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ABSTRACT

This paper examines India's role, and stakes, in the so-called 'Arctic Paradox': As the Arctic region witnesses an unprecedented rate of ice-melt because of global warming, new routes are being opened, paving the way for untapped hydrocarbon and mineral resources to be exploited. While India has been active in the Arctic for over ten years, it has not fully made use of its Observer status, and it must give new energy to its activities in the region. Unlike the Antarctic, however, the Arctic is not considered a 'global commons' and the principle of sovereignty prevents external players from exacting significant gains in the region. India should therefore steer away from advocating for an Arctic commons, but must ensure that the environment is strongly considered at the centre of all debates at the Arctic Council. India can take the lead in pursuing scientific research in the region, to understand in particular the correlation between the Arctic ice-melt and Indian monsoons.

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INTRODUCTION

It is no longer breaking news that with the opening of new routes in the Arctic as a result of climate change-induced ice-melt, many countries are vying for access to the region's untapped minerals and hydrocarbon resources. The economic and environmental implications of this are massive. Economic gains will be realised as a result of increased resource extraction and the exploitation of new routes that provide 40-percent shorter distances between Europe and East Asia. Both activities, however, will impact the health of the region's marine biodiversity.[1] At present, it is the Arctic Council which serves as the central forum for addressing ecological issues in the region. This paper seeks to show how India can find alternative ways to engage in the Arctic, given the limitations set by its Observer status in the Arctic Council. India will only bring itself to a disadvantage if it advocates a global commons treaty for the Arctic region; instead, it should work within the existing system and wield an approach that encompasses both strategic and environmental perspectives.

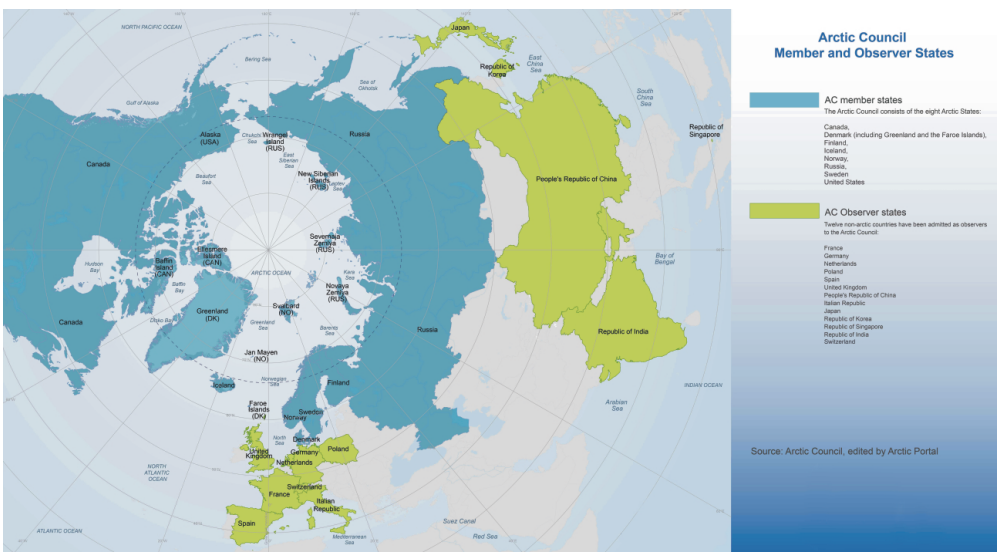
The paper first provides a background to the Arctic, emphasising the effects of climate change in the region and the consequent commercial prospects that are opening up for both, the Arctic countries and Observers in the Arctic Council. It then discusses India's current Arctic activities, associated motivations, areas for collaboration, and takeaways from the activities of other Asian Observers. Finally, it suggests comprehensive measures that India should take in the environmental, governance and strategic areas that are in consonance with its great-power aspirations.

