

# Arctic security: evolution of Arctic security dynamics and prospect for a security regime in the Arctic

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**Abstract** The security dynamics in the Arctic since the Cold War has transitioned from militarization, to de-militarization, and to re-militarization. Under the circumstances of ongoing globalization and climate change, the Arctic states have accorded priority to the enhancement of military capacities in the region, with a view to safeguarding sovereign rights, ensuring navigation security of Arctic waterways, responding to contingencies and guaranteeing civil security. Such military capacity-building measures are otherwise interpreted as initiatives to resume arms race in the Arctic, which would be contributive to the security dilemma. Subject to the structural competition of the U.S. – Russia rivalry, there has long been an absence of a security regime in the Arctic. Nevertheless, the build-up of security regimes in the Arctic constitutes a major concern for the Arctic states, as well as for some extra-regional stakeholders. In the Arctic regional context, the ever-intensifying institutional cooperation in the domains of non-traditional and civil security lays the cornerstone for establishing confidence-building measures, and gives rise to the consensus that maintaining cooperation in the Arctic will be mutually rewarding for all.

**Keywords** Arctic security dynamics, Arctic security regime, NATO

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## 1 Introduction

The transformation of global geopolitical dynamics in the post-Cold War era evokes the debate over re-identifying the concept of security. It is undeniable that the reshaping of the concept of security exerts influences on the formation of security discourse in the Arctic. New security concepts pertinent to the Arctic emerge as well, which embody Arctic environmental security or societal security referring to the potential environmental hazards and cultural shock to indigenous communities challenged by the trend of globalization. The Arctic security referred to herein focuses nevertheless on the political and military aspects of the notion of security in view of the geographical particularity of the region. From geopolitical points of view, the world land power, Russia, and the sea power, the United States, encounter vis-à-vis in the Arctic Ocean. Both powers have long considered the Arctic as crucial to deploying strategic

strike installations and deterrence systems, such as missile defense and early warning systems, from the time of the Cold War until the present day. Meanwhile, climate change further enhances the strategic value of the Arctic and accelerates competition for Arctic sea routes, resources and rights to continental shelf. In this regard, it highlights the importance of evaluating the security situation in the Arctic. This article gives an overview of the evolution of Arctic security dynamics since the Cold War, analyzes the legitimacy, intent and capacities of extra-regional security organizations to intervene in Arctic security issues. Further, it explores the feasibility and possible channels for the build-up of security regimes in the Arctic.

## 2 “Militarization–de-militarization–re-militarization”: evolution of Arctic security dynamics since the Cold War

Awareness of the strategic value of the Arctic began in World War II, as reflected in a report by U.S. Army General Billy

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Mitchell to Congress in 1935, stating that “in the future, whoever holds Alaska will hold the world ... (the Arctic) is the most strategic place in the world”<sup>[1]</sup>. This judgment proved to be true over the course of the World War II. Early in the war, Adolf Hitler’s pre-emptive occupation of Norway forestalled the Allied intention to control the iron supply from Nordic Europe. While taking advantage of the Arctic waterways, the Allied convoys to Murmansk and the White Sea successfully delivered nearly 4 million tons of supplies, playing a key role in resisting German advances. A rare encroachment into the U.S. territory by a foreign power took place in the Northern Pacific (a sub-Arctic region) as well. Japanese forces once occupied Attu and Kiska islands in the western peripheries of the Aleutian Islands in 1942, posing a substantive threat to the U.S. mainland from both the North (the Aleutian Islands) and the West (the Hawaiian Islands). In addition, stations based in the Arctic provided meteorological data for military operations. The German armies established a number of weather stations in Spitsbergen, Jan Mayen and Greenland from 1941 to 1944; data from Allied weather stations were supportive as well to the Allied military operations, notably the Normandy Landing in 1944<sup>[2]</sup>.

