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Russian Cooperation With Non-Arctic Actors: Opportunities And Prospects

The Arctic is increasingly becoming a focal point of international interest, offering vast opportunities for bilateral and multilateral engagement, spanning such key areas as sustainable development, the economy, environmental safety, and the protection of the distinct cultural heritage of indigenous communities in the North. At the same time, the conflict potential in the region is increasing due to the more active military presence of a number of Western states. Due to the escalating tensions between Russia and the West over the past few years, most Arctic cooperation formats—which had been developed over decades and proved their effectiveness—have been suspended. Against this backdrop, more opportunities are opening up for interaction between Russia and non-regional, Russia-friendly states.

China positions itself as a "near-Arctic state." However, the Arctic is not among China’s top foreign policy priorities. For instance, the level of China’s attention to the Arctic is significantly lower compared to the scale of Beijing’s activities in Africa or Latin America. China's Arctic interests span multiple sectors, including scientific research, economic development, energy, and transportation and logistics. Beijing's interests are served by the advancement of science, the intensification of cargo transportation via the Northern Sea Route (NSR), and the expansion of technology and equipment exports designed for operation in extreme sub-zero temperatures. The development of cooperation regarding the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is of mutual interest to Moscow and Beijing. Cooperation on the NSR is becoming increasingly institutionalized. In 2024, a Subcommittee on Cooperation for the NSR was established, and a decision was made to set up three working groups focusing

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on the development of navigation, safety, and Arctic shipbuilding. It is important to note that Chinese companies fear falling under secondary Western sanctions, which in turn hinders potential cooperation regarding the NSR and economic collaboration in the Arctic.

India is also showing a growing interest in the Arctic region. Indian experts note that as an emerging power, India has interests and a desire to maintain a presence in all regions of the world, including the Arctic. India's priority in the Arctic is scientific research, in particular the study of climate issues. The following sectors stand out as promising areas for bilateral interaction between Russia and India: joint scientific research, along with cooperation in logistics, transport, energy, and economic development.

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Other non-regional states, particularly the BRICS nations and Turkey, are interested in conducting scientific research activities in the Arctic region. Most often, this activity is their top priority, especially research related to climate change. They are also drawn to the logistical advantages of the NSR and the opportunities associated with Arctic natural resources. The fact that these countries regard Moscow as their primary partner is beneficial for Russia.

Thus, notwithstanding the curtailment of Russia's cooperation with other Arctic Council members, which was not of Moscow's choosing, substantial prospects remain for cooperation in the region with non-regional, external powers. This cooperation is currently most promising in terms of developing the Northern Sea Route and increasing cargo traffic through it — a goal shared by both Beijing and New Delhi. However, it is crucial to consider the inherent risks, ranging from Russia's national security concerns to the threat of secondary Western sanctions against companies willing to partner with Moscow. Moreover, despite the confrontational nature of Russia's relations with the West, the parties maintain a sense of Arctic community embodied in the so-called Ilulissat spirit. This spirit is one of the reasons why the Arctic Council remains operational today. Despite disagreements among the Arctic states, joint statements are being issued in which all Arctic nations emphasize the importance of this body. This shows that the Arctic continues to be a region for cooperation in various fields and with various actors (regional and non-regional).

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