Arctic Security: Power Shifts and Transformational Change

Workshop Report

Prepared by: Jennifer Spence, Christopher Conway

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Fridtjof Nansen
Institute

About this Report

This report is based on insights from a one-day workshop co-hosted by the Arctic Initiative at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI) that took place at the Harvard Kennedy School on October 6, 2025. The workshop brought together security and foreign policy experts with Arctic specialists to explore how global dynamics are shaping Arctic security futures. Through structured discussions and scenario planning, participants assessed key drivers of change, identified critical uncertainties, and mapped plausible pathways for the region out to 2050. This workshop followed the Oslo Arctic Security Conference hosted by FNI on September 18, 2025.

We did not seek to reach consensus amongst participants on the issues being discussed; this report is simply an overview of notable ideas, issues, and questions that emerged from the discussion.

Introduction

The international order is in transition and projected to become increasingly multipolar amid intensifying great power competition and fragmentation. These shifts carry implications across domains as strategic competitors engage globally, regionally, nationally, and sub-nationally.

The Arctic is increasingly implicated in these developments. The Arctic, often called a "canary in the coal mine" for planetary change, is also emerging as a bellwether for some of the trajectories of global security transitions, including shifting alliances and new forms of confrontation. The long-held notion of "Arctic exceptionalism," which imagined the region as insulated from broader geopolitical tensions, has come under increasing strain.

Cooperative frameworks in the Arctic have withstood earlier tests, including episodes of militarization and regional crises such as the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea and parts of Ukraine's Donbas in 2014. Yet Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a decisive turning point. This led to the temporary suspension of cooperation with Russia through the Arctic Council and has left regional governance strained, with core institutions still adapting to this altered geopolitical landscape.

Efforts to sustain cooperation on discrete policy issues, such as science, fisheries, and maritime management, has continued in some cases; however, U.S.-Russian maritime and scientific collaboration is struggling, while Russo-Norwegian fisheries cooperation is also at risk. Longstanding collaborative mechanisms, once symbols of pragmatic engagement, are coming under pressure.

Against this backdrop, military tensions have increased. Sweden and Finland's accessions to NATO in 2023 and 2024 respectively have significantly added to existing tensions between Russia and the other Arctic nations. Russia maintains an active posture in its Arctic zone, seeking to deter what it claims is NATO aggression by testing Nordic countries' defenses with drones and fishing vessels while mapping and disrupting critical undersea infrastructure across Arctic chokepoints.

Popular coverage of Arctic geopolitics often simplifies complex dynamics, favoring sensationalist narratives of competition and confrontation over grounded analysis. Security, foreign policy, and Arctic experts have a clear value-add here, reintegrating nuance and regional and technical expertise into conversations about the Arctic's future.

The workshop aimed to:

1. Assess the drivers of change and implications for the Arctic security environment through 2050.
2. Explore the characteristics of the evolving security environment and implications for instruments of power and influence (diplomatic, informational, economic, military, science).
3. Present and debate plausible pathways for Arctic security over the next 25 years.
4. Identify critical uncertainties, including the future of the rules-based international order, the pace of systemic change, and the role of foundational changes such as climate change or endemic economic instability.
5. Generate insights that support future research and collaborative outputs.

The workshop agenda is included in **Appendix 1**.

Key Takeaways

The Changing Geopolitical Landscape

Participants noted how the Arctic is no longer insulated from major changes in global geopolitics as the international security environment becomes less stable. More actors are seeking an Arctic presence, complicating an already complex picture.

- **The rules-based international order is being challenged in the Arctic as elsewhere.** Many of the governance structures that previously relied on this international order are experiencing unprecedented uncertainty. States are increasing their military activity in the Arctic. Most activity right now is happening in the Barents Sea, where Russia perceives itself as fighting a sub-threshold conflict with the NATO alliance. Russian drones, fishing boats, and spy vessels are testing NATO's Nordic flank, while Russia and China are conducting joint exercises off Alaska.