During the Cold War, the Arctic turned into the frontline of the U.S.–U.S.S.R. military confrontation, and the regional security pattern was thus subordinate to the U.S.–U.S.S.R. global rivalry. Given the unique geostrategic characteristics of the Arctic Ocean, over which the straight-line distance between the northernmost point of the Eurasian Continent and North America measures only 2000 kilometers, the Arctic constitutes a shortcut for long-range surveillance, strategic strikes, and nuclear deterrence for both powers. As the Cold War hostilities intensified, deployed military hardware was further updated; fixed land-based strategic strike launching devices evolved into more flexible shipborne, airborne, submarine and space-based launching modes. The struggle for naval supremacy constituted the geo-strategic objective of the U.S.–U.S.S.R. competition as well, making the Arctic a highly militarized region for arms race<sup>[3]</sup>. Nevertheless, in light of the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) between the two superpowers and the signing of such precautionary regulations as the *U.S.–Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas (INCSEA)*<sup>[4]</sup> in 1972, the security situation in the Arctic remained in relative equilibrium during the Cold War, despite the absence of any security regime or arms control agreement.

It is assumed that the easing of U.S.–Russian tensions by the end of the Cold War provided a prerequisite and an impulse for initiating regional governance in the Arctic. The Arctic states, both Russia and the U.S. included, have reached the consensus that creating favorable conditions for effective cooperation and ceasing the arms race in the Arctic region fit the common interests for all. Based on this consensus, the *Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS)* founded in 1991, a non-binding agreement on environmental protection among the eight Arctic states, ultimately contributed to the formation of the Arctic regional governance regime under

the framework of the Arctic Council. In the meantime, the signing of arms control agreements and the establishment of confidence-building measures on a global scale further facilitated the process of de-militarization in the Arctic. For instance, the signing of the series of *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START)* between Russia and the U.S. beginning from 1991 has contributed to a substantial reduction of strategic offensive arms installed in the Arctic. The *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe*<sup>[5]</sup> (CFE) concluded by the end of the Cold War, mandated the destruction of excess weaponry and set ceilings on conventional arms deployment (e.g., tanks, armored combat vehicles, and combat aircraft) in the vast areas from the Atlantic to the Urals, thus covering the Nordic Arctic as well as the northwestern part of Russia. Meanwhile, confidence-building measures have been taken to ameliorate interstate security relations by increasing military transparency and reducing uncertainties. An example in point is the *Treaty on Open Skies*<sup>[6]</sup> under the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which allows unarmed aerial surveillance flights over the entire territory of its member states.

In the post-Cold War era, although the Arctic still constitutes a strategic location for mutual nuclear deterrence, both Russia and the U.S. have been dedicated to the de-militarizing process in the Arctic by means of decreasing military expenditures, cutting down the conventional armed forces and nuclear weaponry deployed in the Arctic, as well as reducing the frequency of Arctic-related military exercises. However, it should be noted that these arms control agreements and confidence-building measures that geographically cover the Arctic territories are aimed at lowering security threats, rather than totally eliminating them. Security issues have been excluded from the agenda-setting of Arctic regional cooperation since the very beginning, and all parties have failed to figure out an alternative option that could avoid repeating the Cold War tensions. The instability of the Arctic security situation is also reflected in its vulnerability to the influences of trans-regional and extra-regional factors, notably the impacts of climate change on the Arctic geopolitical environment, the fluctuations of U.S.–Russian relations that dominate the security order in the Arctic, as well as the spill-over effects of external geopolitical dynamics (e.g., the Ukrainian crisis) on the Arctic.

Since the first decade of the 21st century, the acceleration of climate change in the Arctic highlights the economic potential for resource development and sea-route utilization in the region. Under such circumstances, the Arctic states have accorded priorities to the enhancement of their military capacities in the region, with a view toward safeguarding sovereign rights, ensuring the navigation security of Arctic waterways, responding to contingencies and guaranteeing civil security. Such military capacity-building measures are otherwise interpreted as initiatives of the resumption of arms race in the Arctic, which could be contributive to the security dilemma. Russia’s planting its flag on the Arctic seabed in 2007 and the continuous spill-over

effects of the Ukrainian crisis on the Arctic since 2014 are two representative events that affect the current security situation in the Arctic.

