperation on the Yamal LNG, a project on the construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant.<sup>159</sup>

Oil and gas exploitation represents a fundamental aspect of relationship between Russia and China and the latter is keen to invest in projects in this field, but Russian companies have to keep in mind that Chinese ones work on projects whose conditions they consider acceptable.

### *2. Shipping*

As already mentioned, Arctic shipping routes such as the NSR are one of China's key interests in the polar region, since they can bring a great number of opportunities to the country. The NSR is a system of parallel shipping lanes that traverse the coastal waters of Arctic Russia, north of Siberia, beginning in the Barents Sea in the West, crossing the frigid waters off Russia's Northern coastline, and terminating at the Bering Strait in the East.<sup>160</sup>

It was at the beginning of the current century that several experimental voyages were carried out by China along this shipping route. In 2012, the icebreaker *Xue Long* realized its first voyage through the NSR, thus becoming the first Chinese vessel to successfully navigate the area. In 2013, the cargo vessel *Yong Sheng* 永生 (Eternal Life), owned by the Chinese shipping line COSCO, realized the first commercial shipping under the Chinese flag, bringing a load of steel and machinery from Dalian to Rotterdam. In 2015, it also completed an experimental voyage along the NSR from Dalian

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<sup>159</sup> Linda JAKOBSON, Paul HOLTOM, Dean KNOX, Jingchao PENG, "China's energy and security relations with Russia", *SIPRI Policy Paper* 29, 2011, p. 26.

<sup>160</sup> "Breaking Through the Ice", *The Maritime Executive*, 2015, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/features/breaking-through-the-ice>, 5-11-19.

to Sweden. In the same year, a Joint Statement between the Chinese Premier of the State Council of the PRC Li Keqiang 李克强 (2013-present) and the Russian Prime Minister Medvedev emphasized for the first time the two countries' shared desire to cooperate in the exploitation and development of the NSR. However, although Russia welcomes and needs Chinese investments in NSR infrastructures on the one hand, on the other it fears that a stronger Chinese involvement in the route will challenge its rights to establish its own rules of navigation.<sup>161</sup>

### *3. Military development*

The last main field of cooperation between China and Russia is military development and security. For Russia, its Arctic territories have always been zones of military and security interests, that is the reason why over time the country has increased its security presence, restored old military bases and established new ones along the NSR. China is particularly concerned about the militarization of the Arctic, since it fears that tensions between U.S. and Russia could eventually lead to a conflict or, more generally, to a situation like that of the Cold War Era. On the one hand, China have these kind of worries, on the other hand it understands that Russia needs to be able to defend its territories.

Taking into consideration China, it can be expected that, since its exploitation of resources, tourism, shipping and research activities in the Arctic are growing, the region will become increasingly important also for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the armed forces of the PRC.

For example, in 2015 the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), the naval branch of the PLA, was spotted passing through the Bering Sea after finishing military exercises with Russia in the North Pacific and, in the same year, the State Council of the PRC, released a White Paper titled "China's Military Strategy", which mentioned concepts such as the "offshore waters defence" and "open seas protection".<sup>162</sup> The Chinese ambition to be able to operate in Arctic waters is not new, but, since its military presence in the Arctic is growing quickly, it can lead to tensions with Russia, undermining their win-win cooperation.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> SØRENSEN, KLIMENKO, "Emerging Chinese-Russian...", cit. pp. 33-35.

<sup>162</sup> "China's Military Strategy", *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*, 2015, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/05/27/content\\_281475115610833.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm), 6-11-19.

<sup>163</sup> SØRENSEN, KLIMENKO, "Emerging Chinese-Russian...", cit. pp. 35-37.

Another fundamental aspect of the Arctic engagement of China at the beginning of the twenty-first century was the development of political and economic partnerships with several Nordic countries, whose main purpose was gaining a support for the application to become a permanent observer at the Arctic Council. In 2007 China submitted its first application, which was reviewed by the Council in 2009, when it was granted the temporary status of *ad hoc observer* pending the next review applications. Since then, China has conducted a diplomatic and economic self-promotion campaign among Scandinavian countries<sup>164</sup>, which in this work is analyzed country-by-country.

**Iceland's** partnership with China began in 2008, when its President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson (1996-2016) visited Beijing five times during the financial crisis that hit the country from 2008 to 2011. During an interview of the *Financial Times*, Mr Grímsson frequently emphasized the great support received by China, as opposed to the indifference shown by its traditional allies (e.g. the United States). For this reason, although there were several Icelandic leaders that refused to show excitement about a potential partnership with China, its President has always prioritized Iceland's relations with the country and has promoted Iceland as a potential Arctic logistics hub.<sup>165</sup> In such context, it's worth mentioning the official visit of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao 温家宝 to Reykjavik in 2012, during which he expressed his willingness to discuss the future development of bilateral ties and exchanged views on issues of common concern with Mr Grímsson and the Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir. It was on this occasion that China and Iceland have signed six agreements and declarations covering issues such as Arctic cooperation, polar science and technology and the use of geothermal energy. In April 2013, China signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with Iceland, whereby tariffs on most goods were removed.<sup>166</sup> What is particularly interesting is the fact that in the same day, Iceland announced the creation of the Arctic Circle. In May 2013, also thanks to the Icelandic support, China gained the observer status in the Arctic Council.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, "The Snow Dragon...", cit., p. 63.

<sup>165</sup> Andrew WARD, Leslie HOOK, "Iceland's president welcomes Chinese interest", *Financial Times*, 2011, <https://www.ft.com/content/4716d5c2-d57f-11e0-9133-00144feab49a>, 1-11-2019.

<sup>166</sup> For further information about the agreement: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130631/LDM\\_BRI\(2013\)130631\\_REV1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130631/LDM_BRI(2013)130631_REV1_EN.pdf).

<sup>167</sup> ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, HUANG, "China's unfolding Arctic strategy...", cit., p. 83.

**Norway**, just like Iceland, has been forthcoming and welcoming of Asian states' Arctic interests. It showed its support for the inclusion of Asian states in the Arctic Council quite early on and continued to play a key role in the states' ultimate acceptance and inclusion in Kiruna. Indeed, Norway has always considered the Asian states a kind of "revitalization of the Arctic Council", since they are seen as a source of innovative ideas and different points of view. From this perspective, it is quite clear why the country has always been willing to establish relationships with the new observers. Another reason behind this tendency lies in the fact that a cooperation between Norway and the Asian states is mutually convenient, because Norway, being an Arctic country, represents a facilitator for the new observers in the region and, at the same time, Asian states are rapidly growing economies with great opportunities and increasing importance in Norwegian Foreign Policy.<sup>168</sup> In the case of China, following the previous observations, we can affirm that its cooperation with Norway has always been positive, even though in 2010 suffered a setback. This was due to the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Chinese Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波, an event which unleashed the fury of the Chinese Government. Indeed, Liu Xiaobo was an activist who in 2008 was imprisoned for having taken part in the creation of *Charter 08*, a manifesto issued in the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, whose purpose was the democratization of the RPC. This had a negative impact both on the relationship between China and Norway and on Arctic cooperation in general. However, such disputes has been solved, leading to a more stable international situation.

**Denmark's** relationship with China officially started in 2010, when Denmark hosted the first delegation of Chinese traders and investors who signed contracts and letters of intent<sup>169</sup> in the fields of energy, green economy and agriculture.<sup>170</sup> Another fundamental episode which symbolizes the cooperation between the two countries was the official visit of the Chinese President Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 to Denmark in 2012. Hu was a politician who hold the office of General Secretary of the Communist Party and then that of President of the PRC from 2003 to 2013. During the meeting in Copenhagen, Hu affirmed that the relationship between the two countries has always proceeded in a peaceful and productive manner, with a strong cooperation in different fields. The same great emphasis on the ongoing healthy collaboration between the two has been placed in the speech of the

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<sup>168</sup> SOLLI, ROWE, LINDGREN, "Coming into...", cit., p. 261.

<sup>169</sup> The letter of intent is a document declaring the preliminary commitment of one party to do business with another.

<sup>170</sup> ALEXEEVA, LASSERRE, HUANG, "China's unfolding Arctic strategy...", cit., p. 82.

Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen on the occasion of the 60th Year Anniversary of the establishment of Sino-Danish diplomatic relations in 2011:

“Today, more than 400 Danish companies are active in China with production, sales and - increasingly - research and development. At the same time we are pleased to note that Chinese companies are now gradually investing and establishing themselves in Denmark to the benefit of both countries. And just as we have become close political partners in our efforts to combat climate change, I am confident that this collaboration will spark an even closer cooperation between Danish and Chinese companies. As China embarks upon realising her ambitious energy targets, we may benefit mutually from an even closer cooperation in clean technology”.<sup>171</sup>

In addition, the Danish Government made a significant declaration on Chinese participation in the Arctic Council, in which it gave full support to the country. This event went hand in hand with the increasing interests of China in Greenland, which is a core issue in the Sino-Danish relationship. Indeed, Greenland is rich in deposits of rare-earth minerals, uranium, iron ore, zinc and petroleum, which attract Chinese investments.

One of the most significant event in the Sino-**Sweden** relation was the official visit of the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Sweden on April 2012. At the time Sweden was presiding over the Arctic Council, something which is directly related to the meeting between Wen Jiabao and the King of Sweden Carl XVI Gustaf (China was striving for the role of observer). This purpose has been clearly expressed in the speech of the Chinese Ambassador Lan Lijun 兰立俊 at the meeting between the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and Observers:

“China is of the view that the participation of non-Arctic states in the Council as observers has positive significance to the work of the Council. Most of the Arctic region is under the jurisdiction of Arctic states. While some of the Arctic issues are national in nature, some of them are regional that need to be addressed by Arctic states themselves in a coordinated manner. At the same time, some of the Arctic issues are trans-regional, such as climate change and international shipping, which involve the interests of non-Arctic states. China has made some progress in its studies on high-altitude physics, climate change, ecology and ocean in the Arctic. We are ready to conduct cooperation on scientific research with

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<sup>171</sup> “The Foreign Ministers's Speech at Reception on The Occasion of The 60 Year Anniversary of The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Denmark and China”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark*, 2011, <https://um.dk/en/about-us/the-ministers/speeches-and-articles-by-former-ministers/speeches-and-articles-by-former-foreign-ministers/diplomatic-relations-between-denmark-and-china/>, 2-11-19.

other states. China has always attached great importance to communication and dialogue with Arctic states on Arctic issues to enhance mutual understanding and trust (...).<sup>172</sup>

Another important symbol of the Sino-Sweden relationship was the establishment of a ground receiving station for China's meteorological satellites in Kiruna, Sweden in 2010. Since 2013, the collaboration between the two countries was deepened and, by the end of the year, there were twenty-six pairs of sister provinces and cities between the two. Currently they maintain high-level exchanges in several fields, including people-to-people and military-to-military exchanges.<sup>173</sup>

**Finland** was welcoming of non-Arctic states' achievement of the status of observer in the AC. To better understand the nature and the degree of China-Finland relations it proved to be useful to consult the official website of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Finland. Through the reading of the section devoted to Sino-Finnish bilateral cooperation, it clearly emerges that Finland has been China's largest trade partner in Nordic region for the last four consecutive years, and Finland has also served as an important source of FDI and technology in North Europe. Meanwhile, China has been Finland's largest trade partner in Asia. China is Finland's most important export market in Asia, but, in 2008, the trade between the two saw a decline due to the global financial crisis and got better only in 2010. In 2014, the Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Finnish Sauli Väinämö Niinistö met in the Netherlands, a noteworthy event since during it they promised to invest in their bilateral cooperation. The Finnish side welcomed China's participation in the North Pole and pledged to contribute to a deeper relation between China and Europe.<sup>174</sup>

### *Chinese public position on the Arctic*

The public debate on the Arctic among Chinese scholars has evolved and changed deeply over time. It is extremely important for us to consider it since it shows an evolution of thinking on

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<sup>172</sup> "Statement by H.E. Ambassador Lan Lijun at the Meeting between the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and Observers", *Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2012, [https://www.arctic-council.org/images/PDF\\_attachments/Observer\\_DMM\\_2012/ACOBSDMMSE01\\_Stockholm\\_2012\\_Observer\\_Meeting\\_Statement\\_Ambassador\\_Lan\\_Lijun\\_China.pdf](https://www.arctic-council.org/images/PDF_attachments/Observer_DMM_2012/ACOBSDMMSE01_Stockholm_2012_Observer_Meeting_Statement_Ambassador_Lan_Lijun_China.pdf), 2-11-19.

<sup>173</sup> "China and Sweden", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3361\\_664782/](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3361_664782/), 3-11-19.

<sup>174</sup> "Bilateral Collaboration", *Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Finland*, <http://fi2.mofcom.gov.cn/article/bilateralcooperation/bilateralagreement/200710/20071005152486.shtml>, 3-11-19.



China's approach to Arctic governance. There are three main phases that can be clearly distinguished in this tug-of-war process<sup>175</sup> which took place approximately from 2006 to 2013:

First, Chinese academics were alarmed about potential Arctic geopolitical competition when in 2007 Russia planted its national flag on the North Pole seabed as a declaration of sovereignty.

Second, Chinese policymakers and scholars began to ponder China's rights in the Arctic. Their deliberations focused on identifying the benefits of the melting ice for China and assessing what legitimate rights China has in the Arctic region.