- **Democracies and autocracies alike are adapting to a new era of "sharp power,"** in which countries increasingly employ zero-sum, punitive statecraft that often mobilizes dependency as leverage**.** States are focusing more on exercising antagonistic power, using sanctions, sub-threshold activity, and information manipulation to achieve their aims. In reaction to Russian and Chinese military posturing in the Arctic, the other Arctic nations are pushing back. Russia in turn is concerned that NATO threatens its Arctic zone and is strengthening what it argues are deterrence measures against the alliance. These moves are undermining existing Arctic governance structures that have been based on norms of peaceful cooperation since the end of the Cold War.

- **Geopolitics is also becoming more nakedly transactional and mercantilist.** Under President Donald Trump, U.S. foreign policy has become more transactional, rather than isolationist. "America First" and "Peace Through Strength" now undergird every area of U.S. international engagement. Addressing climate change is no longer a U.S. priority; indeed, the United States is now actively undermining efforts to combat the effects of climate change worldwide. The U.S. Arctic strategy now appears to focus on securing critical mineral resources and strategic chokepoints. Greenland represents both, and Trump has not ruled out using force to acquire it. This has harmed U.S.-Denmark bilateral ties and wider relations with the European Union (EU). The world is in a "deals era," threatening existing structures built on enduring commitment and long-term relationships. At the same time, this leaves open potential opportunities for multilateral governance provided it is perceived as aligning with U.S. interests as presently defined.

- **Russia and China signal Arctic unity, but competing ambitions remain.** The two nations are cooperating more closely than ever before in the northern Pacific, having recently conducted joint exercises off Chukotka and in the Bering Strait, as well as joint bomber patrols into Alaskan airspace. At the same time, the Russo-Chinese "partnership" is not unlimited as the two sides claim. Russia is especially wary of Chinese encroachment in what it perceives as its own Arctic sphere of influence. Russia views China as a necessary partner in developing its Arctic zone, but Chinese investors are heedful of perceived economic risks.

- **An increasing number of non-Arctic states are interested in having an Arctic footprint.** Russia wants the BRICS powers more involved in the High North. Turkey has signed the Svalbard Treaty and is considering how its deeper involvement might secure its access to Arctic resources. India is casting the Himalayas a "third pole" and is positioning itself as a growing scientific power. Participants called

this “Arctic FOMO”: fear of missing out on undefined riches or status purportedly offered by a sizable Arctic presence, and a desire to be seen influencing Arctic events on the world stage. Many actors now vie for status and increasingly see the Arctic as a kind of prize to be won. This is likely to create future tensions.

- **Arctic newcomers are not always clear on what they want in the Arctic.** Interest in the Arctic is growing among a broader set of states and actors, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and India. In some cases, Arctic states are having to explain to these incoming states and actors what the issues and dynamics are in the Arctic to help inform what their own interests in the Arctic *should be*. Lack of strategic clarity may cause conflicts, but this same gray zone may create chances for creative cooperation and compromise.
- **The EU’s Arctic posture is ambiguous and inconsistent.** It exerts major influence on Arctic economies and environmental governance through regulations on energy, climate, and scientific research; however, the region is not treated as a strategic priority. Internal divisions among member states, ranging from differing energy dependencies to Denmark’s sensitivities around EU engagement with Greenland, further dilute coherence. Meanwhile, several non-Arctic EU member states are active in Arctic science.

Governance and Institutions

- **The idea of Arctic exceptionalism is over**. There are geopolitical changes arising from ongoing conflicts outside the Arctic. That is, competition within the Arctic is not the inevitable outgrowth of “great power competition,” but an extension of ongoing conflicts rooted in Europe’s security architecture and China’s ambitions to fashion itself as a global power. External politics and security dialectics increasingly dictate the tenor of Arctic engagements.
- **The Arctic is now more heterogeneous, conceptually and geographically.** Climate change impacts vary in speed and severity for different parts of the Arctic. The Russian, Nordic, Alaskan, and Canadian Arctic communities have diverse ways of life, experiences, customs, and priorities. Arctic actors do not necessarily think in terms of a unified Arctic space. Russo-Chinese activity off Chukotka, for example, does not have the same significance for Norway or Finland as it does for the United States and Canada. This has ramifications for the continued viability of pan-Arctic institutions, such as the Arctic Council, and will need to be factored into conversations about its future.
- **The Arctic Council is not working as it should – serious change is needed.** If the Arctic Council were created today, the structure of its working groups, procedures, and functions would all be different. The Council must either adapt its format or its expectations. As of now, its activities are limited to the working level and progress is slow and uncertain. Even this limited activity will likely become increasingly challenging if Russia-Western relations remain deadlocked.
- **Few are willing or able to form the alliances needed for Arctic governance.** There are considerable divergences between the United States and other Western states, which preclude easy cooperation in the Arctic, especially related to the issues of climate change and sustainable development. Furthermore, the Russo-Chinese partnership is not ironclad. The Arctic is now the clearest tension point between the two countries, as Russia remains nervous about Chinese pretensions to naval power projection in what it regards as its internal waters and natural sphere of influence. Rather