Russia's planting its flag on the Arctic seafloor reflects Russia's attempt to breach its geographical limitations, to claim sovereign rights over the extension of its continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean and to send a signal of enhancing its Arctic naval supremacy. As a new vector of strategic development in both economic and military terms for Russia, an Arctic free of sea ice in the context of climate change would exacerbate the United States' and Europe's perceptions of security threats from Russia. The escalation of the Ukrainian crisis since 2014, however, raises questions about under which circumstances and by which means such extra-regional conflicts could have spillover effects on the Arctic regional security situation. Admittedly, the strategic value of the Arctic to Russia outweighs it to the other Arctic states, and Russia's Arctic development plans are more dependent on Western technologies, capital and markets. Thus, sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the European Union on investments and technological transfers to Russia's Arctic oil and gas industries have been used as punitive measures, forcing Russia to adjust its political stances. In response to the economic sanctions, Russia has further stepped up the efforts to modernize its Arctic military capacities. On one hand, as the U.S. and its allies have suspended functional cooperation with Russia in the Arctic economic domains, Russia's Arctic interests are forced to be more inclined to security considerations, as reflected in the document *Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security Efforts for the period up to 2020*<sup>[7]</sup> issued in 2013. This document proposed to maintain the necessary level of combat readiness of armed forces against existing and predictable military threats in the Arctic, as well as to ensure Russia's Arctic sovereign rights, including rights to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the continental shelf. On the other hand, Russia's *Military Doctrine* and *Maritime Doctrine* issued in 2014 and 2015, respectively, reiterate the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the major threat to its national security; Russia's nuclear deployment in its Arctic territories still provides an effective strategic deterrence despite the stagnation in Russia's weaponry upgrades and military reform since the Cold War due to its economic malaise. Russia's moves toward re-militarization in the Arctic, for all practical purposes, aim beyond the region and are meant to serve the needs of Russia's overall defense strategy.

The security dynamics of the Arctic since the Cold War has evolved from militarization to de-militarization, and to re-militarization. This transition is determined not only by the bilateral relations between the Arctic states, but also by the influences of the global geopolitical dynamics. For the Arctic states, especially the coastal ones, within the context of ongoing globalization and climate change, the defense of national security and the safeguarding of sovereign rights are rational justifications for re-militarization in the Arctic region.

### 3 Intervention of extra-regional organizations in the Arctic security issues: legitimacy, competence and intent

The re-intensification of interstate conflicts and the long-term absence of a security regime in the Arctic have left a certain political vacuum and opened the possibility of intervention by extra-regional organizations in Arctic security issues. Currently, certain Arctic states, due to geographical proximity, similarities in national defense policy and common security interests, have developed a number of bilateral and multilateral cooperative mechanisms on collective security and defense. Among these are the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Meanwhile, some of the Arctic states, especially the militarily disadvantaged Nordic ones, in accordance with their security concerns and defense needs, have sought to engage extra-regional organizations in security issues in the Arctic, which tends to further complicate the security dynamics in the region. It also triggers the debate over whether certain organizations such as NATO and OSCE, which entirely or partially geographically cover the Arctic territories, possess the legitimacy, competence and intent to tackle security issues in the Arctic.

Among the NATO member states, the U.S., Canada, Denmark, Norway and Iceland are the Arctic states. Scandinavian states that are dwarfed in terms of size and power by the key players in the region have voiced game-changing views in response to the spillover effects of the Ukrainian crisis on the Arctic. For instance, Norway appealed to NATO for a military presence in the High North to ensure practical deterrence against Russia. Sweden and Finland have expressed doubts over whether to remain neutral as non-aligned states and might resort to NATO as a collective security guarantor as well. Russia, to the contrary, has expressed strong opposition and questioned the legitimacy of NATO's possible involvement in the Arctic.

Article VI of the *North Atlantic Treaty*<sup>[8]</sup> refers to the geographic scope of NATO's operations, defined as "the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America or on the islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer". If any armed attack against one or more member states in Europe or North America occurs, accordingly to Article V of NATO's charter, "each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party(s) so attacked, ..., including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic Area".

