

An Arctic Council in Transition

VICTORIA HERRMANN | MAY 2017



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2017 US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will hand over the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council to Finland after two years of successful American leadership in the circumpolar north.

However, the transition from the Obama Administration's *One Arctic* vision to President Trump's *America First* agenda has left Arctic actors unsure of how, and to what extent, the US will actively contribute to the ambitions of the Finnish Chairmanship and engage in the Council more generally.

Given the Administration's lack of commitment to climate change and scientific cooperation, it will undoubtedly be difficult to foster transatlantic cooperation between the US and other Arctic States to advance the Finnish Chairmanship's stated themes of implementing the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals. But it is not impossible.

THE WAY FORWARD: SUBNATIONAL ACTORS

- Rather than continuing to appeal for US support for climate change and sustainable development initiatives at the ministerial level, it may prove more effective to engage subnational actors on these important issues in the years to come.
- The national inertia created by the Trump Administration when it comes to the Arctic's most pressing issues may prove an opportunity to rethink the framework within which the Arctic Council operates, and ultimately lead to a more inclusive, efficient structure.
- By including regional governments in Arctic Council meetings and empowering them to implement Arctic Council initiatives outside of the direct management of national governments, progress on climate change could be maintained despite a lack of commitment from national governments.



INTRODUCTION

Precarious Times, Sub-National Actors, and A New Structure for a New Arctic

Tomorrow state leaders from across the Arctic region will convene in Fairbanks, Alaska to participate in the handover of the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the regional governance body of the circumpolar north, from the United States to Finland. The meeting of Arctic state ministers marks a significant transatlantic shift in Arctic leadership from North America to Europe—a shift which comes at a time of political volatility and uncertainty. Following four years of Canadian and then American leadership, the Arctic Council will be steered by Europe for the next twelve years, beginning with Finland. While many programs and initiatives will be carried on from one Chairmanship to the next, changes in geographic focus, rhetoric, and vision are inevitable. One way to promote continuity of Arctic engagement in this transatlantic transition in a tumultuous political climate is to rethink the framework of Arctic Council itself to better include subnational governments in its projects and proceedings.

The Ministerial Meeting marks a significant transatlantic shift in Arctic leadership from North America to Europe—a shift which comes at a time of political volatility and uncertainty.

Over the past two years, the heart of the US Arctic Council Chairmanship has been the theme *One Arctic: Shared Opportunities, Challenges, and Responsibilities*,¹ a departure from the ‘many Arctics’ promoted by Norway and other Scandinavian countries.² The United States chose three focal points that reached across borders: improving economic and living conditions for Arctic change. For a country typically seen as the ‘reluctant’ Arctic state, President Obama moved (and renamed) mountains to highlight the region’s importance. In September 2015 President Obama became the first sitting US president to visit the Arctic and invited Arctic state ministers, stakeholders, and researchers to join him in Anchorage for the GLACIER Conference to move forward on climate change.³ Three months later, President Obama highlighted that historic first trip to Alaska during his speech to world leaders at the UN Climate Summit in Paris, COP21, speaking of how he “saw the effects of climate change firsthand in our northernmost state, Alaska, where the sea is already swallowing villages and eroding shorelines; where permafrost thaws and the tundra burns; where glaciers are melting at a pace unprecedented in modern times.”⁴ In the fall of 2016, the White House held the first ever Arctic

¹ U.S Department of State, “U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council,” *U.S. Department of State website*, <https://www.state.gov/e/oes/ocns/opa/arc/uschair/>. Accessed April 20, 2017.

² Brende, Borge, “The Arctic: Important for Norway, Important for the World,” *Harvard International Review*, July 16, 2015. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/Arctic_harvard/id2406903/.

³ Unfortunately the website for the GLACIER Conference has been disabled on the US State Department site. A transcript of President Obama’s speech can be accessed here: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/01/remarks-president-glacier-conference-anchorage-ak>

⁴ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of COP21.” Office of the Press Secretary, The White House. November 20, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/30/remarks-president-obama-first-session-cop21>.