Third, since late 2011, after the Arctic Council's second deferral of decisions on the status of permanent observers, Chinese Arctic scholars have become more subdued in public.<sup>176</sup>

During the political debate on Arctic governance, there have been different leading figures who distinguished themselves for their contribution, e.g.:

**Guo Peiqing** 郭培清, researcher of Arctic politics of the Ocean University of China, has always urged the Chinese government to protect its rights in the Arctic.<sup>177</sup> In an interview with the *Global Times*, a daily newspaper under the *People's Daily*, he was asked to talk about the current competition over the Arctic. Here is what he said:

“Since 2007, the countries bordering the Arctic have been scrambling to seize the area because of its abundant resources and because global warming is making it more important. Over time, the finiteness of earth resources has caused the big powers to focus more on the “Four Extremes” – outer space, deep sea and the two poles. Arctic disputes will lead to tensions, but are very unlikely to touch off a major war. Nowadays, the chance of wars between the great powers is small, and disputes are settled through international law, which is why reliable data is important to settle Arctic affairs. This is one of the main reasons why many countries are investing hugely in scientific studies there”.<sup>178</sup>

Together with numerous explanations of the ongoing international situation, during its media interviews, Guo has always emphasized China's right to make its voice heard in Arctic-related matters. Indeed, he firmly believes that China is fully entitled to take an active part in Arctic issues and leave behind its neutrality, especially due to its deep engagement in Arctic governance and its interests in resources, research, navigation and environmental protection.

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<sup>175</sup> CONDE, IGLESIAS SANCHEZ, *Global challenges...*, cit., p. 430.

<sup>176</sup> JAKOBSON, PENG, “China's Arctic...”, cit., pp. 14-15.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> GUO Peiqing 郭培清, “New cold wars over Arctic wealth”, *Global Times*, 2009, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/451602.shtml>, 30-10-2019.

**Li Zhenfu** 李振福, Professor of the Dalian Maritime University, in one of his works, titled “Obstacles to China’s participation in the international Arctic route mechanism and countermeasures” emphasizes the necessity of China to have a say on Arctic issues and not to be excluded from the Arctic decision-making affairs. In certain sections of the text Li is also critical of Chinese Arctic research, in particular as regards polar routes research. He affirmed that:

“China's Arctic route rights and strategic research has not been carried out in a comprehensive and systematic manner like other countries. It cannot provide basic information and scientific basis for the formulation of China's Arctic route strategy, which greatly restricts China's right to speak in the Arctic route rights issue”. It limits China’s struggle for its rights and international status. Over time, it will definitely affect our long-term interests in future Arctic routes and global strategies.<sup>179</sup>

Apart from the question pertaining to Arctic sea routes, Li has always raised several important issues in his speech and articles, such as the increasing need for a sustainable development, the access to polar resources and, more generally, the right of China to play a key role in this Arctic game, especially due to its status of world power and Permanent Observer of the Arctic Council.

**Hu Zhengyue** 胡正跃, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRC from 1984 to 1985, is often mentioned when talking about the position of China on the polar region. Indeed, before the release of China’s White Paper, Hu’s speech at an Arctic forum organized by the Norwegian Government in Svalbard in 2009, has long been considered the official articulation of China’s thinking on the geopolitics of the Arctic and resulting sovereignty issues. A key message of Hu’s speech is the acknowledgement that the Arctic is both a regional and inter-regional issue due to the global relevance of climate change and shipping.<sup>180</sup>

**Han Xudong** 韩旭东, Senior Colonel and Professor of the PLA National Defence University, a University administered by the PLA, has took part in several discussions about the Arctic, attaching military value to the region. Indeed, in one of its articles he declared that the possibility of use of force cannot be ruled out in the Arctic due to complex sovereignty disputes.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> LI Zhenfu 李振福, “Zhongguo canyu beiji hangxian guoji jizhi de zhang’ ai ji duice” 中国参与北极航线国际机制的障碍及对策 (“Obstacles to China’s participation in the international Arctic route mechanism and countermeasures”), *Zhongguo Hanghai* 中国航海 (Navigation of China), 2009, 31-10-2019.

<sup>180</sup> Quoted in JAKOBSON, PENG, “China’s Arctic...”, cit., p. 9.

<sup>181</sup> *Ivi*, p. 7.

**Yin Zhuo** 尹卓 is a retired Rear Admiral of the People's Liberation Army Navy, a branch of the PLA which deals with naval warfare. In 2010, during an interview with *China News Service* in which he was asked to talk about the polar region, he said:

“The development of the Arctic is equal to all countries. The current struggle of some countries for Arctic sovereignty is tantamount to infringing on the interests of other countries in the world. In the face of this reality, it is difficult to predict the future "Arctic battle", and many countries in the world, including China, also need to make their own voices”.<sup>182</sup>

Broadly speaking, through the analysis of the statements and the reading of several articles written by the most important scholars and officials about the Arctic, it becomes clear that they performed the function of encouraging the Government of China. Indeed, certain matters, such as the protection of the rights of China, the achievement of an active Arctic participation and the continued efforts in seizing the opportunities coming from the melting of ice, are always present in scholars' discussions.

#### *2.4 General historical context*

The content of the previous pages of this chapter consists in the historical analysis of the Chinese presence and relationship with the Arctic, from their very first contacts in the 1920s until today, when we refer to China as an “Arctic stakeholder”. As already highlighted above, the twenty-first century constitutes a turning point for China's polar role. However, in order to get a clear view on the general historical framework of China at the time, we should be able to answer these questions:

*What was the overall situation of China in the twenty-first century?*

*What were the key events that occurred simultaneously with the greater involvement of China in Arctic affairs?*

For this purpose, a brief analysis of China's internal situation at the beginning of the current century is provided below, immediately after a table showing some of the most important events occurred in this period.

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<sup>182</sup> LUO Jianwen 罗建文, “Haijun shaojiang: Kaifa beibingyang zhongguo buke que wei” 海军少将: 开发北冰洋中国不可“缺位” (“Navy admiral: China cannot stay absent from ‘Arctic’ development”), *Zhongguo xinwen she* 中国新闻社 (*China News Service*), 2015, <https://news.qq.com/a/20100305/002928.htm>, 31-10-2019.

Table 3: Major events in China in the twenty-first century.<sup>183</sup>

2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁 is the first member of the Democratic Progressive Party to win the presidential elections.</li> <li>- China and the U.S. sign the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000, which gives China the status of “most favoured nation”, a clause ensuring equal trading among the members of the WTO.</li> </ul>
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- China becomes a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).</li> <li>- China and Russia sign the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation.</li> </ul>
2002-3	The new election of the leadership of the Communist Party leads to the era of the “fourth generation”, in which Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao and Jiang Zemin take power.
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SARS arrives in China, in particular to Guangdong Province and Hong Kong.</li> <li>- China launches its first human spaceflight mission, called <i>Shenzhou 5</i>.</li> </ul>
2004	China and South-East Asian nations sign an accord to create the world’s biggest free trade area by removing tariffs.
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- China ratifies the Anti-Secession Law, in order to prevent Taiwan’s secession from China.</li> <li>- A series of Anti-Japanese demonstrations are held in several Chinese cities against a Japanese history textbook which whitewashed Japan’s actions in the World War II.</li> </ul>
2006-10	China’s 11th Five-Year Plan.
2007	China’s first National Action Plan on Climate Change.
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 11th National People’s Congress, with the confirmation of the President Hu Jintao and the Premier Wen Jiabao.</li> <li>- Games of the XXIX Olympiad is held in Beijing.</li> <li>- Presidential elections in Taiwan see the election of Ma Ying-jeou, Chairman of the Nationalist Party.</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- China becomes the world’s second largest economy.</li> <li>- Shanghai World EXPO.</li> <li>- Award of the Nobel Prize to Liu Xiaobo.</li> </ul>
2011-2012	100th Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution (1911) and Republic of China (1912).
2011-2015	China’s 12th Five-Year Plan.
2012-13	The “fifth generation” of leaders of the Communist Party takes power, with Xi Jinping as General Secretary and then President of the PRC and Li Keqiang as Premier.
2013	First proposal of the “Belt and Road initiative” by Xi during its visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia.
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sunflower Student Movement in Taiwan against a trade pact between PRC and Taiwan.</li> <li>- Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong against a series of restrictive decisions of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress.</li> </ul>
2016-2020	China’s 13th Five-Year Plan.
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 13th National People’s Congress.</li> <li>- 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.</li> <li>- Donald Trump’s first visit to China on November 8.</li> <li>- 90th Anniversary of the founding of the People’s Liberation Army.</li> <li>- the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) is held in Beijing.</li> </ul>

<sup>183</sup> Inspired by Guido SAMARANI, “La Cina contemporanea. Dalla fine dell’impero ad oggi”, *Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi*, 2017.

The main purpose of the PRC in the early years of the twenty-first century was the strengthening of its political, social and cultural system, together with the defence of its increasing international role.<sup>184</sup> These ambitious objectives certainly entailed various challenges to the Chinese leadership, challenges that it already faced and, actually, is still facing nowadays. Corruption, inequalities and the cultural vacuum after the death of Mao Zedong are just some of the difficulties that China experienced. However, the arrival of the new century not only brought troubles, but also different opportunities to the country.

For example, one of the most significant events which took place in the **early years of the 2000s** has been the inclusion of China as a member of the World Trade Organization on December 11, **2001**. As we know, the WTO is a global international organization dealing with trade rules between nations, which China has always wanted to join in order to gain access to new trading partners, better rates with current ones, raising prospects for improved living standards domestically and obtaining a seat at the table in a globalizing world.<sup>185</sup>

Along with these types of benefits, China's inclusion in the organization has also brought it many challenges, such as the mandatory implementation of a large number of reforms and the adaptation to a well defined trading framework, characterized by the principles of transparency and property rights.

It's worth mentioning that the United States played a key role in the process that led China to become a member of the WTO, especially after the formalization of their relationship with the signing of the U.S.-China Relations Act.

As already pointed out during the analysis of Sino-Russian cooperation, 2001 was a crucial year for the two superpowers, mainly due to the ratification of the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation, which laid the foundations for a peaceful and successful cooperation.

Unfortunately, two years later, in **2003**, China was hit by a SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic, which started in the Guangdong Province and highlighted the tendency of China to underestimate problems and hide information.<sup>186</sup> In this problematic context, after the 16th Congress of Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2002, the so-called "fourth generation" of Chinese leadership came to power. The leaders of such generation include Hu Jintao as General Secretary

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<sup>184</sup> SAMARANI, "La Cina contemporanea...", cit., p. 401.

<sup>185</sup> "What happened when China joined the WTO?", *World101 Global Era Issues*, <https://world101.cfr.org/global-era-issues/trade/what-happened-when-china-joined-wto>, 10-11-19.

<sup>186</sup> SAMARANI, "La Cina contemporanea...", cit., p. 404.

and later President of the PRC, Wen Jiabao as Prime Minister and Jiang Zemin as Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CPC.

It was during these dynamic years that the theme of sustainability became common in the Chinese political debate, especially on occasion of the 5th Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the CPC in **2005** and the discussions about the 11th Chinese Five Year Plan (2006-2010). This latter stressed the importance of a higher quality of economical growth, urban and rural development, improvement of public services, but, above all, the building of a “harmonious society” (in Chinese *hexie shehui* 和谐社会), a concept conceived by Hu Jintao, which refers to a society that is “democratic and ruled by law, fair and just, trustworthy and fraternal, full of vitality, stable and orderly, and maintains harmony between man and nature”.<sup>187</sup>

**2007** was the year of the Chinese first Action Plan on Climate Change, a programme outlining objectives, basic principles, areas of actions, as well as policies and measures to address climate change for the period up to 2010.<sup>188</sup> China, being a developing country of responsibility, attaches great importance to climate change, which obviously is an issue of common concern. For this purpose, the National Coordination Committee on Climate Change was established in 2002.

**2008** appeared to be a troubled year, firstly due to several protests and riots occurred in the Tibetan capital Lhasa in March, then due to the disastrous earthquake in Sichuan in May, which caused huge costs in terms of lives and damages. Fortunately, something good took place later on, namely the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing, which were planned for August and were a success for China.

Two years later, in **2010**, there was an event that attracted the world’s attention and that can be seen as a turning point in history: China overtook Japan as the world’s second-largest economy. Even though there were already previsions about this event, it still turned out to be surprising, since Japan held the title for more than forty years. Shortly afterwards, the decline of Japanese economy was attributed to a slowdown in domestic consumption.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> HU Jintao 胡锦涛, “Zai shengbuji zhuyao lingdao ganbu tigao goujian shehuizhuyi hexie shehui nengli zhuanti yantao shangde jianghua” 在省部级主要领导干部提高构建社会主义和谐社会能力专题研讨班上的讲话 (“Talk Delivered to Provincial Main Leading Cadres In Seminar about Enhancing Capacity to Build a Socialist Harmonious Society”), *Ministry of Science and Technology of the People’s Republic of China*, 2005, [http://www.most.gov.cn/jgdj/djyw/200905/t20090518\\_69322.htm](http://www.most.gov.cn/jgdj/djyw/200905/t20090518_69322.htm), 11-11-19.

<sup>188</sup> “China’s National Climate Change Programme”, *National Development and Reform Commission of the People’s Republic of China*, 2007, <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/200706/P020070604561191006823.pdf>, 11-11-19.

<sup>189</sup> “China overtakes Japan as world’s second-largest economy”, *The Guardian*, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/feb/14/china-second-largest-economy>, 11-11-19.

Another episode which caught international attention was the Shanghai World EXPO, the first Chinese world's fair which drew million of visitors of all nationalities and involved more than 190 exhibiting countries. The theme of Expo 2010 was “Better city, better life”, an analysis of urbanization in the twenty-first century aimed at showing the challenges and the potential of a healthy urban development, as well as promoting Shanghai as a great metropolis.<sup>190</sup>

In the same year, the country was dealing with the case of Liu Xiaobo, the human rights activist who took part in the writing of *Charter 08* manifesto and obtained the Nobel Peace Prize, triggering the reaction of the Chinese government.

The following years, especially **2012** and **2013**, were characterized by great innovations. This was mainly due to the fact that, after the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the “fifth generation” of Chinese leadership (the current one) with Xi Jinping 习近平 and Li Keqiang as core, came to power. The purpose of such generation and particularly of Xi was the achievement of the so-called *Chinese Dream* (in Chinese *zhongguo meng* “中国梦”), which consists in a “rejuvenation of the nation”, so basically building a socialist society with Chinese characteristics and making China a prosperous, strong, democratic and culturally advanced country.<sup>191</sup> It was in this context that Xi officially announced the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) during his visits to Central Asia and Southeast Asia in 2013. The strategy aims to promote orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets by enhancing connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas.<sup>192</sup> However, we will talk about this in detail in the next chapter.