The NATO terms simply define the southern boundary of its operational sphere, while barely referring to its northern peripheries, which could be literally interpreted as the geographical scope of NATO's operations being further extended northward to the North Pole. The Nordic states

especially littoral ones such as Norway, Denmark and Iceland, are beneficiary of NATO's collective defense provisions, and their national security strategy is highly dependent on and closely connected to NATO. NATO itself, since its founding, set up air bases in Keflavik, Iceland (withdrawn in 2006) and in Thule, Greenland (in operation up to the present). However, with the end of the Cold War, NATO's military presence in the High North has been weakened to some extent. A notable example is the Joint Headquarters North based in Stavanger, Norway, which was withdrawn in 2003 and replaced recently with an embranchment of the Allied Command Transformation (ACT)<sup>[9]</sup>. Nevertheless, NATO still constitutes a potential power in the Arctic region that should not be underestimated. If by any case Russia were to engage in military conflict with the Nordic states in the Arctic, it would be subject to counterattack from the collective defense of all NATO member states, which means that in terms of Arctic military strength, it would not be to Russia's advantage to do so.

In reality, NATO has been rather prudent and cautious with regard to interfering in Arctic issues. There have been the external pressures of Russia's opposition as well as internal obstacles from Canada, which argues that the Arctic can be managed by the Arctic states on their own under the framework of the Arctic Council and UNCLOS<sup>[10]</sup>. Challenges are posed as well regarding how to convince NATO's non-Arctic member states of the importance of engaging in the Arctic. NATO has never formally introduced any official Arctic policy document, and its Arctic-related conventional practices are relatively limited. Among these are the Cold Response<sup>[11]</sup>, a Norwegian-led military exercise that practices operating in cold-weather conditions with major participation of NATO member states, and NATO's Air Situation Data Exchange (ASDE) systems in cooperation with partner states such as Finland and Sweden. The above-mentioned exercises and practices emphasize the voluntary participation of member states, and weaken the leadership role of NATO.

How best to interpret NATO's prudence on its interference in Arctic security issues and its conservatism in military expenditures in the Arctic? Admittedly, the Arctic is no longer considered a foreign policy priority for the United States, which plays the leadership role in NATO. An Arctic free from conflicts would contribute to the realization of the U.S. global strategy to shift its focus to the Asia-Pacific regions. If NATO intervened in the Arctic in a proactive manner or expansively absorbed Sweden and Finland as member states, the regional balance of power would then become upset, compelling Russia to take countermeasures. These are risks that the United States is unwilling to bear. NATO's role in the Arctic could therefore be defined as an "over-the-horizon" existence and as the provisions of a de facto deterrent defense to its Arctic member states against potential threats from Russia. Firstly, the paramount objectives of NATO's military deployment in the High North are defense-oriented to ensure the security of the territorial waters and airspace of NATO's member states, especially the

Nordic ones. Secondly, as an expression of discontentment over its Nordic neighbor(s)' intention either to join NATO or attempt to engage NATO in Arctic affairs, Russia conducts military action in the Arctic by means of near-border airborne reconnaissance over its Nordic neighbors; these acts, however, are not aimed at bringing about direct confrontation with the U.S. Lastly, even if Russia behaved in a preemptive manner in the Arctic, NATO's military presence enables prompt response and effective mobilization of its armed forces based in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea, posing a deterrent against Russia's western hinterland.

OSCE is another regional security regime that geographically covers the entire Arctic territories and contains all Arctic states. It plays a role in disarmament, arms control and the establishment of confidence-building measures throughout the Pan-European region. The Istanbul Declaration and the Baku Declaration adopted in 2013 and 2014, respectively, by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly both touched upon Arctic security issues. The Istanbul Declaration "urges participating states to be aware of the fact that the economic potential of the Arctic, as well as new routes of transport, have opened up for new types of strategic and security policy opportunities and challenges, and that these challenges of overlapping claims might be a future security risk"<sup>[12]</sup>. While the Baku Declaration "notes the military escalation in the Arctic region in recent years", and "urges participating States to closely monitor the military presence in the Arctic region, be aware of the potential security and environmental risks and continue to strive for a zone of peace and stability in the Arctic"<sup>[13]</sup>. However, it should be noted that the Arctic is hardly considered as a priority for OSCE, whose organizational structure is relatively loose, and its decision-making is not legally-binding and requires unanimous consensus of all member states. Such factors limit the role of OSCE in the build-up of a security regime and the establishment of confidence-building measures in the Arctic.