than large multinational blocs facing off against each other, there is a process of fragmentation into smaller, "mini-lateral" relationships.

- **It would be a win to keep the Arctic Eight together in a multilateral format.** Establishing a "like-minded" Arctic Seven excluding Russia, or even an Arctic Six without the United States, would likely result in unforeseen second order effects. Meaningful Arctic governance is impossible without Russia and the United States and excluding them entirely risks prematurely closing avenues for future collaboration. Other Arctic states should endeavour to keep these two engaged as far as possible in anticipation of future opportunities to more substantively re-engage. Sustained patience will be essential to outlast governments that remain unwilling to engage with multilateral governance frameworks.
- **Informal bodies have an ever-clearer value-add in bringing parties together.** Fora like the Arctic Circle Assembly (ACA), Arctic Frontiers, and Arctic Encounter are hosting more dialogues. Since there is currently less formal dialogue between governments, these alternative venues are providing important platforms to advance Arctic policy issues. It will be interesting to follow how these fora foster dialogue in the future and whether informal formats may provide useful alternative or complementary functions to formal structures like the Arctic Council.

The Security-Economy-Climate Nexus

- **Competition in the Arctic is likely to remain low-level and non-kinetic.** Conflict in the High North is unlikely to go "hot." There are very few places where allies can or would be willing to put boots on the ground. Armed conflict between states in the Arctic remains highly unlikely.
- **Climate change is driving increased interest in economic development with little consideration of the risks.** U.S. rejection of climate action has prompted global backsliding on climate adaptation and mitigation. This leads to a widespread assumption that the Arctic will imminently be more accessible for resource development, shipping, and other economic activities. Russia, for example, sees potential growth in agricultural land reclaimed from thawed permafrost and increased shipping volume through the Northern Sea Route. However, climate change will have much more complex and variable effects on the accessibility of the Arctic, and, overall, the region remains vulnerable to, and poorly prepared for, the types of developments that many actors anticipate.
- **Private actors could play a more important role in Arctic affairs.** Corporations and ultra-high-net-worth individuals now command statecraft-level capabilities in logistics, computing, space, and resource extraction. As commercial and state interests converge in a more mercantilist age, these private actors may play an outsized role in the Arctic's future. Russian oil and gas companies, Chinese investment firms, and U.S. and Canadian mining corporations are often the first agents of national expansion in the Arctic. Involving them in new governance solutions will be unavoidable.
- **Striving for a "boring Arctic" will open space for multilateral collaboration in future.** The less existential an issue is, the more room there will be for cooperation. If corporations are major elements of national power, they require a stable Arctic for investments to bear fruit. Proceeding from this understanding may help Arctic states resolve or suspend disagreements for the sake of mutual benefit. At the same time, this approach carries risks if economic development becomes the focus of cooperation at the expense of fragile Arctic lands and waters.

- **Geographical and logistical issues will limit the rate of resource extraction.** Mining and pipeline projects will continue to face local resistance, ecological risks, and high costs, while new Arctic sea routes are hindered by political uncertainty and lack of infrastructure. Progress in Arctic resource extraction will be incremental rather than exponential. Nevertheless, as melting sea ice and technological advances expand access, competition over exploration and extraction is likely to intensify in contested areas.
- **Structural factors inhibit investment in Arctic infrastructure.** Despite growing interest in Arctic security and resources, the region suffers from a significant infrastructure deficit. Even where economic potential exists, major gaps in basic infrastructure, the high cost of doing business, concerns about environmental impacts, and land use conflicts make major investments challenging. The chronic impacts of climate change (e.g. permafrost thaw, coastal erosion, and extreme weather events) create further challenges for Arctic infrastructure, while demographic decline, population aging, and net out-migration across many parts of the Arctic limit opportunities for sustainable development.