THE ARCTIC CONUNDRUM

According to the US National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA), the level of Arctic Sea ice is decreasing by 12.8 percent per decade since

1979; 2012 saw the minimum recorded Arctic Sea ice extent.[2] This is expected to impact Arctic biodiversity and the lives of the indigenous populations of around 1.5 million in the region.[3] As the cycle continues, scientists say, it creates the so-called 'Arctic-paradox' that will only exacerbate the situation: as routes open up because of climate change, the non-renewable resources previously inaccessible will then be extracted, and these activities in turn will contribute to further global warming.[4] At present, the major stakeholders in the opening up of the Arctic region are the eight Arctic countries, all of whom are members of the Arctic Council—Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US—as well as the Council's 13 Observer States. These countries are actively exploring the geopolitical, strategic, and economic potential of the Arctic region.

Map 1



Source: Arctic Portal, 2013[5]*. Switzerland was granted Observer status in 2017.*

Varied estimates suggest that the Arctic holds a significant portion of the world's undiscovered resources, both in terms of hydrocarbons and minerals. It has historically been a difficult endeavour to exploit

these resources because of the natural barriers created by harsh weather conditions and difficult terrain. The resources are also unevenly distributed: for instance, the Russian region is richer in gas reserves, while the Norwegian region has more oil resources.[6] As the various countries scramble for a share of these resources, analysts say, it could give rise to conflict and tensions, or worsen existing ones within the region and beyond. There is also the danger of these extraction activities triggering negative consequences such as oil spills, as was seen in the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaskan waters.[7]

Indeed, there are no overarching guidelines for how stakeholders can engage the Arctic's resources, akin to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 that limited the use of the Antarctic only for scientific and peaceful purposes and freed it from any territorial claims.[8] To be sure, the sovereignty concerns of the Arctic states help explain such absence of an agreement in the region. In an attempt to secure their energy and security interests, these states are unlikely to surrender in any capacity, the Arctic region to a global commons framework.[9] There are existing disputes related to territorial claims between the region's coastal states, such as those between Canada and Greenland, Russia and the US, and Canada and Denmark.

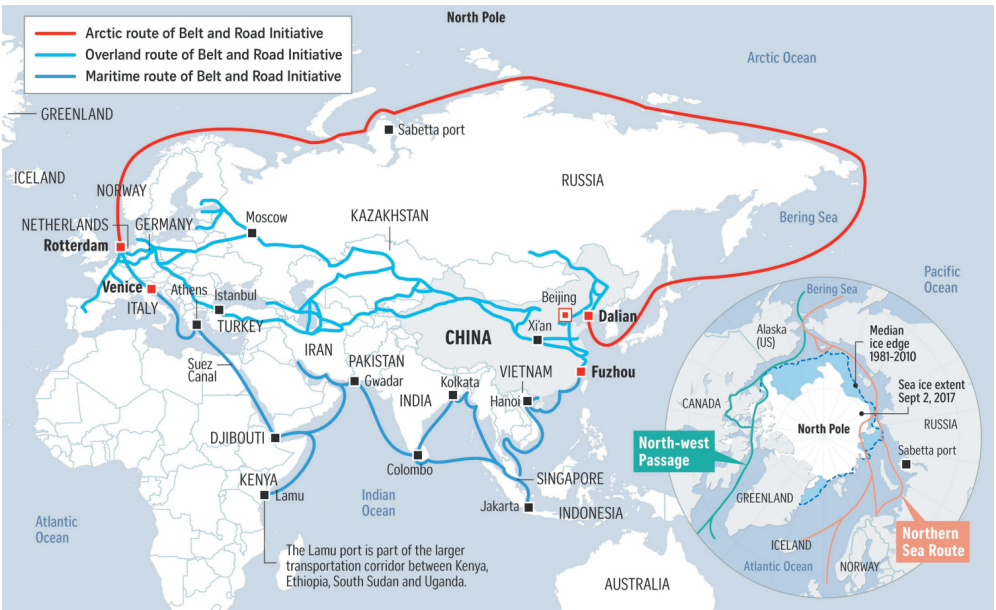
While the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has been ratified by all Arctic littorals with the exception of the US, climate change is altering the geophysical realities of the Arctic, prompting more intense territorial claims.[10] For example, the UNCLOS definition of exclusive economic zone (EEZ) covering upto 200 nautical miles from the coast of the concerned state, has enabled Russia and Canada's considerable gain in terms of rights.[11] An EEZ does not imply territorial gain but provides to the concerned state certain sovereign rights with regard to extraction, exploration, conservation and management of living and non-living resources.[12] Russia, in a bid to

extend its rights while putting forth its claims to the UN Commission for Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLCS), strengthened its position by planting a flag on the seabed.[13] Although the claims were rejected, such an aggressive manoeuvre was widely condemned by other nations. Further, the rejection should not be considered permanent: with the emergence of new evidence, such claims might be put on the table once again. Similar claims may arise from other Arctic countries, escalating concerns that the region will be marred with disputes as well as challenge the freedom of the high seas in the Arctic Ocean.[14]