After the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower Student Movement in Taiwan in **2014**, the situation not only stabilized, but also turned out to be positive, especially in 2016 and 2017. For instance, in March **2016**, the Government of China adopted the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), a plan defining the priorities of the country for the next years and including: a *green development* based on environmental protection and the use of renewable resources, a *financial*

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<sup>190</sup> Kenneth PLETCHER, “Expo Shanghai 2010”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Expo-Shanghai-2010>, 13-11-19.

<sup>191</sup> “Xi Jinping: the Governance of China”, *Foreign Languages Press*, Beijing, 2014.

<sup>192</sup> “China unveils action plan on Belt and Road initiative”, The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *Xinhua News Agency*, 2015, [http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2015/03/28/content\\_281475079055789.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/03/28/content_281475079055789.htm), 13-11-19.

*reform*, with resolution of problems concerning debt and the *opening up* aimed at increasing domestic and foreign investments.<sup>193</sup>

Even more important was the 19th National Congress of the CPC held in October **2017**, which confirmed the ability of the current leadership to lay a solid foundation for the development of China. Indeed, since it came into power, the country has experienced a period of prosperity and stability, mainly due to the fact that the reforms and the guiding principles promoted by Xi Jinping (e.g., peaceful development, sustainability, international cooperation, fight against corruption and cyber security) have as their primary objective the welfare of people.

As regards the foreign policy of China, we can affirm that it has deeply changed over time, mostly due to the evolution of the global role of the country. China now is a consolidated power, a title which brings opportunities, but also a huge amount of responsibilities. In any case, the idea at the base of China's foreign policy is quite stable and consists in promoting a peaceful international environment, both through cooperation with different countries and through its own national development.<sup>194</sup>

In this context, in November 2017, a meeting between the US leader Donald Trump and the Chinese Xi Jinping took place in Beijing. The relationship between the two countries is one of the key issues of our century, although it is extremely difficult to achieve due to their different vision of the world. For example, China is fighting against the American concept of a unipolar world and stressing the importance of a multipolar one based on mutual collaboration and benefits. On the contrary, in **2018**, Donald Trump, in accordance with his foreign policy "America first", imposed a series of tariffs on several Chinese goods, leading to a trade war aimed at damaging China's economy.

In order to understand China's foreign policy and its diplomatic relations with the world's major countries, is useful to listen to the the speech of the Foreign Minister Wang Yi 王毅 at the opening of the "Symposium on International Developments and China's Diplomacy", held in 2017. After presenting the progress of the BRI, Wang reflected on China's collaboration with other nations, saying that: "China and Russia are neighbours whose relation has proven to be forward-looking and increasingly stable. China and Europe continues to make progress in the development of a partnership aimed at peace, growth and reform. China and the Republic of Korea will work on building bilateral relationships and preserving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. China

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<sup>193</sup> Michel AGLIETTA, Guo BAI, "China's 13th Five-Year Plan. In Pursuit of a "Moderately Prosperous Society", *CEPII Policy Brief*, 2016, [http://www.cepii.fr/PDF\\_PUB/pb/2016/pb2016-12.pdf](http://www.cepii.fr/PDF_PUB/pb/2016/pb2016-12.pdf), 13-11-19.

<sup>194</sup> Xi Jinping, "Xi Jinping: The Governance...", cit., p. 63.



and India have more shared interests and need for cooperation than frictions. China appraises Japanese steps in improving their ties and is willing to welcome Japan's participation in the BRI".<sup>195</sup> (...)

After presenting some of the most important events that took place in China in the twenty-first century, in hopes of providing a clear picture of what has kept the Chinese Government engaged in those years, we come to the present day.

As for **2018**, it has been an eventful and intense year for China, both nationally and internationally. Thus, the purpose of the next chapter is to analyze the present circumstances starting precisely from that year, when the official document containing the Arctic Policy of China was finally published.

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<sup>195</sup> "Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Opening of Symposium on International Developments and China's Diplomacy in 2017", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1518130.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1518130.shtml), 14-11-19.

## THIRD CHAPTER

### China's Arctic Policy

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of China's Arctic policy through the analysis of its White Paper. This document explains the country's interests and intentions in the polar region after a wait-and-see approach lasted several years. The Arctic has also been included in the Belt and Road Initiative, which is briefly explained. The last part of the chapter is devoted to presenting the current geopolitical context, often referred to as a "New Cold War" in the Arctic.

#### *3.1 China's Arctic Policy White Paper*

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China<sup>196</sup> published a White Paper titled "China's Arctic Policy" (in Chinese *zhongguo de beiji zhengce* 《中国的北极政策》) on January 26, 2018. The event, which constituted a turning point in Chinese foreign policy, didn't come as a surprise to all those scholars engaged in the analysis of the country's diplomacy for many years.

The document can be considered as the symbol of China's long-term commitment to work with Arctic powers and contribute to a rapidly changing Arctic<sup>197</sup>, rather than something totally innovative. Indeed, although it took some time for China to officially declare its interests and purposes in the region (which, for most people, were already evident), the country laid the foundations for understanding them long time ago.

However, it was through the publication of this official document that the Chinese government demonstrated to the world its position, policies and responsibilities for actively participate in Arctic governance and jointly addressing global challenges.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> The State Council Information Office of the PRC is an administrative office under China's State Council.

<sup>197</sup> Adam LAJEUNESSE, *Finding "win-win" - China's Arctic Policy and What It Means for Canada*, University of Calgary, The School of Public Policy Publications, 2018.

<sup>198</sup> YANG Jian 杨剑, "Zhongguo de Beiji zhengce jiedu" 中国的北极政策 解读 ("An interpretation of China's Arctic Policy"), in "Shanghai Institute for International Studies", 2018, <http://www.siiis.org.cn/Research/Info/4523>, 22-11-19.

In addition to all the practical activities carried out by China in anticipation of the publication of its White Paper (including, e.g., the efforts to have a say in Arctic governance, the huge number of investments made and polar expeditions led), there is also a theoretical work that has been done by the country to gradually make the Arctic part of its national strategy. One aspect of this kind of work is the inclusion of polar interests in the official documents of the PRC, realized through a step-by-step approach as not to make the Arctic states feel threatened.

The first official document mentioning the polar regions was the National Security Law of the People's Republic of China, a law issued in 2015 and composed of several Articles.<sup>199</sup>

Among them, Article 32 is of particular interest to us because it states:

“The State persists in a peaceful exploration and use of outer space, international seabed areas and polar regions, increasing capacity for safe passage, scientific investigation, development and exploitation”.<sup>200</sup>

Besides this law, the other documents that make clear reference to the Arctic are:

- the 13th Five-Year Plan (the current one, it lasts until 2020), a document that, in addition to setting precise goals for a Chinese green development and opening up through the Belt and Road Initiative, schedules the building of a new icebreaker and an increasing presence in the polar region.
- the “Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative”, a document published in 2017, through which the Arctic officially became part of the BRI. The importance of this official paper lies in the fact that through it China declared its willingness to cooperate in the development of a climate of peace and mutual benefit. It also agreed to make its best efforts in the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>201</sup>

What is the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

It is a plan conceived to defeat poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives of people from all over the world. The way in which it can be implemented is through the so called “17 Sustainable

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<sup>199</sup> Mariia KOBZEVA, “China’s Arctic policy: present and future”, *The Polar Journal*, 9, 2019, pp. 94-112.

<sup>200</sup> “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia anquan fa” 中华人民共和国国家安全法 (National Security Law of the People’s Republic of China), *Ministry of National Defence of the People’s Republic of China*, 2015, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2015-07/02/content\\_4643972\\_3.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2015-07/02/content_4643972_3.htm), 24-11-19.

<sup>201</sup> “Full text: Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative”, *Xinhua News Agency*, June 20 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/20/c\\_136380414.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/20/c_136380414.htm), 24-11-19.

Development Goals”, a set of interconnected goals for a sustainable future that need to be achieved all by 2030. Among them we find: no poverty, zero hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, economic growth, peace and climate action.<sup>202</sup> Obviously it is an ambitious plan, but, in case of success, everyone will benefit, including the Arctic region.

### *Analysis of China’s Arctic Policy*

The White Paper containing China’s policy toward the Arctic, which now constitutes a strategic priority for the country, begins with a brief foreword explaining the current situation of the region, characterized by ice-melting and considerable attention from the global community. Since the very beginning, the document underlines the fact that the present circumstances in the Arctic go beyond its regional nature and are of primary concern also for non-Arctic states.

After just a couple of words on the role of China, the last part of this foreword openly states the purpose of the entire White Paper, which is:

“...to elaborate on its policy goals, basic principles and major policies and positions regarding its engagement in Arctic affairs, to guide relevant Chinese government departments and institutions in Arctic-related activities and cooperation, to encourage relevant parties to get better involved in Arctic governance, and to work with the international community to safeguard and promote peace and stability in, and the sustainable development of, the Arctic”.<sup>203</sup>

The main body of the document touches upon four major topics:

- I. The Arctic situation and recent changes
- II. China and the Arctic
- III. China’s policy goals and basic principles on the Arctic
- IV. China’s policies and positions on participating in Arctic affairs

The **first paragraph** provides a description of the geographical characteristics of the Arctic region and some basic laws governing it. After an explanation of climate change and its negative effects on the Arctic natural environment, the paragraph ends by mentioning the controversial nature of the

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<sup>202</sup> “The Sustainable Development Agenda”, United Nations official website, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>, 24-11-19.

<sup>203</sup> “China’s Arctic Policy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, January 2018.

“Arctic issue”. Indeed, if on the one hand ice-melting in the Arctic can worsen global warming, on the other it can provide opportunities for mining and commercial activities, which, in turn, can have a positive impact on international trade, shipping and the life of indigenous people.

The **second paragraph** begins by defining China “an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs” and a “near-Arctic state” (in Chinese *jin beiji guojia* 近北极国家). They are words used for a long time in the speeches of Chinese scholars, which initially upset the Arctic states, but then entered the common language. After listing the areas in which China is currently involved in the Arctic (e.g. scientific research, resource exploitation and global governance), the paragraph summarizes the history of China in the region, which we extensively analyzed in the previous chapter.

The **third paragraph** is extremely important, since it defines China’s policy goals in the Arctic, namely to understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the region. “Understand” means enhancing the capability of China in scientific research, “protect” is the need to cope with climate change, “develop” refers not only to technological innovation, but also to the improvement of the living conditions of indigenous people. Finally, “participate” means regulating and managing Arctic-related affairs and activities in a way that is consistent with the existing legal framework.<sup>204</sup>

To achieve these goals, the White Paper sets four guiding principles:

- “Respect” (*zunzhong* 尊重), related to the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Arctic states, but also to the rights and freedom of non-Arctic states to carry out activities in the polar region.
- “Cooperation” (*hezuo* 合作), since all the Arctic stakeholders are encouraged in taking part in a multi-level, omni-dimensional and wide-ranging cooperation in the region, especially through global, regional, bilateral and multilateral channels.
- “Win-win result” (*gongying* 共赢), is nothing but the achievement of mutual benefits and development, possible only through a compromise between natural conservation and social development.
- “Sustainability” (*kechixu* 可持续) is the most important principle, the one that guides all Chinese activities in the Arctic region. It refers to the necessary balance between environmental protection, conservation and utilization, in order to realize a harmonious coexistence between man and nature.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> “China’s Arctic Policy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, January 2018.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

The **last paragraph** of the document outlines five areas prioritized by China when dealing with Arctic-related issues, namely:

- deepening the exploration and understanding of the Arctic
- protecting the eco-environment and addressing climate change
- utilizing the resources of the region in a lawful and rational manner
- actively participating in Arctic governance and international cooperation
- promoting peace and stability in the region<sup>206</sup>

When asked about these policies areas, all the scholars engaged in this field agree they are nothing new. Indeed, if we analyze—for example—the keynote speech of the Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming 张明 at the Third Arctic Circle Assembly in 2015, we come to the conclusion that the six specific policies proposed by him are almost identical to those outlined in the White Paper.<sup>207</sup> In particular, they are: further explore and understand the Arctic, protect and rationally use it, respect the rights of Arctic countries and indigenous people, respect also those of non-Arctic countries and the international community, build a multi-tiered cooperation framework, uphold the region’s governance system based on existing international law.<sup>208</sup>

After the four paragraphs that form the body of the White Paper, a brief conclusion is provided to the reader. It underlines once again the responsible role of China in the Arctic region and its commitment in addressing climate change and developing the country in a respectful and sustainable manner.

### *Reasons for publishing*

A fair question many scholars have tried to answer immediately after the publication of the White Paper in January 2018 is: “Since China’s polar engagement is deeply rooted in the history of the country, why it took so long to publish the White Paper? Why was it issued in 2018?”

The main reason behind the publication of the WP is the need for China to openly declare its Arctic interests. The core idea is that through it China can not only justify its presence in the region, but

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<sup>206</sup> “China’s Arctic Policy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, January 2018.

<sup>207</sup> LIM Soon Kong, “China’s Arctic Policy & the Polar Silk Road Vision”, *Arctic Yearbook 2018*, [https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2018/Scholarly\\_Papers/24\\_AY2018\\_Kong.pdf](https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2018/Scholarly_Papers/24_AY2018_Kong.pdf), 25-11-19.

<sup>208</sup> “Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly”, *Ministry of foreign affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1306858.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1306858.shtml), 25-11-19.

also avoid alarmism. The Chinese role in the Arctic is no longer that of newcomer, and this factor, together with the clear announcement of the country's polar interests, ensures that the Arctic states are more willing to cooperate with China.

