

Effects of Recent Developments on Arctic Regional Governance



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"The Watch"
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Arctic Academic eTalks

Special Session Executive Summary



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Strengthening Arctic Security with Partnerships and Knowledge

ACTIVITY REPORT



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Arctic Academic eTalks Closed Session Executive Summary

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This closed session of the Arctic Academic eTalks was held during a rapidly changing situation, with select participants providing authoritative perspectives to two particular developments that occurred just prior to the event, including 1) a joint statement from Canada, Finland, Iceland, Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the United States as member states of the Arctic Council, and 2) an official statement from the RAIPON organization.

The purpose of the event was to provide a rapid, initial assessment of how the developments might be understood in terms of impacts to regional governance. 'Governance' is a leading indicator as a metric for Arctic stability, which the U.S. Department of Defense monitors and studies closely in order to maintain awareness and understanding in support of national security-related efforts led by the U.S. State Department.

Joint Statement

A screenshot of the U.S. Department of State website. The page features a dark blue header with the U.S. Department of State seal and logo on the left, and navigation links for 'Newsroom', 'Business', 'Employees', 'Job Seekers', 'Students', 'Travelers', and 'Visas' on the right. Below the header, there are dropdown menus for 'POLICY ISSUES', 'COUNTRIES & AREAS', 'BUREAUS & OFFICES', and 'ABOUT', along with a search icon. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Office of the Spokesperson > Press Releases > Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine'. The title of the statement is 'Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine', with three stars above it. Below the title, it says 'MEDIA NOTE', 'OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON', and 'MARCH 3, 2022'. There are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email. At the bottom of the page, a white box contains the text: 'Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States issue the following joint statement.'

ACTIVITY REPORT



On 3 March at 10am EST, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the United States released a joint statement announcing a pause of Arctic Council activities. The event participants first assessed the meaning of the language in the statement. There seems to be a general consensus - with the group and otherwise – that the joint statement is appropriate and necessary given the situation, however unfortunate. The Arctic Council is representative of the significant level of cooperation throughout the Arctic region, and even a ‘pause’ in activities is cause for concern. The word ‘pause’ also indicates hope that the circumstances can be resolved to the point where the Arctic Council can resume its activities.

RAIPON Statement

АССОЦИАЦИЯ КОРЕННЫХ МАЛОЧИСЛЕННЫХ НАРОДОВ СЕВЕРА, СИБИРИ И ДАЛЬНЕГО ВОСТОКА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ		RUSSIAN ASSOCIATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE NORTH (RAIPON)
Специальный консультативный статус при Экономическом и Социальном Совете ООН		NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Постоянный участник Арктического Совета		Permanent Participant of the Arctic Council
«01» марта 2022 года		№ 64
Президенту Российской Федерации В.В. ПУТИНУ		

Participants also discussed the press release by the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North Russian (RAIPON) dated 1 March that offered justification and support for the invasion of Ukraine, implying an aspect of “militarizing” involving the Arctic Council by way of RAIPON as a Permanent Participant (PP) in the organization (despite the charter mandate prohibiting military security as part of Arctic Council activities and discussions). While the Kremlin’s political purge of the RAIPON leadership and its replacement with Putin loyalists a decade ago had already compromised the integrity of that Indigenous organization, RAIPON’s recent press release in support of the invasion of Ukraine demonstrates a new level of Russian state coercion and use of the PP as a proxy to advance its message through Arctic Council circles.

Additional Perspectives

Participants were invited to comment on possible Arctic strategic messaging pursuant to the Arctic Council pause and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The tension between international geopolitics and regional functionalism was evident throughout the discussions, with participants pursuing themes related to: 1) other

ACTIVITY REPORT



governance-related perspectives, 2) the implications of the pause and sanctions on Sino-Russian relations; 3) the changing economic structure of the Arctic; and 4) the effects of the pause in Arctic Council activities on the Permanent Participants and how community-based Indigenous research might continue without compromising the strong stance taken by the seven Arctic states.

The organizers asked participants to articulate strategic narratives (or considerations relating thereto) that would counter Russian desires for a “business as usual” approach in and to the Arctic. Participants emphasized the importance of reiterating the North American and Nordic Arctic states’ respect for state sovereignty, the promotion of liberal democratic freedoms, human rights, and the rights of Arctic Indigenous people(s) to meaningfully participate in regional governance. Participants rejected the idea that the joint statement is meant to explore opportunities to establish an ‘Arctic 7 Council,’ acknowledging that Russia is an essential player in any Arctic forum that purports to be circumpolar in scope, and instead offered various opinions about conditions and timelines for resuming modest Arctic Council Activities in a rapidly changing international situation. In short, international events are driving regional dynamics, not vice versa, and the Arctic states can remain committed to peace and stability in the Arctic – but must take a principled stand to ensure that Russia cannot use Arctic regional affairs to legitimize its brutal invasion of Ukraine. Participants characterized Russian efforts to perpetuate “business as usual” in the Arctic alongside their international aggression as a ploy to maintain a sense of legitimacy for Putin’s regime rather than as an expression of genuine concern for regional governance.

Participants predicted that the international strategy of politically isolating and economically sanctioning Russia will deepen its dependence on China for Arctic resource development. Participants proposed strategic narratives to counter this eventuality, highlighting the Russian threat of nationalizing Western assets as an example of why Russia is a dangerous place to do business, as well as how Russian desperation for foreign investment might lead to China securing cut-rate deals on Russian resources. Participants also observed how the pause in Arctic Council activities cut off the access of Indigenous peoples (represented by four of the PPs whose members transcend state boundaries) to their kin in Russia. Participants emphasized how the Arctic Council is an innovative forum in which Indigenous Peoples represent themselves at the international level alongside states and regretted the effect that Russian aggression is having on this important forum for Indigenous participation in Arctic governance.

Participants noted that the pausing of the Arctic Council has meant the suspension of the Working Groups and any interaction with the Russian delegations and Russian chairmanship authorities. A strategic pause on Arctic Council activities is a measured way to allow senior officials from the United States, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden to identify what Council work might be able to continue without Russian participation or travel to Russia. Participants in our close session suggested that elements of ongoing Arctic Council projects that do not involve Russian collaborators might continue, including specific projects led or pursued by the Permanent Participants. Participants agreed that these projects needed to focus on new modalities of regional engagement. This might include an amplification of bilateral relationships and discussions between specific Arctic Council members states and the PPs that have not been publicized to date given the preponderant focus on cooperation that is truly circumpolar in scope. New modalities must ensure that Indigenous peoples, and the transnational relationships that they embody, do not become a casualty of Russia’s war on Ukraine. Indigenous participants in the discussion also emphasized that their messaging must

ACTIVITY REPORT



be articulated in a carefully calibrated manner that the Russian state could not appropriate for its own propaganda efforts.

All the participants agreed that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a direct attack on international law and established norms, and that undermining the international system inherently undermines regional governance fora and mechanisms. The pause on Arctic Council activities is respectful of and upholds the Ottawa Declaration, which prohibits discussion of military security within the forum, while ensuring that Russia cannot use the Arctic as a space to message that the West is willing to continue “business as usual” while Russia wages completely unprovoked and unjustified war on a sovereign state. The “pause” does not mean that the Arctic Council is dead, or that Russia has been suspended from it. Instead, it provides an opportunity for the United States, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden to consider how they might resume the work of the Arctic Council at an appropriate time and in a manner consistent with their shared values.