In sum, with regard to the intervention in Arctic security issues by some multilateral security organizations that geographically cover the entire or partial Arctic territories, the Arctic states tend to behave rather cautious and take a "wait-and-see" approach. NATO, for instance, given the structural conflicts between Russia and the U.S., could hardly form a mechanism similar to a "NATO-Russia Dialogue on Arctic Security". NATO, whose role in the Arctic can be precisely defined as an "over-the-horizon" existence, exercises its obligations of collective defense in conformance with Article V of NATO's charter to guarantee the security of its Arctic member states. It does not pose an overwhelming threat to Russia, but maintains a certain level of deterrence, thus conserving a relative equilibrium and stability in the Arctic. Meanwhile, because of their loose institutional structure, lack of legally-binding enforcement, and inherent conflicts between the member states, the role in and influences on Arctic security issues of other international organizations or security frameworks, e.g. OSCE and the UN Security Council, remain rather restrained.

#### 4 Build-up of an Arctic regional security regime: prospects and possible channels

In the post-Cold War era, the states bordering the Arctic have sought to settle disputes over territorial sovereignty and maritime delimitation by means of negotiation; however, they failed to secure a security framework that covers the entire territories of the Arctic region. The current regional governance regime embodied in the Arctic Council has long been viewed as a non-binding regime devoid of legal commitments. Such a regime is incapable of handling security issues, considering the lingering geopolitical rivalries and mistrust between the U.S. and Russia that have not been eliminated by any reinforcement of the current Arctic cooperative regime. Both states have managed to exclude security issues from the agenda-setting for Arctic governance. For Russia, the Arctic is turning into a new vector of strategic development, especially in view of climate change. Russia seeks to consolidate its geopolitical advantages in the Arctic secured by its powerful Northern Fleet and to avert a reduction of its combat capability that might be constrained by the introduction of new arrangements on security or arms control. The primary interests of the U.S. in the Arctic involve exerting deterrence against major powers in the Northern Hemisphere and safeguarding freedom of navigation, especially for its naval vessels. Consequently, the United States also advocates excluding security issues from the Arctic Council's agenda. In view that security interests, as core national interests, remain difficult to reconcile or compromise, the decision-making mechanism required by "consensus"<sup>[14]</sup> adds to explain why security was omitted from the agenda-setting for Arctic regional cooperation since the very beginning.

In addition, the Arctic regional governance regime in its development process has absorbed the Arctic indigenous peoples as Permanent Participants and accepted certain extra-regional states, intergovernmental international organizations and non-governmental organization as Observers. The abovementioned actors become more concerned about Arctic functional cooperation in the domains of climate change, environmental protection, economic development and scientific research. If by any chance the military and security issues were included in the Arctic Council's agenda or if an "Arctic Security Council" were established, regional cooperation under the existing framework would be undermined. Still further, a mechanism similar to an "Arctic Security Council", if in place, might become paralyzed in the event of a crisis escalation, as occurred with the dysfunction of the NATO-Russia Council in the aftermaths of the Ukrainian crisis. This indicates that regimes dealing with military security issues could be counterproductive in the event of an interstate conflict. On the contrary, low-level cooperative mechanisms are more likely to survive and retain the last channels of communication and dialogue for the conflicting parties in times of strained relationships<sup>[15]</sup>.

Despite the aforementioned obstacles, the existing Arctic regional governance mechanism is attempting to introduce cooperative regimes in low politics, civil and normative security domains, and aims to promote the establishment of confidence-building measures, e.g., coordination of search and rescue (SAR). The *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic*<sup>[16]</sup> negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council, as the first legally-binding agreement concluded by consensus among the eight Arctic states, is committed to coordinating regional SAR response in the Arctic and demarcating the SAR responsibility of each state party, which "shall not prejudice the delimitation of any boundary between States or their sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction". The treaty is characterized by its quasi-military nature. On one hand, the SAR agencies are military or quasi-military authorities, including the Coast Guard, the Department of Defense and maritime administrations. The SAR agreement lays the groundwork for regular visits, joint training and exercises, and information exchange among the military departments of the signatory parties. On the other hand, the treaty defines the rules and protocols that should be followed concerning request for entry into the waters of a signatory party for the purposes of SAR operations. The party, upon receiving such a request for entry or transit, "shall immediately confirm such receipt" and "shall apply, in accordance of its law and international obligations, the most expeditious border crossing procedure possible". Such statements provide reference on what procedures and protocols should be taken in Arctic waters when it comes to the entry or transit of a (quasi) military vessel/aircraft to the water territories of other states. The entry into effect of SAR agreement is expected to further facilitate the coordination of security policy and integration of military resources of the Arctic states in soft/civil security cooperation. The topic of military security may be taboo within the Arctic Council, but as an analyst notes, "given that the SAR Agreement necessitates the coordination of the states' military, coast guard, police and transport service for rescue purposes, hard security may be entering into the agenda by stealth"<sup>[17]</sup>.