The second reason for publishing is that at the time the country was ready to offer its own vision for Arctic development, namely, the "Polar Silk Road" initiative.<sup>209</sup>

### *3.2 The Polar Silk Road as part of the Belt and Road Initiative*

Initially the Belt and Road Initiative didn't include the Arctic region, but in 2017, after the release of a document titled "Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative", the Arctic Ocean has become one of the "blue economic passages" (in Chinese *langse jingji tongdao* "蓝色经济通道") proposed by China to connect the country with Europe. Before giving a detailed explanation of the so-called "Polar Silk Road", a brief general description of the Belt and Road Initiative is provided immediately below.

#### *What is the Belt and Road Initiative?*

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an ambitious plan conceived by Xi Jinping, officially proposed during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013. It is also known as One Belt, One Road or OBOR (in Chinese *yidai yilu* "一带一路"), but today we refer to it mainly using the acronym BRI. Actually, "Belt and Road" is short for "Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road", where "the Belt" are rail and roads running through Central Asia and onto Europe, while "the Road" are ports and shipping lanes which connect Southeast Asian States and countries bordering the wider Indian Ocean.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> KOBZEVA, "China's Arctic policy...", cit., p. 106.

<sup>210</sup> "The Belt and Road Initiative", *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, 2016, <http://isdip.eu/content/uploads/2016/10/2016-The-Belt-and-Road-Initiative.pdf>, 19-11-19.

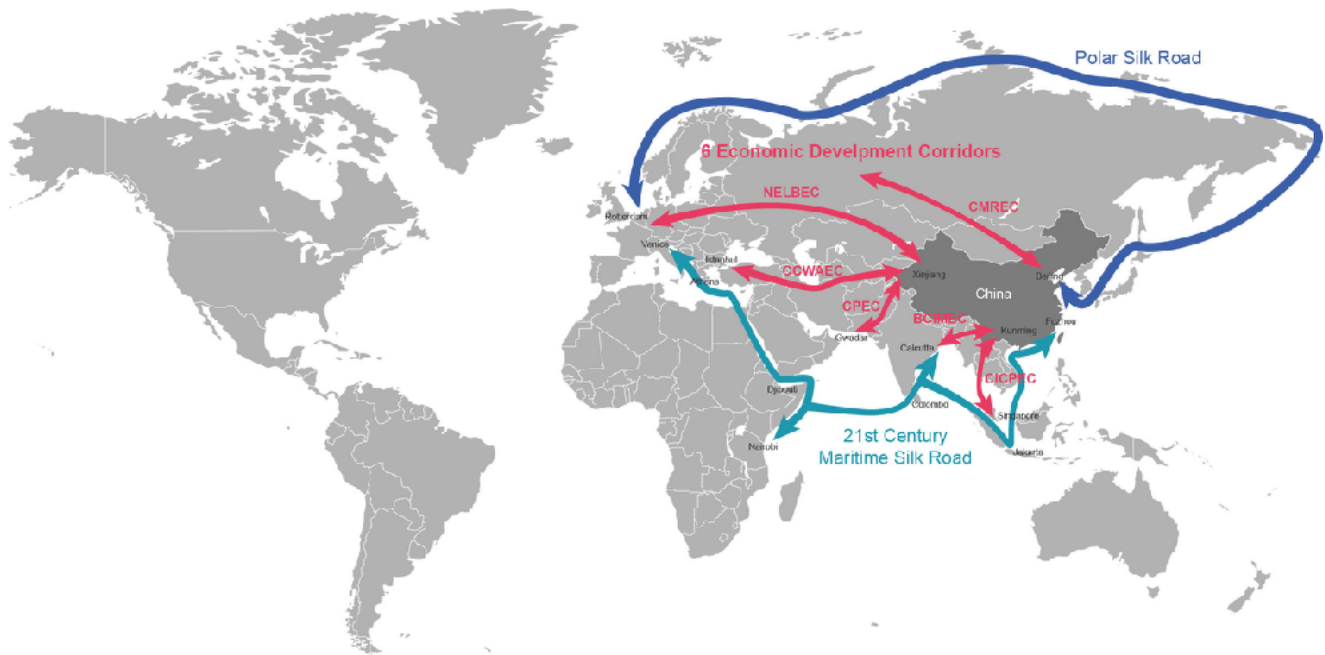


Fig. 4 - Map of the Belt and Road Initiative (source: <https://www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/>).

The model at the base of this plan is the ancient “Silk Road” (130 BCE-1453 CE), the term we use to define several routes of trade and cultural exchanges that linked the major civilizations of Asia, Europe and Africa more than two millennia ago.<sup>211</sup>

During the first proposal of the initiative in 2013, Xi emphasized how in the past countries with differences in race, belief and cultural background succeed in sharing peace and development thanks to ideas such as mutual tolerance, trust, equality, cooperation and win-win.<sup>212</sup> That is the reason why he firmly believes it is something possible even today.

The purpose of his project, which is clearly explained in the 2015 Vision and Actions Plan of the Chinese government, is:

“...promoting the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establishing and strengthening partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, setting up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, realizing diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries”.<sup>213</sup> (...)

<sup>211</sup> “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, *National Development and Reform Commission*, 2015, [http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330\\_669367.html](http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html), 19-11-19.

<sup>212</sup> “President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtffhshzzfh\\_665686/t1076334.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtffhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml), 19-11-19.

<sup>213</sup> “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, *National Development and Reform Commission*, 2015, [http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330\\_669367.html](http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html), 19-11-19.



Obviously, President Xi's proposal takes into account that there are profound differences between the countries along the Belt and Road concerning politics, economy, resources, etc. It is precisely for this reasons that he sees the project as a chance to reach a compromise and to encourage cooperation in the interest of the world community.<sup>214</sup>

As regards cooperation, the Vision and Actions Plan settles five key areas in which it is necessary. These five are nothing but the official objectives of the initiative:

- **policy coordination** (*zhengce goutong* 政策沟通) refers to the need to promote intergovernmental cooperation, build a multi-level intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism, enhance mutual political trust. The countries involved in the BRI have to coordinate their strategies and policies, and provide policy support for the implementation of common projects.
- **facilities connectivity** (*sheshi liantong* 设施联通) refers to the improvement of connectivity through infrastructure construction plans and technical standard systems, for the achievement of an infrastructure network connecting all sub-regions in Asia, and between Asia, Africa and Europe. In doing so, there is an urgent need to promote green and low-carbon infrastructure construction, as not to worsen the problems associated with climate change.
- **unimpeded trade** (*maoyi changtong* 贸易畅通) consists in the improvement of investments and trade facilitation, together with the removal of investment and trade barriers for the creation of a sound business environment. To achieve this, all countries along the Belt and Road should cooperate in information exchange, trade liberalization and facilitation, law enforcement and investments.
- **financial integration** (*zijin rongtong* 资金融通) is the deepening of financial cooperation, the building of a currency stability system and credit information system, the support to companies in issuing bonds in domestic and foreign currencies and the strengthening of the role of the Silk Road Fund.<sup>215</sup>
- **people-to-people bond** (*minxin xiangtong* 民心相通) is the promotion of cultural and academic exchanges, media cooperation and volunteer services. It implies encouraging tourism and cultural

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<sup>214</sup> "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", *National Development and Reform Commission*, 2015, [http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330\\_669367.html](http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html), 19-11-19.

<sup>215</sup> The Silk Road Fund is an investment fund created to provide support for trade and economic cooperation between countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative. For further information, consult the official website: <http://www.silkroadfund.com.cn/enweb/23773/index.html>.

activities, sending more students in each other's countries, establishing scholarships, improving technology transfer and addressing health emergencies.<sup>216</sup>

The initiative is open to the international community and, indeed, it was conceived precisely for the well-being of people from all over the world. An article published in the *China Daily* of March 2019 states that so far China has signed 171 cooperation documents with 29 international organizations and 123 countries, including both developed and developing countries.<sup>217</sup> However, not all nations have shown unconditional support for the BRI or have signed a Memorandum of Understanding<sup>218</sup> (MoU) with China. An example of this is France, where the government's reaction has been relatively positive, but not without concern. Indeed, during its visit to China in 2018, the French President Emmanuel Macron stressed the importance for certain conditions to be met for a fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation to be realized. In any case, although China and France have not signed a MoU and the reaction of the latter has been quite tough, we cannot consider the country an opponent of the BRI.<sup>219</sup>

Despite the ups and downs, all in all it can be stated that, from the very first introduction of the initiative in 2013, the feedback from the global community has been quite positive. The progresses of the project are described in detail in a report of April 2019 released by the "Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative", a body set up by the Chinese government under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)<sup>220</sup>. The report lists all the improvements occurred within the five main goals of the BRI, such as the fact that an increasing number of countries have signed cooperation agreements on the project, a number of advances have been made in the construction of economic cooperation corridors, closer cooperation has been implemented between financial institutions and different types of cultural exchanges realized.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", *National Development and Reform Commission*, 2015, [http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330\\_669367.html](http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html), 19-11-19.

<sup>217</sup> "China has signed 171 B&R cooperation documents", *Yidai yilu wang 一带一路网 (Belt and Road Portal)*, 2019, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/81686.htm>, 19-11-19.

<sup>218</sup> The Memorandum of Understanding is an agreement between two or more parties emphasizing their willingness to move forward with a contract and their mutually accepted expectations. For further information: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/mou.asp>.

<sup>219</sup> Françoise NICOLAS, "France and China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI)*, 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/france-and-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-22787>, 19-11-19.

<sup>220</sup> The National Development and Reform Commission is a management agency which takes care of the macroeconomic planning of China. For more information consult: <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn>.

<sup>221</sup> "The Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, Contributions and Prospects", *Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative*, 2019, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/86739.htm>, 20-11-19.

As shown in figure 4 of this chapter, the Polar Silk Road, initially not included in the plan, now is one of the major corridors for international economic cooperation. Before giving a detailed explanation of its inclusion, it is worth mentioning the other six corridors we see in the picture:

1. New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELBEC)
2. China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC)
3. China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC)
4. China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC)
5. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC)
6. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)<sup>222</sup>

### *The Polar Silk Road*

The Polar Silk Road (PSR) is a shipping route connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans through the Arctic. It is the shortest way to link Asia, North America and Europe, which is the reason why it can bring several benefits to the countries involved in its use. One of these is certainly China, where about 90% of goods are transported by sea. The PSR, being the shortest route to reach Europe and North America, can be really beneficial to the Chinese economy, since it allows to be faster and save costs. Furthermore, it offers a valid alternative to traditional routes such as the Malacca Straits, the Suez Canal and the Cape of Good Hope, characterized by heavy traffic and piracy.

Obviously, the exploitation of this passage gives rise also to different challenges.

Firstly, when we talk about the so-called “Arctic routes”, we do not refer only to the Northern Sea Route, but also to the Northwest Passage and the Transpolar Sea Route. Unfortunately, however, the first one is the only viable route at the moment, since the NWP presents harsh conditions due to thick ice and complex straits, while the TSR passes through the coldest part of the Arctic, so it will not be viable until ice free.<sup>223</sup>

Secondly, the unique environment of the region has made imperative to develop sustainable energy systems<sup>224</sup> and to invest in infrastructures, which, despite the efforts, are still deficient.

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<sup>222</sup> “The Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, Contributions and Prospects”, *Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative*, 2019, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/86739.htm>, 20-11-19.

<sup>223</sup> “Belt and Road Initiative reaches the Arctic”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, 2017, [http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2017-11/06/content\\_41851666.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2017-11/06/content_41851666.htm), 21-11-19.

<sup>224</sup> Henry TILLMAN, YANG Jian, Egill Thor NIELSSON, “The Polar Silk Road. China’s New Frontier of International Cooperation”, *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 4, 3, 2018, pp. 345-362.

As already pointed out at the beginning of this paragraph (3.2), initially the PSR was not incorporated in the BRI, which included only land routes from China to Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Russia, and shipping routes through the Indian and Pacific Oceans to Africa, Europe, Middle East and South Asia. It was only in 2018, through the release of China's Arctic Policy White Paper that the PSR officially became one of the blue economic passages.

### *How did it come to the inclusion of the PSR in the BRI?*

To answer this question, we have to go back to 2011, when the vague concept of a “Silk Road on Ice” (in Chinese *bing shang silu* “冰上丝路”) was proposed by the Russian Minister of Emergency Situations Sergey Shoygu, without obtaining a positive outcome.<sup>225</sup> However, the situation changed after Vladimir Putin's speech at the second International Arctic Forum titled “The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue”<sup>226</sup>, when he outlined his intention to turn the NSR into a “key commercial route of global importance” and “an international transport artery capable of competing with traditional sea routes in cost of services, safety and quality”.<sup>227</sup> Since then, the Russian Federation started to beef up its infrastructure projects in the Arctic and China became more active in the affairs pertaining to the region. Later on, in May 2017, during a meeting between the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, Wang expressed China's intention to support the “Ice Silk Road” proposed by Russia and to jointly explore the Arctic routes.

One month later, the SOA and the NDRC co-published a document titled “Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative”, through which the Arctic was officially included the BRI. In the same year, Xi Jinping and the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev met after the 19th National Congress of the CPC and agreed to cooperate in the development of a “Silk Road on Ice”.<sup>228</sup>

Although all these events had given advance notice of the growing importance of the Arctic for China and international trade, it was only in 2018 (following the publication of China's Arctic

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<sup>225</sup> TILLMAN, YANG, NIELSSON, “The Polar Silk Road...”, cit., p. 347.

<sup>226</sup> The International Arctic Forum is a key platform for discussing current issues related to the development and the effective exploitation of the Arctic. For more information: <https://forumarctica.ru/en/>.

<sup>227</sup> “Vladimir Putin's speech at the second International Arctic Forum”, *The Official Site of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation*, 2011, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/16536/print/>, 21-11-19.

<sup>228</sup> “Xi Jinping meets with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of Russia”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1507193.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1507193.shtml), 21-11-19.

