



The Arctic Institute

Center for Circumpolar Security Studies

A QUICK START GUIDE TO THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL'S MEMBER STATES ARE CANADA, DENMARK (INCLUDING GREENLAND AND THE FAROE ISLANDS), FINLAND, ICELAND, NORWAY, RUSSIA, SWEDEN AND THE UNITED STATES.



Canada held the first Arctic Council Chairmanship (1996-1998), as well as the Chairmanship before the U.S. (2013-2015).



Although continental Denmark is well below the Arctic Circle, Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and makes it an Arctic state.



Finland will be the next country to the chair the Arctic Council (2015-2017) after the United States.



Iceland is the smallest of the Arctic countries, and it is home to the secretariat for two of the six Arctic Council working groups.



Norway is home to the Arctic Council secretariat and to the secretariat for working group AMAP.



Russia is the largest of the Arctic countries. Its Arctic coastline swings through more than 150 degrees of longitude around the North Pole.



Sweden held the Arctic Council Chairmanship before Canada (2011-2013).



The state of Alaska makes the United States an Arctic country. The U.S. is chairing the Arctic Council for the second time, from 2013-2015.

Image: National Library of Norway

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL IS UNIQUE IN THE PROMINENT ROLE THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE.

The Arctic Council has a unique category called “permanent participant”, which is extended to indigenous peoples’ groups from the Arctic region. They sit around the same table as the eight member countries at meetings, and are supposed to be fully consulted on all decisions taken by the Council. There are currently six permanent participants in the Arctic Council.

- Aleut International Association
- Arctic Athabaskan Council
- Gwich’In Council International
- Inuit Circumpolar Council
- RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North)
- Saami Council



THE ARCTIC COUNCIL IS A CONSENSUS FORUM. ALL THE MEMBERS HAVE TO AGREE TO WHAT IT DOES.

There is no voting as such in the Arctic Council. All the Arctic Council's activities and statements are agreed to by all eight member states. There are different priorities for different countries, and different initiatives can be supported at different levels by different countries, but everything is done with consensus agreement by all eight.

EACH MEMBER STATE CHAIRS THE COUNCIL FOR ROUGHLY TWO YEARS. RIGHT NOW, THE U.S. IS CHAIR (2013-2015).

