

# China Plans to Raid the Arctic



## *Commentary*

One week after Russia invaded Ukraine, seven countries—Canada, the United States, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland—announced that they [were withdrawing](#) from the [Arctic Council](#) until further notice. At present, the only remaining member is Russia.

With the likes of the United States and Canada turning their backs on the council, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has spotted an opening. Xi Jinping and his colleagues appear to be [extremely interested](#) in exploring the Arctic region. The question, though, is why?

I reached out to [Brigt Dale](#), the research director for the Environment and Society Research Group at Nordland Research Institute, for

comment on the matter.

Why, I asked, is Beijing so interested in this largely inhospitable region?

First, said Dale, the Arctic has a pool of [resources](#) that are “ready to be taken.” It “is reminiscent of the colonialist idea which, for many in the Arctic, is not a part of history but rather manifests every day.”

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Within the realm of geopolitics, discussions regularly revolve around the idea of “how one can exploit Arctic resources to the benefit of others elsewhere—whilst at the same time maintaining the notion that the Arctic is ‘being taken care of,’” said Dale.

The researcher told me that “natural resource utilization and exports of goods has always been a part of subsistence here—as can be exemplified by the trading of furs, fish, and products from the hunting of marine mammals going back for centuries, perhaps even millennia.”

Thus, extracting “resources from the Arctic is nothing new.” Today, however, “we see an increased interest in hydrocarbons, in particular, but also for minerals (an increased interest due to the needs arising from green tech development) both from Arctic states and from other states [that] in one way or another define themselves as ‘having interests in the Arctic,’ a process that alienates as much as invites local communities and Arctic populations,” added Dale.



A view shows pipelines at a gas processing facility, operated by Gazprom company, at Bovanenkovo gas field on the Arctic Yamal peninsula, Russia, on May 21, 2019. (Maxim Shemetov/Reuters)

In Russia, [China](#)'s close ally, "the focus is still on oil and gas—and minerals—as the foundation of their economy, and the latter (access to minerals) are, I would guess, as important to the Chinese as oil and gas."

Additionally, according to Dale, "the Northern sea route from the Barents Sea to the Bering Strait is of great importance to the Chinese," as it offers access to new "[fishing](#) grounds."

Domestically, China's fish stocks are at [risk of collapse](#). As a [symbol of abundance](#) in Chinese culture, fish is [a key ingredient](#) in many of the country's most popular dishes. The Arctic region offers Beijing the opportunity to avert a fish-centered crisis.

Moreover, Dale noted the region's abundance of rare earth minerals. As

the scholar Mark Rowe [has written previously](#), rare earth metals like neodymium, praseodymium, terbium, and dysprosium “are key to the world’s electric-vehicle and renewable-energy revolutions, underpinning battery technology and wind turbines among other things.”

China is leading both [the electric vehicle](#) and [renewable energy](#) revolutions. To maintain its position, though, it needs easy access to valuable minerals. The Arctic offers such access.

What are the potential geopolitical implications of China’s Arctic ambitions?

I asked [Indra Overland](#), a lead researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, this very question.

“What Russia really would like,” he said, “is if the Chinese could help keep its Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) projects on the Yamal Peninsula moving forward.”

According to Overland, such assistance “would make Russia less dependent on the European natural gas market.” However, he added, at present, “the Chinese do not have the necessary technology for this.”

Overland added, “If the Russians could not easily acquire it themselves until now, it is not something the Chinese can easily copy from Western and Japanese companies in a hurry either.” Nevertheless, “it is possible the Chinese and Russians will do their best to try to work together on the Yamal Peninsula.”

When discussing the possibilities of Russian and Chinese cooperation in the Arctic region, so much depends on what happens in Ukraine.

Overland told me that the "Russian invasion of Ukraine represents both possible downsides and possible upsides for China."

The possible downside is obvious; he continued, "Russia could be defeated and the unity and determination of Western countries in defending democracy strengthened."

The upside, on the other hand, "is that China may get heavily discounted access to Russian natural resources, including natural gas, oil, coal, metals, and grain," while "Western demand for Chinese solar panels and other clean energy goods skyrockets due to the strengthened desire to reduce dependency on Russian fossil fuels," Overland said.

If Russia is defeated in Ukraine, then China's Arctic ambitions may be delayed indefinitely. However, if Russia emerges victorious, China will likely be given the keys to the Arctic, allowing its contractors to fish and mine with impunity.

*Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.*



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