The other area of potential disputes relates to the opening of new shipping routes owing to the melting Arctic ice. Canada, for one, holds the Northwest Passage to be falling within its territory of internal waters; the US, for its part, regards the passage as part of international waters.[15] The stakes are significant as the new shipping routes will likely give economic returns with the shortening of journey time and the reduction of costs. In 2018, cargo shipments through the section of the Arctic Sea Route near Russia reached 15 million tonnes, over five times higher than the number in 2013.[16] Estimates suggest that by 2025, over 60 million tonnes of energy resources will be transported via the Northern Sea Route, including coal and Yamal Energy project-produced LNG.[17] The number is likely to increase with the ease of navigability triggered by ice-melt.

These new routes may yet prove to be more secure than conventional routes that are beset with problems such as piracy and terrorism.[18] At the same time, however, these coastal states might act to increase their military presence in the region given their insecurities; this could result in a more tense and less peaceful environment. Indeed, there are still remnants of the militarisation of the Arctic that was witnessed during the Cold War.[19] Today, what could compound the matter is that the Arctic does not have any regulations in place against military use by any of the

Map 2



NOTE: September is the end of summer in the North Pole when the frozen lid of sea ice tends to shrink to its smallest. Unlike the Antarctica, there is no land under the frozen Arctic ice.
Sources: CHINA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM COMMISSION, THE ARCTIC INSTITUTE, NATIONAL SNOW AND ICE DATA CENTRE, REUTERS STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Source: Straits Times, "China's Polar Ambitions Cause Anxiety," 2018.[20]

littorals. Additionally, military and security matters fall outside the ambit of the Arctic Council.[21]

As the littorals seek to maintain their supremacy in the region, not only has there been no progress in resolving existing disputes, but there is also a general aversion to pursuing an agreement that will in any way declare the Arctic as a global commons. At the Arctic Council, in fact, a key criterion for gaining Observer status is that the country must recognise the sovereignty of the Arctic states, their sovereign rights of and jurisdiction in the region.[22] Such provision ensures that there is little room for non-Arctic states to undermine the power of the Arctic states, to have a stronger role in the governance of the region or to even lobby for an Antarctic-like Treaty. India's former Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, amongst others had expressed reservations regarding India's acceptance of the sovereignty clause.[23] Although, the same clause does

serve to protect the interests of the region's indigenous peoples against the interference of non-Arctic actors.

Yet, the reality of climate change has made it increasingly difficult to define boundaries between states and international waters.[24] The global implications of climate change require the collective efforts of the international community. Moreover, the region's geopolitical landscape—with its multitude of interested parties and associated risks—cannot be viewed in isolation especially given the significant amounts of resources of the region.[25] Retired Chinese Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo, for example, has said that China's large population justifies his country's interest in having a share in the resources of the region.[26]

INDIA IN THE ARCTIC

Observer states such as India and China find it necessary to forge favourable relations and form alliances with the coastal states within the present framework of Arctic governance. Tangible efforts have been made in this direction in terms of scientific research and other projects and investments. India, for one, opened Himadri, its only research station in the region in 2008.[27] In July 2018, India displayed an increasing commitment to Arctic research when its National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research was renamed the National Centre for Polar and Oceanic Research.[28] Furthermore, India and Norway's bilateral research cooperation is realised in the Norwegian Programme for Research Cooperation with India (INDNOR).[29] As India currently lacks a Polar-suitable vessel, it has planned to acquire a Polar Research Vehicle which will be advantageous in escalating scientific research activity.[30] NCPOR has signed a contract with FESCO Transportation Group for access to the company's icebreaker vessel which will be utilised both for general cargo deliveries to Antarctic stations and scientific activities in the region.[31] While this vehicle will focus its activities in the Antarctic,

benefits in the Arctic may also materialise. Although India's output of research on the region increased by 300 percent from 2005-2012, little collaboration was seen with other countries.[32] In the absence of an official Arctic policy, India's Arctic research objectives are centred on ecological and environmental aspects, with a focus on climate change.[33] Generally, India is seen to have taken the lead among Asian Observer states placing more weight on environmental and scientific rather than the economic potential of the region.[34] Support for such focus is certainly strengthened by the fact that the importance of agriculture to the Indian economy and its dependence on monsoons, along with its long coast-line with a high population make the country extremely vulnerable to climate change.