Securitization of the Arctic and Emerging Technologies

- **States will continue investing in Arctic defense infrastructure.** A significant proportion of Russia's nuclear enterprise lies in its Arctic zone, including the testing, building, and housing of nuclear weapons as well as its nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet. Other Arctic states and NATO have increased their investment in defense infrastructure in response with a stated emphasis on domain awareness and deterrence. This trend is not likely to dissipate any time soon.
- **Investments in defense have implications for Arctic communities.** Rising defense spending and growing military activity in the Arctic are reshaping local realities. This could have positive effects when communities are engaged in planning and opportunities for dual-use infrastructure are identified. However, rapid military buildup can also be a source of tension, especially between governments and Indigenous Peoples. If relations between Arctic communities and national governments deteriorate, this could constitute an additional challenge for Arctic governance moving forward.
- **Emerging technologies present opportunities and risks.** Emerging technologies are transforming both the nature of security challenges and the capacities of state and non-state actors. The rise of autonomous and unmanned systems, such as unmanned surface vessels (USVs) and underwater vehicles (UUVs), expand military reach in harsh Arctic environments and alter deterrence strategies. Hybrid threats involving undersea cables, drones, and infrastructure mapping are increasing, underscoring how technological tools can amplify gray zone activities. At the same time, advances in quantum computing, enhanced connectivity, and the growing influence of tech entrepreneurs introduce new actors and uncertainties in the Arctic. These developments blur traditional boundaries between military, commercial, and civilian domains, making technological change a central driver of both risk and opportunity in the future governance of the region.

Trust, Dialogue, and the Promise of Science Diplomacy

Participants frequently advocated for the potential of science diplomacy as a foundation upon which to build pathways to future cooperation. Some priorities raised in the workshop included:

- **Scientific cooperation should inform decision-making and maintain lines of communication.** Regardless of politics, Arctic states require high-quality empirical data to understand the rapid changes taking place in the region and inform decision-making. For example, conducting research on climate change in the Arctic without data from Russia, which is close to 50% of the Arctic, provides an incomplete picture. Science diplomacy can also assist with keeping the lines of communication open and, when appropriate, sustaining relationships in specific spheres. Governments recognize the role of researchers in diplomacy and acknowledge the importance of these relationships as a foundation for future collaboration.
- **Cooperation should focus on specific issues and areas.** Arctic actors should seek out "non-existential" zones of collaboration. These areas could include fisheries, scientific data-sharing, shipping management, emissions control, and engagement of transnational Indigenous Peoples. The arrangements could also be geographically limited to specific places, such as Svalbard or the Bering Strait, where mechanisms for cooperation exist.
- **Third parties can play a critical role in trust-building.** Independent third parties, such as the Arctic Initiative and FNI, can position themselves neutrally in a way governments cannot. These types of organizations could create opportunities for trust building with Arctic leaders to find common zones of interest and working arrangements to ensure stable Arctic governance.

Strategic Pathway Forward

How can governments and civil society actors contribute to a pragmatic, adaptive system of cooperation that is resilient to broader geopolitical strains? Workshop participants generated the following suggestions (Please note: There was no attempt to reach consensus on these suggestions, and the list reflects a range of opinions).

For Governments:

1. **Build on current areas of cooperation, especially fisheries management.** Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, fisheries management has been one of the only zones of Russia-West cooperation to survive. Currently, Norway and Russia jointly administer fishing quotas in the Barents Sea through the Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission. Though this arrangement is experiencing increasing strain, it has not broken. The Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement has also survived. These resilient formats may offer models from which to enable broader Arctic governance.
2. **Identify common interests in research collaboration and science diplomacy.** Regardless of politics, all sides require high-quality empirical data for research and decision-making. This will become especially pertinent as the Arctic environment continues to transform with climate change. Science diplomacy remains an important tool during this period of increased tension and geopolitical uncertainty. During the Cold War, trust between the American and Soviet academies helped produce the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Iran nuclear deal would not have happened without trust between the signatories' top scientists. Governments often appoint scientists to positions of access and influence and this creates opportunities to leverage these relationships to expand engagement and cooperation, when appropriate.