The Arctic Coast Guard Forum initiated by the member states of the Arctic Council serves as another example of a cooperative regime in low-politics domains. The Forum, defined as a cooperative initiative between nations with shared maritime interests in the Arctic<sup>[18]</sup> to ensure safety, security and stewardship of Arctic waters, is an unbinding framework aimed at strengthening trans-regional coordination of navigation safety in Arctic waters. The initiative does not, however, touch upon overlapping claims to continental shelf or disputes of maritime delimitation in the Arctic region. Instead, it creates a platform to discuss security-related issues in the Arctic from an operational perspective.

The security situation in the Arctic is currently in a transitional phase from the tensions of the Cold War era to institutional security cooperation in limited spheres. Given the lack of a comprehensive security framework in the Arctic, the development of institutional cooperation in low-politics

and non-traditional security domains as SAR, prevention of radiation contamination and relief efforts in the aftermaths of natural disasters and emergencies constitutes an indispensable approach to constructing an Arctic regional security regime. Although the Arctic lacks effective arms control regimes and confidence-building measures, the series of arrangements and agreements reached in the process of the formation of Arctic governance mechanism facilitates the shaping of security discourse and cooperative consensus that peace and stability in the Arctic bring about mutual benefits. Consequently, the geopolitical relations in the Arctic are inclined to remain relative stability in the sense of traditional security.

In the absence of a comprehensive security framework in the Arctic, developing the institutional cooperation in low-politics and non-traditional security domains, as well as enhancing the establishment of confidence-building measures in the Arctic regions is likely to promote the tendency toward a build-up of security regimes in the Arctic. So far, the Arctic states have reached cooperative agreements in coast guard cooperation on SAR, oil leakage disposal and emergency response. Such institutional cooperation is likely to expand to almost all dimensions of civil security in the Arctic, including strengthening border control across the Arctic states in prevention of smuggling, human trafficking, trans-boundary crime and terrorist attacks, reinforcing nuclear safety for civilian use, enhancing emergency response capabilities for coastal erosion, extreme weather, and other natural hazards. More ambitious security goals such as military transparency, arms control and nuclear disarmament are likely to remain difficult to realize in the short term.

## 5 Conclusion: implications of Arctic security for China

China, as an Arctic extra-regional state, has no conflicts of interest with the Arctic states in terms of sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdictions in the Arctic region. However, this does not mean that the security situation in the Arctic is unrelated to China. On one hand, as a potential user of Arctic resources and sea routes, China is seeking regional peace and stability for its engagement in Arctic development cooperation. On the other hand, with China being a state situated in the mid-latitudes of Northern Hemisphere, the weaponry (e.g. missile defense systems and nuclear submarines) and military installations that both Russia and the U.S. have deployed in the Arctic, impose deterrence against China. The absolute advantages of Russia and the U.S. in terms of Arctic air supremacy and mastery of the strategic channels (e.g. the Bering Strait) pose challenges as well to China's potential commercial use of Arctic sea routes. In addition, as an official statement of China's Arctic policy still appears to be vague, China's engagement in Arctic issues tends to be labeled as "China's emerging threat" or "China's hunger for Arctic resources" with the hypothesis that China is unsatisfied with its observer status within the Arctic Council, and China is therefore thought likely to become a revisionist

power attempting to transform the current Arctic order and to re-allocate rights and the interests in the Arctic. Accordingly, while paying close attention to the development of Arctic security dynamics, China should wisely participate in the multilateral cooperation in low politics and non-traditional security such as SAR, and prevention of marine oil pollution in the Arctic. In doing so China can build mutual trust with the Arctic states and contribute to shaping a stable political environment favorable to China's engagement in sustainable and cooperative Arctic development.

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