In the economic domain, and particularly in energy, India has prioritised its historical relations with Russia and the latter's dedicated focus on oil and gas exploration.[35] To this effect, India and Russia's top oil and gas companies have signed agreements and are cooperating on shared production projects and offshore exploration.[36] India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh Ltd. holds a 26-percent stake in Russia's Vankorneft[37] and a 20-percent stake in the Sakhalin-I project.[38] Cooperation with companies from other Arctic and Observer countries is also evident: for instance, the US' ExxonMobil and Japan's SODECO are also partners in the Sakhalin-I project. The Gas Authority of India Ltd. (GAIL) has a 20-year agreement with Russian energy giant, Gazprom, for a supply of 2.5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year. This was recently renegotiated to add two million tonnes to the agreement, with the contract being extended by three years.[39] This deal has been representative of India's pursuit of strategic autonomy, especially in the context of American sanctions.[40] Diversification of energy imports remains a crucial endeavour for India which has always remained sceptical of alignment with any power. The

Arctic region also holds mineral resources, as mentioned earlier, including gold, nickel, cooper, graphite and uranium.[41] These minerals are utilised in the manufacture of high-technology products such as mobile phones and nuclear energy, which can help push India's 'Make in India' programme.[42]

ASIAN OBSERVERS AT THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

In 2013, four Asian countries besides India were granted Observer status to the Arctic Council—i.e., China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore. Broadly, China, Japan and South Korea have chosen to stress on an economic approach and have collectively engaged in a number of meetings centred on the Arctic. For their part, India and Singapore have founded their approach on scientific research. Such varied approaches can be explained by the fact that not all the Observer countries stand to benefit equally from the Arctic's commercial prospects with the opening of the NSR. While China, Japan and South Korea may benefit considerably from such connectivity with the region, and more specifically Russia—India, for its part, is not as strategically located to extract similar commercial advantages.[43] Equally, Singapore which is among the world's busiest ports may be disadvantaged with the increased viability of the NSR, as it could result in the diversion of sea traffic from the traditional Indian Ocean and Pacific routes.[44] Despite varying interests, however, Observer states are well aware of the changing geographic, economic and political nature of the Arctic and thus are diversifying their efforts to align with each of these changing dimensions. A point of convergence between the five Asian Observers is their dependence on energy, which the Arctic has an abundance of.

With its expertise in port infrastructure development and energy production, Singapore has focused on leveraging this technological

knowledge to make its impact in the Arctic.[45] It has made use of knowledge in these fields to advance its efforts in strengthening bilateral relations with Arctic countries such as Norway and Russia.[46] Further, it has established joint ventures with Russian and Norwegian oil and drilling companies, respectively.[47] Notably, Singapore has an edge over other actors in the Arctic as it has focused on Permanent Participants at the Arctic Council and the indigenous people by offering them training and opportunities for education scholarships in Singapore.[48] As an island-state, Singapore's environmental concerns are closely intertwined with the region's climate change concerns in terms of Sea Level Rise. Its involvement in a project on migratory birds also adds to its portfolio.[49] India could carve out a niche area in a similar manner with regard to the indigenous populations of the Arctic.