Policy WP), that the PSR was officially defined as an integral part of the BRI. In this respect, the document states that:

“China hopes to work with all parties to build a “Polar Silk Road” through developing the Arctic shipping routes. It encourages its enterprises to participate in the infrastructure construction for these routes and conduct commercial trial voyages in accordance with the law to pave the way for their commercial and regularized operation”.<sup>229</sup>

As specified in these words, the developing of an Arctic route requires a series of investments in infrastructure, continuous cooperation and research. China attaches great importance to this kind of activities, something which is consistent with the economic projects it is taking part with the major Arctic states, in particular Russia, Norway, Finland and Iceland.

One of the most significant examples is the Yamal LNG, the biggest Sino-Russian development project in the Arctic, which encompasses the production, liquefaction and shipping of natural gas.<sup>230</sup> It is the model for a future Sino-Russian energy cooperation in the region and evidences the fact that Russia is the main area of interest for China’s Arctic investments.

Besides Russia, there are other Arctic states with whom China is collaborating in several different projects under the framework of the BRI. For example, there have been discussions about Chinese investments in port facilities in Iceland and Norway, which could service a growing number of vessels using Arctic sea routes.<sup>231</sup> Indeed, Iceland is trying to promote itself as a logistical hub on the PSR, while Finland and Norway have started to cooperate on the so-called “Arctic Corridor”, a transporting corridor connecting Finland and Europe that can be a possible end station of the PSR.<sup>232</sup>

More recently, China has provided support for the MOSAiC project (Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate), the first year-round expedition into the central Arctic. The German research icebreaker RV Polarstern, which is currently carrying out the operation, has set sail in September 2019 and will be back in 2020.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> “China’s Arctic Policy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, January 2018.

<sup>230</sup> Yamal LNG official website: <http://yamallng.ru/en/>.

<sup>231</sup> Lau Øfjord BLAXEKÆR, Marc LANTEIGNE, Mingming SHI, “The Polar Silk Road & the West Nordic Region”, *Arctic Yearbook 2018*, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>232</sup> Camilla T.N. SØRENSEN, “Intensifying U.S.- China security dilemma dynamics play out in the Arctic: Implications for China’s Arctic strategy”, *Arctic Yearbook 2019*, 2019, p. 6.

<sup>233</sup> MOSAIC official website: <https://www.mosaic-expedition.org>.

### 3.3 Latest news and future perspectives

Upon reading the latest articles and reports about the Arctic, it is clear that the region is considered a strategic priority by the international community. In particular, world media are currently focusing on the three major players in Arctic affairs, namely Russia, the U.S. and China. Thus, almost every discussion about the polar region is based on the ongoing dynamics between these superpowers, which, in case of deterioration, could lead to a “New Cold War”.

The present situation is quite complex, but we can try to simplify it. What we are seeing is that:

- **China**, despite being only a “near-Arctic state”, has always invested time and efforts in developing polar research capabilities and participating in polar governance, eventually achieving the status of “Arctic stakeholder”.
- **Russia** owns one-third of the Arctic territory, but, despite this, it is increasingly dependent on China to avoid isolation and raising capital.
- The **United States**’ government has always clearly articulated its Arctic interests in the past, but, over the last decade, its policy toward the region has been quite stagnant.<sup>234</sup>

It goes without saying that it is only through cooperation, peaceful development and mutual help that the fragile Arctic environment can be preserved. However, tensions and competition between the world’s greatest superpowers suggest that the so-called “Arctic exceptionalism” — the idea that the Arctic is a region detached from global political dynamics and, thus, an apolitical space characterized by peace and dialogue<sup>235</sup> — is coming to an end.

This concept emerged immediately after the Cold War, when the polar region lost its geostrategic and geopolitical relevance, turning into an area of scientific research and environmental protection.<sup>236</sup> Nowadays, primarily due to ice melting, the Arctic is regaining its strategic value and, thus, creating tensions in the world politics that we will discuss at a later stage.

Before doing so, it has been decided to provide a table with all the most significant events of 2019. Obviously, they all occurred or are closely related to the Arctic region.

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<sup>234</sup> Heather A. CONLEY, Matthew MELINO, “The implications of U.S. Policy Stagnation toward the Arctic region”, *CSIC report*, 2019, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> Juha KÄPYLÄ, Harri MIKKOLA, “On Arctic exceptionalism”, *FIIA Working Paper*, April 2015, p. 4.

<sup>236</sup> *Ivi*, p. 6.

Table 4: Major events in the Arctic in 2019.<sup>237</sup>

January	A pattern of high-altitude winds in the Arctic, known as “polar vortex”, weakens, sweeping frigid air over North America and Europe and causing record low temperatures.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Canada releases its federal budget, committing \$700 million over the next decade to programs specific to Canada’s North.</li> <li>- Iceland and UK sign a MoU on defence and security cooperation.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Russian President Vladimir Putin invites foreign investors to take part in the construction of NSR hubs and orders the Russian Government to encourage foreign investments through government tax reliefs plans.</li> <li>- The United States Coast Guard releases a document titled <i>Arctic Strategic Outlook</i> to reaffirm American leadership’s commitment in the Arctic.</li> <li>- The International Arctic Forum “The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue” is held in St. Petersburg.</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting takes place in Rovaniemi, Finland. The Chairmanship of the AC passes from Finland to Iceland.</li> <li>- the Arctic Circle China Forum is held in Shanghai, in cooperation with the PRIC and the SIIS. The purpose of the Forum is discussing the role of China in the Arctic and the future development of the region.</li> <li>- the Arctic Science Summit Week 2019 is held in Arkhangelsk, Russia.</li> <li>- Russia launches its newest Nuclear-powered icebreaker <i>Ural</i>. It will be on service in 2021.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Arctic Council delegates gather in Iceland in the first Senior Arctic Officials’ executive meeting during the Chairmanship of Iceland.</li> <li>- The United States’ Department of Defence releases its updated <i>Arctic Strategy</i>. It outlines a strategic approach for protecting U.S. national security interests in the Arctic in an era of strategic competition.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Russia’s largest oil company, Rosneft, announces more offshore Arctic drilling off Taymyr Peninsula in summer 2020.</li> <li>- Alaska records its warmest month ever.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trump’s interest in purchasing Greenland from Denmark emerges.</li> <li>- Germany releases its <i>Arctic Policy Guidelines</i>, stressing its desire to protect and peacefully use the Arctic.</li> <li>- The Canadian High Arctic Research Station in Nunavut opens its doors.</li> <li>- Russia launches a floating nuclear power plant, the <i>Akademik Lomonosov</i>, which is part of a wider ambition of the President Putin to develop the Northern Arctic region.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Canada releases its Arctic and Northern Policy Framework.</li> <li>- Scotland releases its Arctic Policy Framework, setting its ambitions in the region and stressing the need for international collaboration.</li> <li>- US Vice President Mike Pence visits Iceland to discuss Arctic issues.</li> <li>- The Northern Sustainable Development Forum, which brings together the most prominent experts of the circumpolar and Asian countries, is held in Yakutsk, Russia.</li> <li>- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change publish a report titled <i>the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate</i> on the impact of ice-melting in the Arctic region.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council hold their first joint meeting.</li> <li>- The 7th annual Arctic Circle Assembly is held in Reykjavik.</li> <li>- Local leaders from 13 cities around the Arctic formally inaugurate the Arctic Mayors Forum.</li> </ul>

<sup>237</sup> Inspired by Justin BARNES, “The Arctic in 2019-Timeline of events”, *Arctic Yearbook 2019*.

### *Current Arctic Strategy of the world's greatest superpowers*

As already mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph (3.3), the U.S. have always been quite clear about their Arctic interests, something which is confirmed by a number of different documents released under the government of Richard Nixon (1969-74), Ronald Reagan (1981-89) and George W. Bush (2001-09). All these documents containing the U.S. policy toward the Arctic, highlighted the country's objectives in the polar region, which cover areas such as scientific research, national defence and resource development.<sup>238</sup> Under the administration of Barack Obama (2009-17), the main areas of interest of U.S. Arctic strategy were security, responsible stewardship and international cooperation, as pointed out in the "Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic region" of January 2014. However, the greatest efforts under the Obama administration have been made during the American Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, from 2015 to 2017, when the President tried to raise the awareness of the need to elevate climate change as a national security imperative.<sup>239</sup> It was under the guidance of the President Donald Trump that the Chairmanship of the AC has been concluded in 2017.

In December of the same year, the "National Security Strategy Document", an official paper highlighting the U.S. major security concerns, was published. Despite talking about a "dangerous world filled with a wide range of threats"<sup>240</sup>, the Arctic is mentioned only once, in relation to the role of international institutions.

When discussing the U.S. policy toward the Arctic, most scholars believe that its greatest weakness has been a delay in understanding the geostrategic role of the region, together with limited infrastructures. Indeed, it was only recently with the Trump administration that the country began to see the polar region as an arena for great power rivalry, which is the reason why it strengthened its presence there, not only physically through a military build-up, but also diplomatically.<sup>241</sup>

A clear example can be found in the speech by the U.S. Secretary of State Micheal R. Pompeo during the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi, Finland in May 2019.

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<sup>238</sup> For further information about the U.S. policy documents relating to the Arctic see "Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41153.pdf>.

<sup>239</sup> Heather A. CONLEY, Matthew MELINO, "The implications of U.S. Policy Stagnation toward the Arctic region", *CSIC report*, 2019, p. 3.

<sup>240</sup> "National Security Strategy of the United States of America", *The White House*, December 2017.

<sup>241</sup> SØRENSEN, "Intensifying U.S.-China...", cit., p. 7.



On this occasion he stated that “the world has long felt magnetic pull towards the Arctic, but never more so than today” and that “we are entering a new age of strategic engagement in the Arctic”.<sup>242</sup>

However, it is worth mentioning that the document not only reveals the U.S. current vision of the polar region, but also that of Chinese Arctic engagement, which is perceived as ambiguous and potentially aggressive. Such an approach may be noticed also in the 2019 Department of Defence Arctic Strategy, an update of the 2016 version, in which the Arctic is depicted as a “potential corridor for strategic competition”<sup>243</sup>. In this regard, U.S. interests include:

“...maintaining flexibility for global power projection, including by ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight; and limiting the ability of China and Russia to leverage the region as a corridor for competition that advances their strategic objectives through malign or coercive behaviour”.<sup>244</sup>

Another area of interest of U.S. Arctic policy is Greenland, the world’s largest island, where the U.S. raised the possibility of reestablishing a permanent Department of State in May 2019. The proposal was accepted by the Government of Greenland, which has always been open for cooperation and trade.

Later on, after the signing of a MoU in the mining sector, Trump’s idea to buy Greenland from Denmark in August 2019 upset not only the balance found with Greenland, but also with Denmark. Indeed, Greenland, despite being an autonomous territory, is formally within the Kingdom of Denmark, which greatly contributes to the island’s economic growth. After Trump’s suggestion, (considered just a joke by most people), the President cancelled his state visit to Denmark scheduled for September.

However, today the relationships between the three countries are quite stable, and the U.S. are laying the groundwork to open a consulate in Nuuk (the capital and biggest city of Greenland) which will be operational in 2020. A permanent U.S. presence in Greenland is seen as strategically important for exploiting natural resources, creating new shipping routes and housing American military assets.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> “Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus”, speech by Micheal R. Pompeo, May 2019, <https://www.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>.

<sup>243</sup> “Report to Congress Department of Defence Arctic Strategy”, *Department of Defence of the United States of America*, June 2019.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> Jordan MCDONALD, “Here’s why Trump wants to buy Greenland”, in *CNCB*, August 2019, <https://www.cncb.com/2019/08/21/heres-why-trump-wants-to-buy-greenland.html>, 30-11-19.

Overall, it can be stated that the U.S. policy toward the Arctic has deeply changed since the 2000s. The rise in temperature and the consequent ice-melting created opportunities and challenges that the country can no longer ignore. Thus, the U.S., once considered a “reluctant Arctic power”<sup>246</sup>, have become increasingly focused on the polar region, although specific interests differ from one administration to another. For example, the Obama administration gave priority to climate change and cooperation with Arctic states, while Trump appears more concerned with national defence and economic interests, achievable through a unilateral “America First” approach. Though it may seem early to make a judgment on Trump’s Arctic policy, his recent actions suggest this. A good example is the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on June 2017, which is considered “unfair” by the American president.<sup>247</sup>

The emphasis of U.S. Arctic policy on national defence is evidenced not only by an increasing military presence in the region, but also by the recent investments in polar icebreakers (at present the U.S. owns only two icebreakers, the *Polar Star* and the *Healy*). As things stand today, it can be argued that the U.S. interests and presence in the Arctic are likely to increase.<sup>248</sup>

**Russia** owns an Arctic territory which is about 29% of its entire territory. It is known as “Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation” (AZRF) and constitutes the main focus of Russian Arctic policy. The AZRF includes several regions and autonomous districts.<sup>249</sup> In addition, if the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf recognises it, the Mendeleev and Lomonosov ridges, two underwater ridges subject to territorial disputes, may become Russian by the summer of 2020.<sup>250</sup> Even considering only this territorial factor, it is clear why Russia is destined to play a key role in the development and protection of the Arctic. The region has always been one of the main priorities of Russia’s foreign policy agenda and will continue to be essential, especially in view of the Russian Chairmanship of the AC, from 2021 to 2023.

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<sup>246</sup> HUEBERT, “United States Arctic Policy...”, cit., p. 2.

<sup>247</sup> “Paris climate deal: Trump pulls US out of 2015 accord”, *BBC News*, June 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40127326>, 1-12-19.

<sup>248</sup> Emirhan ALTUNKAYA, “US and the Arctic Region in the Era of Climate Change: A Brief Analysis of the Evolution of US Arctic Foreign Policy Since 2000s”, *Istanbul Gelisim University Journal of Social Sciences*, April 2019, pp. 192-194.

<sup>249</sup> Eduard GALIMULLIN, Yuri MATVEENKO, “The ongoing formation of Russia’s Arctic policy: a new stage?”, *Arctic Yearbook 2019*, 2019, p. 2.