3. **Develop a strategy to adapt the Arctic Council's structure to new realities.** If the Arctic Council was created today, it would look significantly different. A new format is needed. Commentators have proposed alternative governance approaches, such as the Arctic Seven or Arctic Six (Canada and the Nordic nations), but these have been largely dismissed because of the significant role that both Russia and the United States play in the region. Scholars and policymakers must continue to explore and develop Arctic governance mechanisms that meet the moment.

4. **Scale up horizon-scanning to prepare for future shocks.** Recent geopolitical shocks and their ramifications have taken the Arctic policy community by surprise and undermined the foundations of existing multilateral institutions. To anticipate future shocks and enable Arctic actors to prepare and mitigate their effects, Arctic horizon-scanning should be prioritized. This should consider the impacts of sub-national, national, regional, and global dynamics and political, social, economic, and demographic change in the region. For example, domestic elections will determine Norway's approach to deep-sea mining and the U.S. stance on developing Alaska's oil and gas, while the ambitions of Arctic states are likely to be frustrated by demographic decline. Arctic horizon-scanning needs to take a broad view of the drivers of change.

For Civil Society:

1. **Engage more deeply with the security community.** There is a gap between the approaches of Arctic researchers and security practitioners. Researchers examine "softer" deescalation strategies, which security practitioners often view more critically in favor of bolstering deterrence. By engaging more with military officials, Arctic experts can better understand practitioners' perspectives, while communicating the strategic value of maintaining collaboration with adversaries such as Russia and China. This will improve researchers' capacity to provide useful, timely policy recommendations and add to the legitimacy of their conclusions. Simultaneously, this dialogue would deepen practitioners' understanding of the Arctic beyond their immediate security concerns.

2. **Bridge the North American and Nordic Arctic analytical communities.** Security dynamics vary significantly across the Arctic. While Russia girds itself for a low-intensity war with NATO in the Barents Sea, the Bering Strait remains comparatively calmer. Scholars from different regions of the Arctic often grapple with different problems, especially in the security field. The gap between North American and Nordic researchers needs to be closed through closer scholarly exchanges and dialogues.

3. **Develop contingencies for future engagement and cooperation.** Arctic practitioners and scholars should devise contingency plans that can be activated when conditions exist for increased multilateral engagement and cooperation, when appropriate. These plans should include identifying priority issue areas for renewed collaboration and outlining strategies to compartmentalize security problems from broader Arctic collaboration.

Conclusion

The Arctic is becoming a mirror of broader global transformations: great power rivalry, the erosion of multilateral norms, and the shifting balance between security, economy, and climate imperatives. Participants agreed that global competition is now extending into domains once insulated from geopolitics. Yet the discussion also underscored areas of resilience and opportunity, from enduring fisheries cooperation to the promise of science diplomacy and informal multilateral formats that keep communication channels open as official mechanisms falter. The emerging picture is of a region at an inflection point: more complex and fragmented, but by no means beyond saving.

The Arctic Initiative-FNI workshop convened an exploratory discussion to bring disparate expertise together, integrating technical and academic insights with the realities of regional security developments. Throughout the workshop questions were raised for various Arctic actors. **Appendix 2** to this report presents a collection of these questions that could inform future discussions, analyses, and decisions related to Arctic security and governance.

Appendix 1: Workshop Agenda

08:30 – 09:00 | Opening and Context Setting

- Welcome remarks & safety briefing – Jennifer Spence
- Debrief from Oslo Arctic Security Conference – Iselin Németh Winther & Andreas Østhagen
- Workshop overview – Jennifer Spence

09:00 – 10:30 | Session 1 – The Security Environment: From Rules-Based Order to Great Power Competition

- Expert scene-setters
    - Maureen Page on global shifts (10 minutes)
    - Andreas Østhagen on Arctic implications (10 minutes)
- Plenary discussion moderated by Sherri Goodman
- Group reflection: initial signals for Arctic security futures.