South Korea was amongst the earliest Asian countries to release an Arctic Policy document in 2013 which included three policy goals, four strategies and 31 projects.[50] The three dimensions of research, economics and politics are recurring trends in the Arctic Policies or related frameworks of most actors in the region and South Korea is no exception. The economic dimension overshadows the others significantly which may be perceived in positive light as it reflects a focused outlook. The country is extremely dependent on maritime routes, given that its imports and exports are almost entirely transported via the sea.[51] Further, the sea routes and trade could bring greater gains for South Korea than China and Japan. This is due to a culmination of its trade dependence, success in ship-building and associated technological know-how which is crucial for Arctic states.[52] Major South Korean shipbuilding companies—namely, Hyundai, Daewoo and Samsung—have engaged in the Arctic, obtaining contracts from various Arctic countries to construct LNG carriers and ice-breaker vessels.[53] Additionally, India can learn from South Korea's active

Observer participation in working groups and the encouragement it offers its researchers to participate in such frameworks.[54] It would also be in India's interest to strengthen its relations with South Korea in light of its economic successes in the Arctic as well as the consequential point it is set to occupy in the NSR.

Japan, meanwhile, has stressed on scientific research and technology in the Arctic and has developed a number of institutions to support this endeavour, in alignment with its national economic development goals.[55] It tends to focus its discussion on the negative aspects of the viability of the NSR and the impact shipping will have on marine diversity in Japanese waters.[56] Japan is working towards increased bilateral cooperation with Arctic countries as expressed in its Arctic Policy.[57] It has collaborated with Norway and Russia on research projects to assess the navigability of the NSR, even as it remains uncertain whether it will gain from the opening of the NSR.[58] It has also participated in oil extraction and energy activities in Greenland and Norway's offshore areas.[59] In the backdrop of the Fukushima incident and the consequent shut-down of nuclear power plants, the Arctic may be able to meet Japan's LNG needs, making the region of high priority for Japan.[60] It has also recently signed an agreement regarding fishing regulations with countries such as the US and Russia.[61] Japan's interest areas, therefore, do not necessarily coincide with India's interests. Yet, collaborative efforts in the area of scientific research may be promising.

In a similar but more consistent manner to other Observers, China has engaged in energy deals and investments and has taken concrete steps in formulating close ties with certain Arctic countries. It has done serious research on the region with several institutions dedicated to the same and its icebreaker, Xue Long or 'Snow Dragon' has taken part in nine Arctic expeditions.[62] China's second icebreaker vessel was launched in September 2018,[63] with its first already having navigated three of the

most significant Arctic shipping routes showcasing the country's increasing interest in the region.[64] Additionally, China has cooperated closely with Russia, securing the Yamal LNG Deal which saves time and helps avoid the Suez Canal fees.[65] Its diplomatic endeavours are apparent in its relations with Iceland with which it has a free trade agreement.[66] It has attempted to secure markets and resources in the region as observed in Chinese mining companies' activities in Greenland and Canada.[67] China is likely to benefit greatly from the region, given the Northern Sea Route's future navigability prospects not only in terms of importing natural resources and exporting hi-tech products but also, in other commercial activities. Indeed, China perhaps has the highest level of economic interest in the region among Asian states.[68] The vital position the Arctic region holds for China may be discerned from its Arctic Policy where China has put forth the idea of a 'Polar Silk Road' as part of its larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[69] China is urging active participation from businesses in the development of the Northern Sea Routes.[70] The advantages of these routes in shortening distances and time will not only be enjoyed by China's northern ports but also its southern ports.[71] It is not alarming in this backdrop that China has referred to itself as a 'Near-Arctic state' in its Arctic Policy published in January 2018.[72]

THE 'GLOBAL COMMONS' QUESTION AND INDIA'S ROLE IN THE ARCTIC

As an observer, India's influence is limited as it must suggest projects either through an Arctic State or Permanent Participant which may be partly funded by India but cannot be more than that provided by the Arctic State in most cases.[73] In addition, while India may offer views, make statements and submit documents in Council meetings, it is only at the discretion of the Chair that it can do so.[74] A key aspect is that the

Arctic Council, while being the dominant organisation in the region, is more of a political forum that does not have any legal basis.[75] As stated earlier, the Council does not discuss military matters and has limited funds—this weakens its legitimacy.[76] Nevertheless, the Council's presence does complement the broader frameworks and regulations that govern more specific aspects in the region such as sea routes and resources. India has sufficient influence and a definite role to play in these wider regulations which directly or indirectly guide the activities of the Arctic Council, for instance, the UNCLOS. Leveraging of such rights and influence by India and other Asian Observers can therefore bring benefits to the Arctic Council.[77]