<sup>250</sup> Nastassia ASTRASHEUSKAYA, Henry FOY, “Polar powers: Russia’s bid for supremacy in the Arctic Ocean”, *Financial Times*, April 28 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/2fa82760-5c4a-11e9-939a-341f5ada9d40>, 5-12-19.

Russia is strongly aware of the military and economical importance of the Arctic and knows very well that the development of this region supports the development of Russia as a whole.<sup>251</sup> Its interests in the High North include: environmental protection, cooperation, natural resources, fishing, transport routes and national security.<sup>252</sup> Despite the passing of time, these areas of concern remained broadly unchanged, unlike the specific methods and contents of its foreign policy, which are revised as necessary. At present there are three main documents determining the Russian policy towards the Arctic:

- “Basis of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period till 2020 and for a further perspective” (2008);
- “The Strategy of the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and the National Security up to 2020” (2013);
- “State programme Socioeconomic Development of the Russia Arctic Zone up to 2025” (2017).<sup>253</sup>

All these documents, which are the updated version of the previous ones, point out the priorities of the Russian Arctic strategy, with differences in the geopolitical context and specific objectives. Reading them, it is clear that at present Russia’s main goals in the Arctic are the development of the NSR and the extension of its continental shelf. Indeed, through the achievement of these goals, the country would gain greater strategic role and power, attracting inflows of foreign investment and technology.

As has already been said when discussing its ongoing relationship with China, Russia attaches primary importance to cooperation, whether with Arctic or non-Arctic countries. After the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and the consequent deterioration of the relationship with the U.S. and EU, Russia’s ability to develop infrastructures along the NSR has been threatened. This fact, together with the strong desire of several countries (e.g. China, Japan and Korea) to be included in Arctic affairs, has led to the creation of a cooperative environment. Obviously the potential benefits coming from the NSR is one of the main reasons behind non-Arctic states’ steps toward Russia,

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<sup>251</sup> Ken S. COATES, Carin HOLROYD, *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 195-196.

<sup>252</sup> Viatcheslav GAVRILOV, “Russian Arctic Policy”, in *Breaking the Ice Curtain? Russia, Canada, and Arctic Security in a Changing Circumpolar World*, Calgary, Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2019, pp. 1-12.

<sup>253</sup> Nazrin MEHDIYEVA, *Russia’s Arctic papers: The evolution of Strategic thinking on the High North*, in “Nato Defence College”, 2018, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=567>, 5-12-19.

even if this latter doesn't provide full access to the route and closely monitors all the activities that take place there.<sup>254</sup>

For instance, in March 2019, the Russian Government established a set of rules for foreign vessels passing through the NSR. According to these rules, all countries involved in the use of the route have to provide a notification about a voyage 45 days in advance, together with other accurate information such as the name and the type of ship.<sup>255</sup>

One month later, in April 2019, the Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the plenary session of the 5th International Arctic Forum "The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue". During the meeting, he gave a speech underlying the growing need to develop transport and communication infrastructures. To be more specific, he invited foreign partners to join projects and invest in the construction of port hubs along the NSR. He also made reference to Russia's efficient production of icebreakers, including that of nuclear-powered icebreakers currently under construction in St. Petersburg (the *Arktika* and the *Sibir*).<sup>256</sup> Indeed, according to the President's forecasts, by 2035 the country will operate with 13 icebreakers, 9 of which powered by nuclear reactors.

Shortly afterwards, in May 2019, Rosatom, the Russian company specialized in nuclear energy, launched its nuclear-powered icebreaker *Ural*, a vessel able to slice through ice up to three meters thick.<sup>257</sup> In the same period, the Arctic Science Summit Week 2019, which focused on the consequences of climate change and the security of Arctic indigenous people, was held in Arkhangelsk.

Overall, we can say that Russia pursues its Arctic policy tenaciously, also thanks to foreign investments and its partnership with China. In this respect, a good example is provided by the official visit of Xi Jinping to Russia in June 2019. On this occasion, the Chinese and the Russian heads of state repeatedly stressed the importance of their mutually beneficial cooperation, especially in the energy sector. In addition, in August 2019, the Russian Federation launched the *Akademik Lomonosov*, a floating nuclear power plant that, on the one hand, is destined to provide electricity in the Russian Arctic<sup>258</sup>, on the other is part of the broader plan of Putin for the development of the

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<sup>254</sup> Ekaterina ANANYEVA, "Russia in the Arctic region: Going bilateral or multilateral?", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 10,1, 2019, pp. 85-97.

<sup>255</sup> Atle STALEESEN, *Russia sets out stringent new rules for foreign ships on the Northern Sea Route*, in "Arctic Today", 2019, <https://www.arctictoday.com/russia-sets-out-stringent-new-rules-for-foreign-ships-on-the-northern-sea-route/>, 4-12-19.

<sup>256</sup> For further information about Putin's speech at the Forum: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60250>.

<sup>257</sup> "Russia launches new nuclear-powered icebreaker in bid to open up the Arctic", *The Guardian*, May 26 2019.

<sup>258</sup> *Russia floating nuclear power station sets sail across Arctic*, in "BBC News", 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49446235>, 5-12-19.

NSR. In conclusion, there are experts who believe that factors such as the increased focus on resource extraction, hydrocarbons and the development of transport corridors suggest that Russia's view of the polar region is becoming increasingly extractivist.<sup>259</sup>

Since the publication of its White Paper, **China** has always worked hard to be recognised as a responsible “Arctic stakeholder”. In 2018, a year that can be considered very busy for China, it undertook a series of measures to implement and strengthen its Arctic strategy. In March, after the restructuring of Chinese Party and its apparatus, the SOA, the main body of the Government with competence in polar issues, was finally dissolved to be replaced by the Ministry of Natural Resources. In May, the Arctic Circle China Forum, a conference during which several important issues such as the Polar Silk Road were extensively discussed, was held in Shanghai. From July to September, the Chinese icebreaker *Xue Long* conducted the country's ninth Arctic expedition, aimed at carrying out research on marine ecology and pollution, in view of the building of the Silk Road on ice.<sup>260</sup> In July, China also expressed the desire for constructing a nuclear-powered icebreaker and in September it proudly launched its first domestically-build research vessel *Xue Long 2*. Furthermore, throughout 2018, the Chinese company COSCO completed several transits along the NSR.<sup>261</sup>

On the contrary, from a political and strategical point of view, 2019 has been a difficult year for China, mainly due to the fierce opposition from the U.S. to its Arctic activities. In this regard, we already mentioned the speech by the American Secretary of State Pompeo in May 2019, during which China's approach in the region has been defined as “aggressive”. In addition, the Trump administration believes that a Chinese presence in the Arctic is of no benefit to anyone.

Under these difficult circumstances, most scholars believe that there are two possible consequences:

- China may return to a low-profile approach in the Arctic region
- China may further strengthen its cooperation with Russia

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<sup>259</sup> Ken S. COATES, Carin HOLROYD, *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 212.

<sup>260</sup> “China begins 9th Arctic expedition to help build ‘Polar Silk Road’”, *Global Times*, July 20 2018.

<sup>261</sup> Trym Aleksander EITERJORD, “China's Busy Year in the Arctic”, *The Diplomat*, January 30 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/chinas-busy-year-in-the-arctic/>.

What the future holds for China's Arctic strategy is difficult to say, even if we have reason to believe that the country will have a prominent role in the future of the Circumpolar World.<sup>262</sup> What matters is that: (i) China is officially an Arctic stakeholder working closely with Arctic states, (ii) these latter don't fully share the U.S. vision of the Chinese presence in the region.<sup>263</sup>

### *The "New Cold War" in the Arctic*

Quite often, when reading or listening to news about the current geopolitical context of the Arctic, we hear about a "New Cold War" taking place there. What does it mean specifically?

The term refers to a renewal of the Arctic as a location of competition<sup>264</sup>, which implies an increase in military presence in the region, exactly as during the Cold War.

This concept was conceived in 2007, when, after a period of relative peace and stability<sup>265</sup>, Russia planted its national flag at the seabed of the North Pole, drawing global attention to the Arctic region. One year later, in 2008, the appraisal by U.S. Geological Survey of the Arctic's undiscovered oil and gas reserves, stimulated the Arctic states' interest in developing strategies towards the region.<sup>266</sup>

These factors, together with the growing tensions between Russia and the West during the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, raised concerns about a possible "New Cold War".

Today, this term is used mainly when referring to the militarization of the Arctic region through long-range strategic bombers and nuclear-powered submarines, promoted by Russia and the U.S. in recent years. To complicate things, there is China's growing role and activities in the Arctic. However, if we consider the case of Russia and the U.S., we realize that they have every right to place their weapons in the polar region for at least three reasons.

First, being the Arctic an integral part of their national territory, the two superpowers need to be able to defend it. Second, it is nearly impossible to achieve a total denuclearisation of the region.

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<sup>262</sup> Ken S. COATES, Carin HOLROYD, *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 331.

<sup>263</sup> SØRENSEN, "Intensifying U.S.-China...", cit., p. 11.

<sup>264</sup> Robert HUEBERT, "A new Cold War in the Arctic?! The old one never ended!", *Arctic Yearbook 2019*, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>265</sup> After Gorbachev's speech in Murmansk (1987), during which he underlined the USSR's desire to make the Arctic a "zone of peace", the need for military spending in the Arctic decreased and different agreements on Arctic security were initiated.

<sup>266</sup> Exner-Pirot H. (2020) Between Militarization and Disarmament: Challenges for Arctic Security in the Twenty-First Century. In: Heininen L., Exner-Pirot H. (eds) *Climate Change and Arctic Security*. Palgrave Pivot, Cham.

Furthermore, in the case of Russia, its nuclear assets, especially those in the Kola Peninsula, are needed to preserve the status of great power. Third, all the Arctic states have an interest in cooperating and maintaining a peaceful environment, but also in military investments, if only for deterrence reasons.<sup>267</sup>

At present it is difficult to say how the Arctic's geopolitical context will evolve, even though several theories are being formulated about it. During my work, I selected two of them that are in line with my thinking:

- It is unlikely that the current situation will escalate into armed conflict.
- It is necessary to cooperate and develop a public policy response to the challenges of the twenty-first century based on a long-term approach.<sup>268</sup>

As for the first idea, most scholars simply believe that a direct fight is not in the interest of the global community and that it is of far greater importance to keep peace, security and mutual-assistance. Others think that the Arctic needs to become a “neutralized area”, obviously not free from military assets, but off limits from war. The basic idea is that in this way it is possible to build mutual trust between all the actors involved in the administration of the delicate Arctic environment, pushing away the negative thought of the so-called “New Cold War”.<sup>269</sup>

The second theory is based on the concept that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive Arctic strategy, which, in turn, requires long term forecasts. Indeed, every global change leading to 2050, including, for example, rampant climate change, technological innovation and the use of renewable energy sources, might affect the Arctic. Thus, it is only after a preliminary assessment of these changes that an effective policy framework can be created.<sup>270</sup>

To achieve this goal, which is closely linked to the proper protection of the Arctic region and the world as a whole, governments, organizations, policymakers and Arctic Indigenous peoples should overcome tensions and create a climate of cooperation and mutual learning.

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<sup>267</sup> Exner-Pirot H. (2020) Between Militarization and Disarmament: Challenges for Arctic Security in the Twenty-First Century. In: Heininen L., Exner-Pirot H. (eds) *Climate Change and Arctic Security*. Palgrave Pivot, Cham.

<sup>268</sup> Ken S. COATES, Carin HOLROYD, *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 530.

<sup>269</sup> Exner-Pirot H. (2020) Between Militarization and Disarmament: Challenges for Arctic Security in the Twenty-First Century. In: Heininen L., Exner-Pirot H. (eds) *Climate Change and Arctic Security*. Palgrave Pivot, Cham.

<sup>270</sup> Ken S. COATES, Carin HOLROYD, *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 531-533.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Arctic engagement of China is deeply rooted in its history, merging with all the major events that shaped the country as we know it. Through a careful analysis of the data in our possession (e.g. official documents, speeches, newspaper articles) we can affirm that the Chinese Government has never ignored the polar regions, and, on the contrary, has always been committed to the protection of their fragile natural environment.

Having to think about a starting date of the long process undertaken by China to have a say in Arctic issues, it would certainly be the 1925, when the country was granted the right to access Svalbard through the signature of the Spitsbergen Treaty. Indeed, it can be stated that China has always tried to carve out a niche for itself in the complex network of international relationships, in the Arctic as elsewhere. However, its road to success was a bumpy ride, with many obstacles to overcome. An example of this is provided by the considerable efforts made by China to gain the status of observer of the Arctic Council, which happened only in 2013, after its application was denied three times.

To better understand the challenges faced by China in all matters relating to the Arctic, we should always bear in mind that it is a non-Arctic state with no sovereignty rights, whose growing economic power is seen as a threat by certain countries, especially the United States. On the contrary, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland have always shown their willingness to develop partnerships with China and include it in Arctic activities. Without the help of these countries, it would have been difficult for China to become a major “Arctic stakeholder”. As already pointed out in the second chapter, several important phases of Chinese Arctic engagement have been simplified by the so-called “leaders” of the region. China, for its part, took an important step in 2018 through the publication of its “China’s Arctic policy” White Paper, making its intentions clearer.

Generally speaking, we can say that China’s presence in the High North is welcomed by the Arctic states due to the fact that the country is a source of investment for their research and infrastructure projects. Thus, it can be said that the world’s second largest economy is not the only one who benefits from an increasing “globalization” of the Arctic. In this respect we saw the example of Russia, which formed a strategic alliance with China in 2014. At present, it seems sound and mutually beneficial, but scholars are doubtful about how long it will last. What is certain now is that the United States are firmly against the Chinese presence in the polar region and are trying to



warning the other Arctic states. Fortunately for China, not all countries share Trump's view in this regard.