10:30 – 10:45 | Coffee Break

10:45 – 12:15 | Session 2 – Major Power Dynamics: Russia, China, EU, India

- Lightning talks (4 × 5 min)
    - Geir Hønneland on Russia,
    - Rana Mitter on China
    - Andreas Raspotnik on EU
    - Spenser Warren on India
- Expanded discussion moderated by Henry Lee
    - How global ambitions and competition play out in the Arctic.
    - Convergences/divergences among major actors.
    - Implications for regional governance and security.
- Group reflection: What patterns signal future trajectories?

12:15 – 13:00 | Lunch (45 minutes)

13:00 – 15:00 | Session 3 – U.S. Foreign and Security Policy

- Expert scene-setters
    - Paula Dobriansky on U.S. global strategy (10 minutes) - VIRTUAL
    - David Balton on U.S. Arctic posture (10 minutes)
- Plenary discussion moderated by John Holdren
- Group reflection: key insights and uncertainties captured for foresight work.

15:00 – 15:15 | Coffee Break

15:15 – 16:15 | Session 4 – Synthesis and Pathways
Objective: Consolidate insights from the day into a set of drivers, uncertainties, and plausible pathways for Arctic security.

- Expert key takeaways (4 x 5 minutes)
    - Halla Logadóttir
    - Arild Moe
    - Karen Kosinski
    - Hans Peder Kirkegaard
- Plenary discussion moderated by Jennifer Spence
    - Which insights resonate across sessions?
    - What 2–3 plausible pathways emerge for Arctic security between now and 2050?
    - Where are the biggest disagreements or blind spots?
    - What are the top drivers, uncertainties, and implications?

16:15 – 16:30 | Closing Reflections

- Roundtable moderated by Jennifer Spence: If the Arctic is the canary in the coal mine, what is it telling us?
- Workshop outputs Jennifer Spence and Andreas Østhagen.

Appendix 2: Key Questions

One of the workshop's aims was to identify critical questions to help drive informed and actionable research and policy proposals to stabilize the Arctic security environment and encourage responsible governance. A wide range of actors are implicated in achieving potential Arctic futures. Here are some questions to pursue stemming from conversations held during the workshop.

For Diplomacy Practitioners

Policymaking

1. To what extent is it realistic to preserve the Arctic Eight structure?
2. How might the "Arctic Seven" coordinate effectively without institutionalizing exclusionary blocs that undermine eventual reintegration of the Arctic Eight?
3. What about some coalition among the Arctic Six (minus Russia and United States)? Are the A6 enough?
4. How can Arctic and North Atlantic defense cooperation evolve to address divergent strategic priorities between the Nordic, North American, and European theaters?
5. How can election cycles and domestic political turnover in Arctic states be mitigated to ensure continuity in long-term Arctic diplomacy?

Implementation

1. Which multilateral formats show promise as a means to sustain dialogue between Arctic states?
2. What diplomatic pathways could allow limited cooperation with Russia on safety, science, and environmental management without legitimizing aggression elsewhere?
3. To what extent can science diplomacy be leveraged to maintain channels of communication among Arctic and near-Arctic states during geopolitical crises?
4. In what ways can subnational and Indigenous diplomacy (e.g., through the Saami Council or Inuit Circumpolar Council) contribute to Arctic engagement?
5. How can local or Indigenous diplomatic mechanisms, like the Saami Council or Inuit Circumpolar Council, provide models for peaceful negotiation?
6. How might "peace planning" for eventual re-engagement with Russia be operationalized within existing diplomatic frameworks? Is "peace planning" a realistic exercise?

For Security and Military Practitioners

1. What are militaries' strategic priorities in the Arctic in peacetime and wartime?
2. What communication mechanisms could ensure crisis management between NATO and Russian forces operating in proximate Arctic domains? What models exist that could be revived or adapted for the current Arctic security context?

3. How do militaries assess the extent to which emerging technologies will alter military activities and deterrence in the Arctic?
4. What are the conflict risks of deep-sea mining in disputed or poorly regulated Arctic seabed zones? Has scenario planning been conducted for such situations?
5. What is the world going to look like when NATO members all are spending 5% of their GDP on the military? How will this affect the Arctic security environment?
6. What tools can be used to systematically monitor hybrid activity (e.g., undersea cable mapping, vessel tracking) while preserving transparency?