What is clear is that Asian Observers including India are in need of energy, new markets and resources. To this end, and even if incrementally, China for instance, hopes to make the Arctic global commons a reality, an undercurrent of which may be identified in its new Arctic Policy.[78] Taking a similar stance may hamper any progress India has made in the region with Arctic states who are firm on their sovereignty, especially as India has accepted the sovereignty clause in its bid for Observer status. The Antarctic Treaty faced little opposition in comparison to what could result if the Arctic region were to be established as a commons.[79] It is likely to be more advantageous for India to avoid being the cause for insecurities both from Arctic states and the indigenous peoples. This is due to any fears and insecurities that could lead to rampant militarisation of the region and an undermining of India's position in the global arena. India has enjoyed positive relations with Russia and the US and should not risk these ties as well. It may well be a more realistic proposition for India to take a stance encouraging more cooperation and upholding ecological primacy—whether it is within the existing framework or is incorporated into a legal framework that resolves regional disputes but avoids the commons question.

Having said that, it is crucial that India continues to create a favourable environment for itself. Some have opined that the most plausible method to do so would be through engagement in research and scientific activity, keeping any negative perceptions regarding India's intentions from the Arctic Council members at a safe distance.[80] With the Arctic's commercial potential gradually increasing, a general consensus has emerged around India being unable to gain as much as China, Japan and South Korea. This strengthens the argument that India should channel its energy towards science and environmental concerns in the region. Moreover, developed countries tend to point fingers at developing countries to take the responsibility to reduce carbon emissions.[81] It will not bode well for India to take a more radical stand against resource exploration and extraction in the region, given that it is itself engaged in similar activities. Despite the absence of significant economic gains, India may still realise some benefits.

The current goal generally shared by most Arctic actors of following a path of sustainable development should continue to be what India also aspires for. Herein lie the prospects for India's contribution, where India should present a more holistic view by means of environmental arguments against the increasingly materialistic approach followed by other Members and Observers at the Arctic Council. This would entail efforts at drawing global attention to the Arctic region that would nudge those involved in the region to upgrade their environmental consciousness.

Polar Research and Climate Change

India's scientific and research activity, although in its early stages in the Arctic could expand given its experience in Antarctica. A correlation between Arctic ice-melt and the Indian Monsoons has been established but the exact effect remains undiscovered. It is believed that melting

Arctic ice and the consequent increase of freshwater in the region prevents heat from escaping, leading warmer waters to the Indian Ocean which in turn alters Indian monsoons.[82] The effects of this would be detrimental, specifically on agriculture that remains critical to India's economy and growing population. Sea level rise would be accompanied by a devastating situation for India's coastal inhabitants and ecosystems. Moreover, the Himalayas or often what is called the 'third pole' where India's major rivers originate, will worsen the situation.[83] It is imperative that India improve upon and put in place a more robust Arctic research programme to deal with these future threats. Several research stations in the Arctic are functional all-year-round but India's research station, Himadri is not operational in the winter. In this respect, improved facilities that increase the operability of Himadri will aid its research programme.[84] Cooperation and collaboration with other countries—whether Artic Council members or Observers—should be increased as this will result in the sharing of facilities and expertise, increasing India's experience and encouraging friendlier relations with those countries. Most significantly, as both India and China are exposed to the impacts of climate change on the Himalayas, they will equally gain by doing research in the Himalayas and drawing on learnings for environment-related intergovernmental cooperation.[85]

A Platform for Increasing India's Clout

Simultaneously, India may extract out of its position at the Arctic Council and existing activities in the region the ability to strengthen its international presence. In terms of governance, in addition to offering a more holistic view, India can make use of opportunities within the Council. The opportunity at the Council that allowed Observer participation in formulating the Agreement on Enhancing Scientific Cooperation demonstrated that there may be more room in active governance for Observers in the future.[86] Further, India's relative

absence in Working Groups where other Observers are actively engaged displays India's underexploited potential in Arctic governance.[87] To add to this, its participation in other Arctic forums within the region and outside of it has been minimal, such as the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Norway[88] and meetings between other Asian Observers.[89] In comparison to other Asian Observers, India's position in terms of private sector investment in the region is weak, however, India should encourage businesses and other interested parties to participate in the more flexible Arctic Circle that admits non-state actors as a means to further Indian influence.[90] Governance measures such as these would lend more weight to any environmental endeavours that India puts forth as well as build on its self-image and perhaps projected image of a moral and responsible power. It is therefore essential that India consider the strategic and geopolitical angles to have a well-rounded understanding and approach in the region, for no Arctic issues in the current and evolving context can be isolated to fit a specific category.