Leaving politics aside, although most of discussions today focus on the opportunities coming from the region, we should not forget that we are witnessing a real natural disaster. The Arctic sea ice is melting fast and, according to recent reports, the situation will get worse. For this reason, I invite anyone interested to visit the official website of the National Snow & Ice Data Center, an organization sponsored by NASA that provides daily updates and satellite images of ice sheets, permafrost and snow around the world. After consulting it, I have learned that the ice extent in November 2019 has been the second lowest in the satellite record. This should make us reflect on how to handle the situation appropriately. We need to ask ourselves:

Is it right or wrong to benefit from the Arctic change?

How can we prevent ice shrinking through our daily actions?

It has already been explained that the current polar situation brings several opportunities, especially in economic terms, but also calls for a cautious approach. Indeed, every human activity carried out improperly or roughly could damage the ecosystem, especially shipping and mining.

My opinion is that prevention is fundamental in environmental issues. However, since climate change is not a new problem, but its effects were visible already in the mid-20th century, now we can only try to find solutions. Stopping ice melting means stopping climate change, which is possible only through daily measures including recycling waste, saving energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Over the years the governments of all countries have taken part in agreements and created plans for protecting the environment. Beyond that, they are trying to find the positive side of an increasingly ice-free Arctic.

The same goes for China, which has gone from being an Arctic "outsider" to a country able to make its voice heard and defend its interests. At the present it is very hard to tell whether the polar region will play a key role in the future of China or not. What is certain is that its geopolitical relevance is higher than once and China, despite the growing challenges at home and abroad, will remain committed to Arctic matters. Indeed, even if nowadays the Government of China is addressing a set of priority issues, including, for instance, the signature of a trade deal with the US and the outbreak of the deadly Wuhan coronavirus, we have reason to believe that the country will continue to invest, conduct research and develop partnerships in the Arctic region, especially after the efforts made to be regarded as "Near-Arctic state" and responsible "Arctic stakeholder".

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APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

Arctic	<i>beiji</i>	北极
Arctic activities	<i>beiji huodong</i>	北极活动
Arctic affairs	<i>beiji shiwu</i>	北极事务
Arctic Circle	<i>beiji quan</i>	北极圈
Arctic ecosystem	<i>beiji shengtaixitong</i>	北极生态系统
Arctic expedition	<i>beiji kaocha</i>	北极考察
Arctic exploration	<i>jidi tanxian</i>	极地探险
Arctic governance	<i>beiji zhili</i>	北极治理
Arctic indigenous people	<i>beiji tuzhuren</i>	北极土著人
Arctic Ocean	<i>beibingyang</i>	北冰洋
Arctic region	<i>beiji diqu</i>	北极地区
Arctic stakeholder	<i>beiji liyi you guan fang</i>	北极利益攸关方
Arctic waterway	<i>beiji hangdao</i>	北极航道
Belt and Road Initiative	<i>yidai yilu changyi</i>	“一带一路”倡议
Central Channel	<i>zhongyang hangdao</i>	中央航道
environmental protection	<i>huanjing baohu</i>	环境保护
environmental pollution	<i>huanjingwuran</i>	环境污染
freedom of navigation	<i>hangxing ziyou de quanli</i>	航行自由的权利
glacier	<i>bingchuan</i>	冰川
greenhouse effect	<i>wenshi xiaoying</i>	温室效应
greenhouse gases	<i>wenshiqiti</i>	温室气体
global warming	<i>quanqiu qihou biannuan</i>	全球气候变暖
ice melting	<i>bingxue ronghua</i>	冰雪融化
international treaties	<i>guoji tiaoyue</i>	国家条约
mineral resources	<i>kuangchan ziyuan</i>	矿产资源
Near-Arctic state	<i>jin beiji guojia</i>	近北极国家
Northeast Passage	<i>dongbei hangdao</i>	东北航道

Northwest Passage	<i>xibei hangdao</i>	西北航道
observer of the Arctic Council	<i>beiji lishihui guanchayuan</i>	北极理事会观察员
polar expedition	<i>jidi kaocha</i>	极地考察
polar facilities	<i>jidi sheshi</i>	极地设施
polar icebreaker	<i>beiji pobingchuan</i>	北极破冰船
polar region	<i>jidi</i>	极地
polar strategy	<i>jidi zhanlue</i>	极地战略
Polar Silk Road	<i>bing shang silu</i>	冰上丝路
renewable resources	<i>kezaisheng nengyuan</i>	可再生能源
research activities	<i>keyan huodong</i>	科研活动
research station	<i>kaocha zhan</i>	考察站
resource exploration	<i>ziyuan kantan</i>	资源勘探
scientific research	<i>keyan</i>	科研
scientific research vessel	<i>kekao chuan</i>	科考船
Snow Dragon (icebreaker)	<i>Xue Long</i>	雪龙
sovereign rights	<i>zhuquan quanli</i>	主权权利
sustainable development	<i>kechixufazhan</i>	可持续发展
Yellow River station	<i>huanghe zhan</i>	黄河站
“China’s Arctic Policy” white paper	<i>zhongguo de beiji zhengce</i>	《中国的北极政策》白皮书
“Kyoto Protocol”	<i>jingdu yidingshu</i>	《京都议定书》
“New Cold War”	<i>xin lengzhan</i>	“新冷战”
“Paris Agreement”	<i>bali xieding</i>	《巴黎协定》
“Spitsbergen Treaty”	<i>si pi ci bei er gen qundao tiaoyue</i>	《斯匹次卑尔根群岛条约》
“United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”	<i>lianheguo haiyang fa gongyue</i>	《联合国海洋法公约》

## APPENDIX 2: 《中国的北极政策》白皮书

### 目录

#### 前言

#### 一、北极的形势与变化

#### 二、中国与北极的关系

#### 三、中国的北极政策目标和基本原则

#### 四、中国参与北极事务的主要政策主张

#### 结束语

### 前言

近年来，全球气候变暖，北极冰雪融化加速。在经济全球化、区域一体化不断深入发展的背景下，北极在战略、经济、科研、环保、航道、资源等方面的价值不断提升，受到国际社会的普遍关注。北极问题已超出北极国家间问题和区域问题的范畴，涉及北极域外国家的利益和国际社会的整体利益，攸关人类生存与发展的共同命运，具有全球意义和国际影响。

中国倡导构建人类命运共同体，是北极事务的积极参与者、建设者和贡献者，努力为北极发展贡献中国智慧和力量。为了阐明中国在北极问题上的基本立场，阐释中国参与北极事务的政策目标、基本原则和主要政策主张，指导中国相关部门和机构开展北极活动和北极合作，推动有关各方更好参与北极治理，与国际社会一道共同维护和促进北极的和平、稳定和可持续发展，中国政府发表本白皮书。

#### 一、北极的形势与变化

北极具有特殊的地理位置。地理上的北极通常指北极圈（约北纬66度34分）以北的陆海兼备的区域，总面积约2100万平方公里。在国际法语境下，北极包括欧洲、亚洲和北美洲的毗邻北冰洋的北方大陆和相关岛屿，以及北冰洋中的国家管辖范围内海域、公海和国际海底区域。北极事务没有统一适用的单一国际条约，它由《联合国宪章》《联合国海洋法公约》《斯匹次卑尔根群岛条约》等国际条约和一般国际法予以规范。

北极的大陆和岛屿面积约800万平方公里，有关大陆和岛屿的领土主权分别属于加拿大、丹麦、芬兰、冰岛、挪威、俄罗斯、瑞典、美国八个北极国家。

北冰洋海域的面积超过1200万平方公里，相关海洋权益根据国际法由沿岸国和各国分享。北冰洋沿岸国拥有内水、领海、毗连区、专属经济区和大陆架等管辖海域，北冰洋中还有公海和国际海底区域。

北极域外国家在北极不享有领土主权，但依据《联合国海洋法公约》等国际条约和一般国际法在北冰洋公海等海域享有科研、航行、飞越、捕鱼、铺设海底电缆和管道等权利，在国际海底区域享有资源勘探和开发等权利。此外，《斯匹次卑尔根群岛条约》缔约国有权自由进出北极特定区域，并依法在该特定区域内平等享有开展科研以及从事生产和商业活动的权利，包括狩猎、捕鱼、采矿等。

北极具有独特的自然环境和丰富的资源，大部分海域常年被冰层覆盖。当前，北极自然环境正经历快速变化。过去30多年间，北极地区温度上升，使北极夏季海冰持续减少。据科学家预测，北极海域可能在本世纪中叶甚至更早出现季节性无冰现象。一方面，北极冰雪融化不仅导致北极自然环境变化，而且可能引发气候变暖加速、海平面上升、极端天气现象增多、生物多样性受损等全球性问题。另一方面，北极冰雪融化可能逐步改变北极开发利用的条件，为各国商业利用北极航道和开发北极资源提供机遇。北极的商业开发利用不仅将对全球航运、国际贸易和世界能源供应格局产生重要影响，对北极的经济社会发展带来巨大变化，对北极居民和土著人的生产和生活方式产生重要影响，还可能对北极生态环境造成潜在威胁。在处理涉北极全球性问题方面，国际社会命运与共。

## 二、中国与北极的关系

中国是北极事务的重要利益攸关方。中国在地缘上是“近北极国家”，是陆上最接近北极圈的国家之一。北极的自然状况及其变化对中国的气候系统和生态环境有着直接的影响，进而关系到中国在农业、林业、渔业、海洋等领域的经济利益。

同时，中国与北极的跨区域和全球性问题息息相关，特别是北极的气候变化、环境、科研、航道利用、资源勘探与开发、安全、国际治理等问题，关系到世界各国和人类的共同生存与发展，与包括中国在内的北极域外国家的利益密不可分。中国在北冰洋公海、国际海底区域等海域和特定区域享有《联合国海洋法公约》《斯匹次卑尔根群岛条约》等国际条约和一般国际法所规定的科研、航行、飞越、捕鱼、铺设海底电缆和管道、资源勘探与开发等自由或权利。中国是联合国安理会常任理事国，肩负着共同维护北极和平与安全的重要使命。

中国是世界贸易大国和能源消费大国，北极的航道和资源开发利用可能对中国的能源战略和经济发展产生巨大影响。中国的资金、技术、市场、知识和经验在拓展北极航道网络和促进航道沿岸国经济社会发展方面可望发挥重要作用。中国在北极与北极国家利益相融合，与世界各国休戚与共。

中国参与北极事务由来已久。1925年，中国加入《斯匹次卑尔根群岛条约》，正式开启参与北极事务的进程。此后，中国关于北极的探索不断深入，实践不断增加，活动不断扩展，合作不断深化。1996年，中国成为国际北极科学委员会成员国，中国的北极科研活动日趋活跃。从1999年起，中国以“雪龙”号科考船为平台，成功进行了多次北极科学考察。2004年，中国在斯匹次卑尔根群岛的新奥尔松地区建成“中国北极黄河站”。截至2017年年底，中国在北极地区已成功开展了八次北冰洋科学考察和14个年度的黄河站站基科学考察。借助船站平台，中国在北极地区逐步建立起海洋、冰雪、大气、生物、地质等多学科观测体系。2005年，中国成功承办了涉北极事务高级别会议的北极科学高峰周活动，开亚洲国家承办之先河。2013年，中国成为北极理事会正式观察员。近年来，中国企业开始积极探索北极航道的商业利用。中国的北极活动已由单纯的科学研究拓展至北极事务的诸多方面，涉及全球治理、区域合作、多边和双边机制等多个层面，涵盖科学研究、生态环境、气候变化、经济开发和人文交流等多个领域。作为国际社会的重要成员，中国对北极国际规则的制定和北极治理机制的构建发挥了积极作用。中国发起共建“丝绸之路经济带”和“21世纪海上丝绸之路”（“一带一路”）重要合作倡议，与各方共建“冰上丝绸之路”，为促进北极地区互联互通和经济社会可持续发展带来合作机遇。

### 三、中国的北极政策目标和基本原则

中国的北极政策目标是：认识北极、保护北极、利用北极和参与治理北极，维护各国和国际社会在北极的共同利益，推动北极的可持续发展。

认识北极就是要提高北极的科学研究水平和能力，不断深化对北极的科学认知和了解，探索北极变化和发展的客观规律，为增强人类保护、利用和治理北极的能力创造有利条件。

保护北极就是要积极应对北极气候变化，保护北极独特的自然环境和生态系统，不断提升北极自身的气候、环境和生态适应力，尊重多样化的社会文化以及土著人的历史传统。

利用北极就是要不断提高北极技术的应用水平和能力，不断加强在技术创新、环境保护、资源利用、航道开发等领域的北极活动，促进北极的经济社会发展和改善当地居民的生活条件，实现共同发展。

参与治理北极就是要依据规则、通过机制对北极事务和活动进行规范和管理。对外，中国坚持依据包括《联合国宪章》《联合国海洋法公约》和气候变化、环境等领域的国际条约以及国际海事组织有关规则在内的现有国际法框架，通过全球、区域、多边和双边机制应对各类传统与非传统安全挑战，构建和维护公正、合理、有序的北极治理体系。对内，中国坚持依法规范和管理国内北极事务和活动，稳步增强认识、保护和利用北极的能力，积极参与北极事务国际合作。

通过认识北极、保护北极、利用北极和参与治理北极，中国致力于同各国一道，在北极领域推动构建人类命运共同体。中国在追求本国利益时，将顾及他国利益和国际社会整体利益，兼顾北极保护与发展，平衡北极当前利益与长远利益，以推动北极的可持续发展。

为了实现上述政策目标，中国本着“尊重、合作、共赢、可持续”的基本原则参与北极事务。

尊重是中国参与北极事务的重要基础。尊重就是要相互尊重，包括各国都应遵循《联合国宪章》《联合国海洋法公约》等国际条约和一般国际法，尊重北极国家在北极享有的主权、主权权利和管辖权，尊重北极土著人的传统和文化，也包括尊重北极域外国家依法在北极开展活动的权利和自由，尊重国际社会在北极的整体利益。

合作是中国参与北极事务的有效途径。合作就是要在北极建立多层次、全方位、宽领域的合作关系。通过全球、区域、多边和双边等多层次的合作形式，推动北极域内外国家、政府间国际组织、非国家实体等众多利益攸关方共同参与，在气候变化、科研、环保、航道、资源、人文等领域进行全方位的合作。