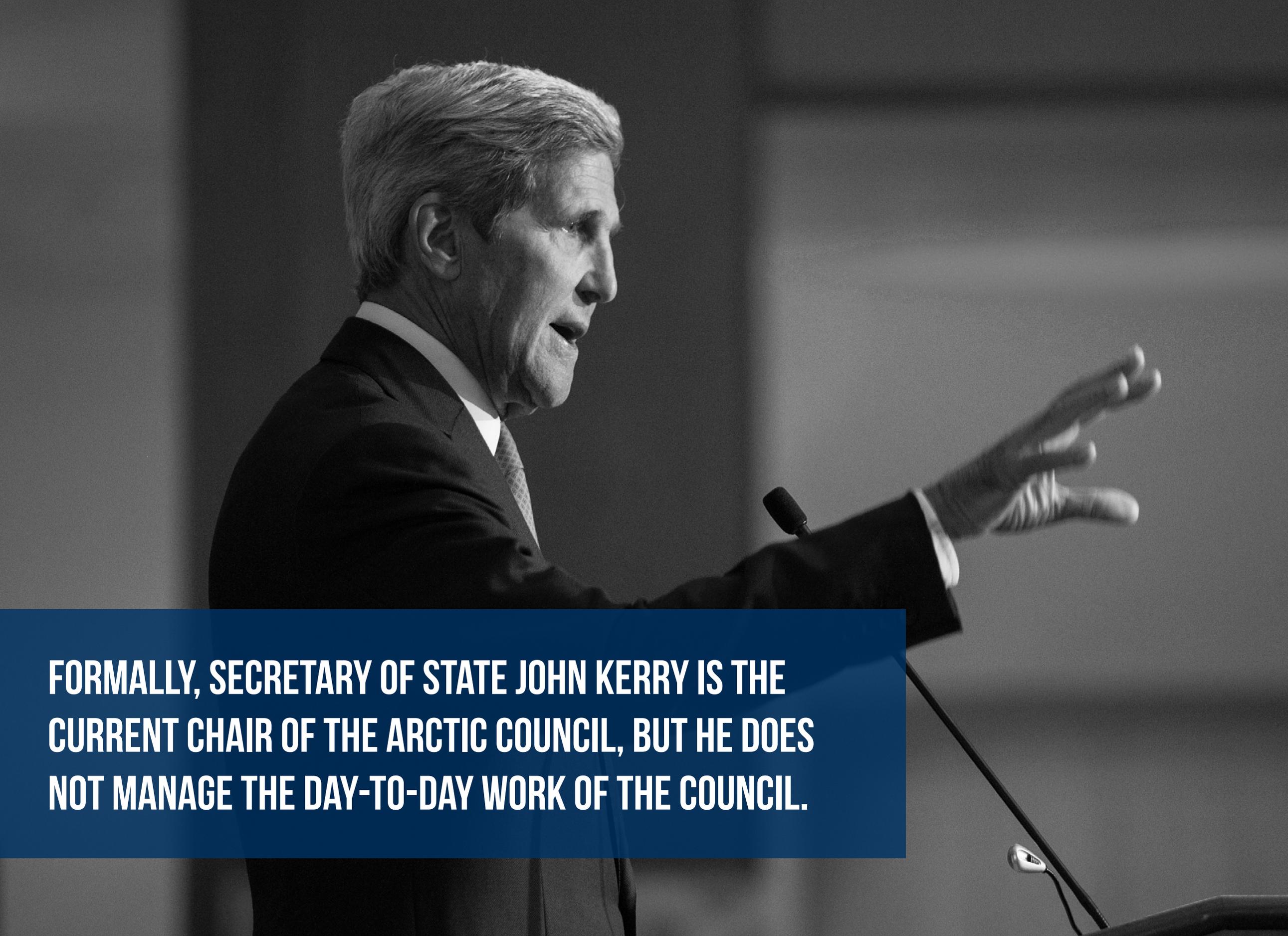


Each member state takes on the responsibility of chairing the Arctic Council for roughly two years at a time. Because the Council is a consensus-based forum, this does not mean that the country that holds the chairmanship is “boss” for two years. Instead, the chairmanship is a responsibility to help manage and guide the work of the Council for that period.

The order of chairmanships is:

- Canada
- United States
- Finland
- Iceland
- Russia
- Norway
- Denmark
- Sweden

The second cycle began in 2013. Currently, the U.S. is the chair (2013-2015). Next will be Finland (2015-2017).



FORMALLY, SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY IS THE CURRENT CHAIR OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL, BUT HE DOES NOT MANAGE THE DAY-TO-DAY WORK OF THE COUNCIL.

Formally, a Minister (or Secretary, in the U.S.) often holds the title of the Chair of the Arctic Council. But the daily work of the Arctic Council is supposed to be overseen instead by a person at a lower level called the “chair of the Senior Arctic Officials”. During the U.S. chairmanship, this person is Ambassador David Balton. Because the Arctic Council is a consensus-based forum, this person primarily serves a coordinating role, helping to ensure that the work that the Council has planned gets done.



MUCH OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL'S WORK HAS TO DO WITH INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION ON ARCTIC RESEARCH.

The Arctic Council has six working groups, each of which focuses on a particular area of research in the Arctic. They are long-term organizations that, in most cases, have existed since the Arctic Council was founded. They address such diverse issues as shipping, biodiversity, pollution, oil spill prevention and response, tourism, search-and-rescue, mental wellness, language preservation and economic development in Arctic communities.

The six working groups are:

- ACAP
- AMAP
- CAFF
- EPPR
- PAME
- SDWG

The Arctic Council also regularly sets up short-term task forces to tackle specific tasks.

Image: Kathryn Hansen
Goddard Spaceflight Center
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IN 2011, ARCTIC COUNCIL STATES SIGNED AN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON SEARCH-AND-RESCUE.

The Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic addresses things such as how to inform other countries of emergency situations, how to request border crossings in case of an emergency, meeting to prepare for practical cooperation, and what sorts of information should be exchanged between countries to facilitate search and rescue operations.

Link to the full agreement:
<http://bit.ly/1YOfIN0>

Image: U.S. Coast Guard
U.S. Government work

IN 2013, ARCTIC COUNCIL STATES SIGNED A SECOND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR MARINE OIL SPILLS.

The Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic was signed in 2013, at the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Kiruna, Sweden. It covers such areas as preparing response equipment, training, communications systems, how and when to share information, monitoring for oil pollution incidents, movement of resources across borders, and more.

Link to the full agreement:
<http://bit.ly/1YOfzZU>

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SETTLING TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN THE ARCTIC.



The international claims to the Arctic seabed that are often written about in the press are submissions to the United Nations' Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). The Arctic Council is not a U.N. body, and it doesn't have anything to do with settling these territorial claims in the Arctic.

Link to the CLCS:
<http://bit.ly/1Q4ti9b>

**NEITHER CHINA NOR ANY OTHER
OBSERVER STATE CAN BECOME A
FULL MEMBER.**

The Ottawa Declaration, signed in 1996, is the founding document for the Arctic Council. It states: "Members of the Arctic Council are: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States of America (the Arctic States)." Because the Arctic Council is a consensus forum, any change to this would require agreement by all eight Arctic states - not at all likely. In fact, the Arctic Council has some important limitations and restrictions on the rights of observers within the Council.

Link to the full Ottawa Declaration:
<http://bit.ly/1Ggxxc1>



THE ARCTIC COUNCIL DOES NOT DEAL WITH MILITARY ISSUES. THAT IS SPECIFICALLY EXCLUDED IN ITS FOUNDING DOCUMENT, THE OTTAWA DECLARATION (1996).

Some people believe that the Arctic Council will be a forum for the Arctic states to discuss military activity in the Arctic. But this is actually forbidden by the Arctic Council's founding document, called the Ottawa Declaration, which says in a footnote "The Arctic Council should not deal with matters related to military security."

Link to the full Ottawa Declaration:
<http://bit.ly/1Ggxxc1>

**THE ARCTIC COUNCIL WAS FOUNDED ON 19 SEPTEMBER 1996.
IT WILL HAVE ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2016.**

1996-2016