Taking up strategic ventures while keeping negative perceptions at bay is a possibility. As India does have a growing demand for energy, it has currently made progress in securing an LNG deal with Russia. Natural Gas as a cleaner fuel will align with India's environmental stewardship in the international arena whilst diversifying its energy imports [91]. To further secure its energy needs, strengthening its relations with South Korea which is also an Observer at the Arctic Council, will be beneficial in the long run as South Korea hopes to compete with Singapore in oil-storage and becoming a trade hub.[92] India may utilise other concrete measures to highlight its commitment to the region, build trust in the region and secure for it stronger relations with Arctic countries. Given the increasing discovery of resources and the opening of shipping routes, the need for infrastructural development is consequently increasing. India can help fulfil this need, using it as a basis for building trust. For instance,

collaboration and involving skilled Indian labour in infrastructure development such as building ports and other economic activities would act as a relations-building activity [93] Equally, collaboration with Arctic countries outside the Arctic region may also align with broader Arctic aims as in the case of the Indian Navy. The Arctic is geographically different from the IOR and it is the Coast Guard that primarily deals with search and rescue operations and pollution control activities, however the Indian Navy also engages in disaster relief operations and could have a valuable contribution to make in Arctic affairs as well. The navy is experienced in the IOR and has cooperated closely with the Russian navy with some experience in the Russian region.[94].

CONCLUSION

Today, when the Arctic is growing both in environmental and geopolitical relevance, it would be unwise for India to ignore the importance of the region. While it may be unable to benefit from it in the same way as other Asian nations, certain efforts have already proved rewarding. Some experts have criticised India's submission to the sovereignty clause for the Arctic Council's Observers; yet, India has more to gain from being a part of the Council. This paper has argued that considering the Arctic as 'the common heritage of mankind' in the current scenario could result in strained relations with the Arctic littorals which would counter India's great-power aspirations. Further, there is sufficient room to work within this framework both in the Council and in the region in general. India has not yet fully harnessed its Arctic potential. With measures focused on increased cooperation and collaboration with other nations, it will be able to improve upon its current research facilities, economic activities and relations. India's environmental focus will not only receive international praise but also prevent climate change issues from being overshadowed by the political

and strategic focus of other nations. Moreover, strategic benefits are likely to accrue such as in collaboration even in the limited capacity of scientific research.

It would be wrong to assume that the changes in the region will lead to a revolutionary refocus from the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to the Arctic, considering the current importance of the IOR. Regardless, certain fears are likely to dwell in the Indian perspective as in the case of the increasing geostrategic relevance of the Arctic, the IOR may to some extent lose the position of relevance it holds today. As a consequence, according to experts such as Shyam Saran, India whose geostrategic position enables it to exert considerable control over the IOR may suffer at the cost of the Arctic and the commercial viability of its polar routes.[95] Another opinion is that Indian strategy in relation to China will be gravely affected which is founded on the assumption that any aggressive measures by China in the Himalayas, could be countered by blocking off the Malacca Straits and choking energy supplies.[96] In order to be a great power, other nations must recognise the concerned nation as a great power and generally, a positive agenda has greater chances of success than a negative one. Declaring the Arctic as another platform for rivalry will therefore counter these ambitions. Instead, efforts such as collaborating with China in the field of climate change and applying the research closer to home, in the Himalayas, will lead to a win-win situation and a positive perception of India.

There could be multiple scenarios that arise in the region with global implications such as increasing disputes, or else, a more cooperative environment. What is certain is that the Indian understanding of the Arctic will be enhanced with its presence in the region, which it can use to bridge further gaps. The country has made notable progress in the area of environmental stewardship, particularly pertinent for the Arctic. Such stewardship will elevate its standing in the global arena. As

an Observer in the Arctic Council and as a nation that hopes to occupy a compelling position in global governance, India should utilise the meaningful platform provided by developments in the Arctic region to display its competence in areas outside of its immediate neighbourhood.

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