For Technical Experts and Researchers

Conceptual

1. Does it make sense to talk about the Arctic, or Nordic, North America, and Northern Russia? What are the main cleavages dividing the region?
2. To what extent is the Arctic an arena where great power competition plays out versus being the cause of this great power competition?
3. How might the decline of the rules-based international order impact a united governance system in the Arctic?
4. How can Arctic security research better communicate uncertainty and risk to policymakers to avoid alarmism or fatalism?

Research directions

1. What are the best ways to adapt academic research on the Arctic to be able to provide concrete policy recommendations?
2. How can collaborative science projects be structured to rebuild trust among researchers from states with strained diplomatic relations?
3. What role can shared technical data (sea ice, shipping, permafrost, and infrastructure vulnerability) play in preventing misperception or conflict among Arctic actors?
4. How can data-sharing protocols balance national security sensitivities with the need for transparency in Arctic research?
5. What metrics can quantify “trust” or “cooperation density” in Arctic governance networks, allowing researchers to assess where dialogue is fraying?
6. What lessons from Cold War-era environmental and nuclear cooperation can inform present efforts to depoliticize technical collaboration in the Arctic?
7. How can climate, energy, and security researchers co-develop models that anticipate how environmental change influences Arctic geopolitics?

8. What are the implications of Arctic permafrost thaw and shifting coastlines for existing territorial and economic boundaries?
9. How can scenario-planning methodologies used in climate foresight be adapted to geopolitical foresight?

Actor- and region-specific

1. What are current suggestions for reforming the Arctic Council? Which models offer the most potential for renewed multilateral engagement?
2. To what extent are current fisheries agreements holding up? How does this vary across the Arctic, and why?
3. If current trends continue, Russia is likely to weaken economically and demographically over time. How might this change Russia's behavior and activities in the Arctic?
4. What role is the United States likely to play in leading, or following, coalitions like an Arctic Seven framework in Russia's absence?
5. How does China's experience in the South China Sea inform its approach to Arctic security, particularly regarding freedom of navigation and resource claims? Will this allow us to anticipate future Chinese Arctic activity?
6. What is the potential for Sino-Russian divergence in the Arctic?
7. Can we anticipate a more united European approach to the Arctic given external pressure from Russia and its war on Ukraine?
8. How can the EU reconcile divergent Arctic interests among its members and observers—between environmental priorities and energy dependence?
9. To what extent is India's Arctic engagement motivated by climate–monsoon linkages and vulnerability to global sea-level rise?
10. Is there a concrete economic or security reason why non-Arctic states want to be included in Arctic governance/security structures?

For Private Sector Actors

1. Are private sector actors conscious of their role as geopolitical players in the Arctic? Are the security implications of major energy/mining projects and shipping routes understood by commercial operators?
2. How might public–private partnerships support Arctic infrastructure resilience without militarizing or politicizing development?
3. How can energy, mining, and shipping firms contribute to transparent reporting and verification mechanisms that build trust among states?
4. How can the private sector participate in science diplomacy initiatives (e.g., through data-sharing or joint research)?

For Legal Experts

1. To what extent does Russia's definition of the NSR as "internal waters" conflict with UNCLOS? Might resistance to this designation prompt Russia to leave UNCLOS or otherwise undermine Arctic maritime governance frameworks?
2. To what extent does the U.S. refusal to ratify UNCLOS impact attempts at joint legal regimes for shipping and maritime activity in the Arctic?
3. How does UNCLOS treat emerging technologies such as autonomous vessels (USVs, UUVs)?
4. What precedents from fisheries, environmental protection, or arms control regimes could inform laws relating to Arctic conflict-prevention?
5. How might a "moratorium" or precautionary legal mechanism for high-risk Arctic activities (e.g., seabed mining, geoengineering) be structured?

For Indigenous Peoples and Local Governments

1. How can Indigenous Peoples and local governments participate meaningfully in Arctic security and governance dialogues beyond symbolic inclusion?
2. How can Indigenous leaders and Arctic communities foster trust-building across national borders?
3. What role can Indigenous diplomacy play in maintaining communication channels when state-level relations are frozen? For example, what can relationships between Russian and non-Russian Saami teach us?