共赢是中国参与北极事务的价值追求。共赢就是要在北极事务各利益攸关方之间追求互利互惠，以及在各活动领域之间追求和谐共进。不仅要实现各参与方之间的共赢，确保北极国家、域外国家和非国家实体的普惠，并顾及北极居民和土著人群体的利益，而且要实现北极各领域活动的协调发展，确保北极的自然保护和社会发展相统一。

可持续是中国参与北极事务的根本目标。可持续就是要在北极推动环境保护、资源开发利用和人类活动的可持续性，致力于北极的永续发展。实现北极人与自然的和谐共存，实现



生态环境保护与经济社会发展的有机协调，实现开发利用与管理保护的平衡兼顾，实现当代人利益与后代人利益的代际公平。

#### 四、中国参与北极事务的主要政策主张

中国参与北极事务坚持科研先导，强调保护环境、主张合理利用、倡导依法治理和国际合作，并致力于维护和平、安全、稳定的北极秩序。

##### （一）不断深化对北极的探索和认知

北极具有重要的科研价值。探索和认知北极是中国北极活动的优先方向和重点领域。

中国积极推动北极科学考察和研究。中国尊重北极国家对其国家管辖范围内北极科考活动的专属管辖权，主张通过合作依法在北极国家管辖区域内开展北极科考活动，坚持各国在北冰洋公海享有科研自由。中国积极开展北极地质、地理、冰雪、水文、气象、海冰、生物、生态、地球物理、海洋化学等领域的多学科科学考察；积极参与北极气候与环境变化的监测和评估，通过建立北极多要素协同观测体系，合作建设科学考察或观测站、建设和参与北极观测网络，对大气、海洋、海冰、冰川、土壤、生物生态、环境质量等要素进行多层次和多领域的连续观测。中国致力于提高北极科学考察和研究的能力建设，加强北极科考站点和科考船只等保障平台的建设与维护并提升其功能，推进极地科学考察破冰船的建造工作等。

中国支持和鼓励北极科研活动，不断加大北极科研投入的力度，支持构建现代化的北极科研平台，努力提高北极科研能力和水平。大力开展北极自然科学研究，加强北极气候变化和生态环境研究，进一步推动物理、化学、生命、地球等基础学科的发展。不断加强北极社会科学研究，包括北极政治、经济、法律、社会、历史、文化以及北极活动管理等方面，促进北极自然科学和社会科学研究的协同创新。加强北极人才培养和科普教育，支持高校和科研机构培养北极自然和社会科学领域的专业人才，建立北极科普教育基地，出版北极相关文化产品，提高公民的北极意识。积极推进北极科研国际合作，推动建立开放包容的国际北极环境监测网络，支持通过国际北极科学委员会等平台开展务实合作，鼓励中国科学家开展北极国际学术交流与合作，推动中国高校和科研机构加盟“北极大学”协作网络。

技术装备是认知、利用和保护北极的基础。中国鼓励发展注重生态环境保护的极地技术装备，积极参与北极开发的基础设施建设，推动深海远洋考察、冰区勘探、大气和生物观测

等领域的装备升级，促进在北极海域石油与天然气钻采、可再生能源开发、冰区航行和监测以及新型冰级船舶建造等方面的技术创新。

## （二）保护北极生态环境和应对气候变化

中国坚持依据国际法保护北极自然环境，保护北极生态系统，养护北极生物资源，积极参与应对北极环境和气候变化的挑战。

### 1.保护环境

中国始终把解决全球性环境问题放在首要地位，认真履行有关国际条约的义务，承担环境保护责任。中国积极参加北极环境治理，加强北极活动的环境影响研究和环境背景调查，尊重北极国家的相关环保法规，强化环境管理并推动环境合作。

海洋环境是北极环境保护的重点领域。中国支持北冰洋沿岸国依照国际条约减少北极海域陆源污染物的努力，致力于提高公民和企业的环境责任意识，与各国一道加强对船舶排放、海洋倾废、大气污染等各类海洋环境污染源的管控，切实保护北极海洋环境。

### 2.保护生态

北极是全球多种濒危野生动植物的重要分布区域。中国重视北极可持续发展和生物多样性保护，开展全球变化与人类活动对北极生态系统影响的科学评估，加强对北极候鸟及其栖息地的保护，开展北极候鸟迁徙规律研究，提升北极生态系统的适应能力和自我恢复能力，推进在北极物种保护方面的国际合作。

### 3.应对气候变化

应对北极气候变化是全球气候治理的重要环节。中国一贯高度重视气候变化问题，已将落实“国家自主贡献”等应对气候变化的措施列入国家整体发展议程和规划，为《巴黎协定》的缔结发挥了重要作用。中国的减排措施对北极的气候生态环境具有积极影响。中国致力于研究北极物质能量交换过程及其机理，评估北极与全球气候变化的相互作用，预测未来气候变化对北极自然资源和生态环境的潜在风险，推动北极冰冻圈科学的发展。加强应对气候变化的宣传、教育，提高公众对气候变化问题的认知水平，促进应对北极气候变化的国际合作。

### （三）依法合理利用北极资源

北极资源丰富，但生态环境脆弱。中国倡导保护和合理利用北极，鼓励企业利用自身的资金、技术和国内市场优势，通过国际合作开发利用北极资源。中国一贯主张，开发利用北极的活动应遵循《联合国海洋法公约》《斯匹次卑尔根群岛条约》等国际条约和一般国际法，尊重北极国家的相关法律，并在保护北极生态环境、尊重北极土著人的利益和关切的前提下，以可持续的方式进行。

#### 1.参与北极航道开发利用

北极航道包括东北航道、西北航道和中央航道。全球变暖使北极航道有望成为国际贸易的重要运输干线。中国尊重北极国家依法对其国家管辖范围内海域行使立法权、执法权和司法权，主张根据《联合国海洋法公约》等国际条约和一般国际法管理北极航道，保障各国依法享有的航行自由以及利用北极航道的权利。中国主张有关国家应依据国际法妥善解决北极航道有关争议。

中国愿依托北极航道的开发利用，与各方共建“冰上丝绸之路”。中国鼓励企业参与北极航道基础设施建设，依法开展商业试航，稳步推进北极航道的商业化利用和常态化运行。中国重视北极航道的航行安全，积极开展北极航道研究，不断加强航运水文调查，提高北极航行、安全和后勤保障能力。切实遵守《极地水域船舶航行安全规则》，支持国际海事组织在北极航运规则制定方面发挥积极作用。主张在北极航道基础设施建设和运营方面加强国际合作。

#### 2.参与油气和矿产等非生物资源的开发利用

中国尊重北极国家根据国际法对其国家管辖范围内油气和矿产资源享有的主权权利，尊重北极地区居民的利益和关切，要求企业遵守相关国家的法律并开展资源开发风险评估，支持企业通过各种合作形式，在保护北极生态环境的前提下参与北极油气和矿产资源开发。

北极富含地热、风能等清洁能源。中国致力于加强与北极国家的清洁能源合作，推动与北极国家在清洁能源开发的技术、人才和经验方面开展交流，探索清洁能源的供应和替代利用，实现低碳发展。

### 3.参与渔业等生物资源的养护和利用

鱼类资源受气候变化等因素影响出现向北迁移趋势，北冰洋未来可能成为新渔场。中国在北冰洋公海渔业问题上一贯坚持科学养护、合理利用的立场，主张各国依法享有在北冰洋公海从事渔业资源研究和开发利用活动的权利，同时承担养护渔业资源和保护生态系统的义务。

中国支持就北冰洋公海渔业管理制定有法律拘束力的国际协定，支持基于《联合国海洋法公约》建立北冰洋公海渔业管理组织或出台有关制度安排。中国致力于加强对北冰洋公海渔业资源的调查与研究，适时开展探捕活动，建设性地参与北冰洋公海渔业治理。中国愿加强与北冰洋沿岸国合作研究、养护和开发渔业资源。中国坚持保护北极生物多样性，倡导透明合理地勘探和使用北极遗传资源，公平公正地分享和利用遗传资源产生的惠益。

### 4.参与旅游资源开发

北极旅游是新兴的北极活动，中国是北极游客的来源国之一。中国支持和鼓励企业与北极国家合作开发北极旅游资源，主张不断完善北极旅游安全、保险保障和救援保障体系，切实保障各国游客的安全。坚持对北极旅游从业机构与人员进行培训和监管，致力于提高中国游客的北极环保意识，积极倡导北极的低碳旅游、生态旅游和负责任旅游，推动北极旅游业可持续发展。

中国坚持在尊重北极地区居民和土著人的传统和文化，保护其独特的生活方式和价值观，以及尊重北极国家为加强北极地区居民能力建设、促进经济社会发展、提高教育和医疗水平所作努力的前提下，参与北极资源开发利用，使北极地区居民和土著人成为北极开发的真正受益者。

#### （四）积极参与北极治理和国际合作

中国主张构建和完善北极治理机制。坚持依法规范、管理和监督中国公民、法人或者其他组织的北极活动，努力确保相关活动符合国际法并尊重有关国家在环境保护、资源养护和可持续利用方面的国内法，切实加强中国北极对外政策和事务的统筹协调。在此基础上，中国积极参与北极国际治理，坚持维护以《联合国宪章》和《联合国海洋法公约》为核心的现行北极国际治理体系，努力在北极国际规则的制定、解释、适用和发展中发挥建设性作用，

维护各国和国际社会的共同利益。中国主张稳步推进北极国际合作。加强共建“一带一路”倡议框架下关于北极领域的国际合作，坚持共商、共建、共享原则，重点开展以政策沟通、设施联通、贸易畅通、资金融通、民心相通为主要内容的务实合作，包括加强与北极国家发展战略对接、积极推动共建经北冰洋连接欧洲的蓝色经济通道、积极促进北极数字互联互通和逐步构建国际性基础设施网络等。中方愿与各方以北极为纽带增进共同福祉、发展共同利益。

在全球层面，中国积极参与全球环境、气候变化、国际海事、公海渔业管理等领域的规则制定，依法全面履行相关国际义务。中国不断加强与各国和国际组织的环保合作，大力推进节能减排和绿色低碳发展，积极推动全球应对气候变化进程与合作，坚持公平、共同但有区别的责任原则和各自能力原则，推动发达国家履行在《联合国气候变化框架公约》《京都议定书》《巴黎协定》中作出的承诺，为发展中国家应对气候变化提供支持。中国建设性地参与国际海事组织事务，积极履行保障海上航行安全、防止船舶对海洋环境造成污染等国际责任。中国主张加强国际海事技术合作，在国际海事组织框架内寻求全球协调一致的海运温室气体减排解决方案。中国积极参与北冰洋公海渔业管理问题相关谈判，主张通过制定有法律拘束力的国际协定管理北冰洋公海渔业资源，允许在北冰洋公海开展渔业科学研究和探捕活动，各国依据国际法享有的公海自由不受影响。

在区域层面，中国积极参与政府间北极区域性机制。中国是北极理事会正式观察员，高度重视北极理事会在北极事务中发挥的积极作用，认可北极理事会是关于北极环境与可持续发展等问题的主要政府间论坛。中国信守申请成为北极理事会观察员时所作各项承诺，全力支持北极理事会工作，委派专家参与北极理事会及其工作组和特别任务组的活动，尊重北极理事会通过的《北极海空搜救合作协定》《北极海洋油污预防与反应合作协定》《加强北极国际科学合作协定》。中国支持通过北极科技部长会议等平台开展国际合作。

在多边和双边层面，中国积极推动在北极各领域的务实合作，特别是大力开展在气候变化、科考、环保、生态、航道和资源开发、海底光缆建设、人文交流和人才培养等领域的沟通与合作。中国主张在北极国家与域外国家之间建立合作伙伴关系，已与所有北极国家开展北极

事务双边磋商。2010年，中美建立了海洋法和极地事务年度对话机制。自2013年起，中俄持续举行北极事务对话。2012年，中国与冰岛签署《中华人民共和国政府与冰岛共和国政府关于北极合作的框架协议》，这是中国与北极国家缔结的首份北极领域专门协议。中国重视发展与其他北极域外国家之间的合作，已同英国、法国开展双边海洋法和极地事务对话。2016年，中国、日本、韩国启动北极事务高级别对话，推动三国在加强北极国际合作、开展科学研究和探索商业合作等方面交流分享相关政策、实践和经验。

中国支持各利益攸关方共同参与北极治理和国际合作。支持“北极- 对话区域”、北极圈论坛、“北极前沿”、中国- 北欧北极研究中心等平台在促进各利益攸关方交流合作方面发挥作用。支持科研机构和企业发挥自身优势参与北极治理，鼓励科研机构与外国智库、学术机构开展交流和对话，支持企业依法有序参与北极商业开发和利用。

#### （五）促进北极和平与稳定

北极的和平与稳定是各国开展各类北极活动的重要保障，符合包括中国在内的世界各国的根本利益。中国主张和平利用北极，致力于维护和促进北极的和平与稳定，保护北极地区人员和财产安全，保障海上贸易、海上作业和运输安全。中国支持有关各方依据《联合国宪章》《联合国海洋法公约》等国际条约和一般国际法，通过和平方式解决涉北极领土和海洋权益争议，支持有关各方维护北极安全稳定的努力。中国致力于加强与北极国家在海空搜救、海上预警、应急响应、情报交流等方面的国际合作，妥善应对海上事故、环境污染、海上犯罪等安全挑战。

#### 结束语

北极的未来关乎北极国家的利益，关乎北极域外国家和全人类的福祉，北极治理需要各利益攸关方的参与和贡献。作为负责任的大国，中国愿本着“尊重、合作、共赢、可持续”的基本原则，与有关各方一道，抓住北极发展的历史性机遇，积极应对北极变化带来的挑战，共同认识北极、保护北极、利用北极和参与治理北极，积极推动共建“一带一路”倡议涉北极合作，积极推动构建人类命运共同体，为北极的和平稳定和可持续发展作出贡献。