Science Ministerial Meeting, which resulted in a Joint Statement that committed ministers to work together to deepen scientific knowledge and understanding of the Arctic.⁵ Recognizing the momentum of these advances, the Finnish Chairmanship has chosen to focus on the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and on the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 during their two-year Chairmanship from 2017 to 2019.⁶

However, United States will end its Arctic Council leadership without an official statement by the current administration about its national Arctic policy stance, without a plan to engage with the region after the Chairmanship returns to Europe for the next twelve years, and without an Arctic Special Representative. (In January 2017, Admiral Papp stepped down from his Arctic Representative position.⁷ The transition from the Obama Administration's *One Arctic* vision to President Trump's *America First* agenda has left Arctic actors unsure of how, and to what extent, the US will actively contribute to the ambitions of the Finnish Chairmanship and engage in the Council. While Secretary of State Tillerson will participate in the Ministerial Meeting in Fairbanks, there is skepticism that his presence will translate to sustained interest in the region. In a February 2017 report commissioned by the Finnish Government in preparation for their leadership titled *Finnish Presidency at the Arctic Council (2017 – 2019): Change and Uncertainty*, the authors note that

“the choice of Donald Trump for president raises uncertainty about the US policy direction...Trump’s general criticism and disparaging attitude of climate change issues can resonate to cripple the US to work with the Arctic Council on minimizing the impacts of and adapting the northern regions to climate change.”⁸⁹

The report is no exaggeration. The early months of President Trump’s tenure have largely born out the authors’ predictions of a retreat in climate action and multilateralism. Many of President Trump’s cabinet appointees have expressed opposition to climate action and support for fossil fuels. Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, helped to bring a lawsuit from 28 states against the agency’s Clean Power Plan, an Obama administration rule to cut carbon pollution from coal power plants.¹⁰ State Department Secretary and current Chair of the Arctic Council Rex Tillerson is the former chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil, and while he has acknowledged the science of human caused climate change – unlike President Trump – his former company has consistently lobbied against climate policy proposals and is under investigation by New York’s attorney general for

⁵ Joint Statement of Ministers. The White House of President Barack Obama. September 28, 2106.

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/28/joint-statement-ministers>

⁶ “Finland’s Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2017-2019,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, updated April 26, 2017 <http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=356546>.

⁷ gCaptain, “Eastern Shipbuilding Hire Admiral Papp, Former Coast Guard Commandant, as Washington Rep,” gcaptain.com, January 6, 2017, <http://gcaptain.com/eastern-shipbuilding-hires-admiral-papp-former-coast-guard-commandant-washington-rep/>.

⁸ Timo Koivurova, Małgorzata Śmieszek, Adam Stepień, Harri Mikkola, Juha Kämpylä, Paula Kankaanpää, “Finland’s chairmanship in the Arctic Council (2017-2019) in the age of change and uncertainty,” The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February 14, 2017. http://www.fiaa.fi/en/news/4116/finland_s_chairmanship_in_the_arctic_council_2017-2019_in_the_age_of_change_and_uncertainty/.

⁹ Original report in Finnish, translation using Google Translate and checked with authors of report.

¹⁰ Natasha Geiling, “Scott Pruitt Makes It Clear That the Clean Power Plan is Going Away,” *Think Progress*, February 19, 2017. <https://thinkprogress.org/scott-pruitt-wall-street-journal-clean-power-plan-epa-a2b622e71701>

misleading investors on the risks of climate change.¹¹¹² Trump himself has called climate change a Chinese hoax created to make US manufacturing non-competitive.

Given the circumstances, it will undoubtedly be difficult to foster transatlantic cooperation between the United States under Trump and other Arctic States to advance the Finnish Chairmanship's support of the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals. But it is not impossible.

The national inertia created by the Trump Administration may prove an opportunity to rethink how the Arctic Council operates and lead to a more inclusive structure.

Rather than continuing to appeal for US support for climate change and sustainable development initiatives at the ministerial level, it may prove more effective to engage subnational actors on these important issues in the years to come. The national inertia created by the Trump Administration when it comes to the Arctic's most pressing issues may prove an opportunity to rethink the framework within which the Arctic

Council operates, and ultimately lead to a more inclusive, efficient structure.

This Issue Brief considers the current state of US climate and multilateral policy as a catalyst for increasing the involvement of subnational state and non-state actors in the Arctic Council's work. First, the paper provides a brief overview of the Arctic Council leadership transition, including a summary of where the Arctic Council's work stands at the end of the US Chairmanship and an identification of the challenges posed by the current state of affairs to the continuation of this work. The paper then turns to the potential participation of sub-national actors in the Arctic to advance the aims of the Finnish Chairmanship and the vision of the Arctic Council and offers justification for the inclusion of sub-national actors and initial steps towards that end. While no formal statement has been made by the Trump White House ahead of the Arctic Council meeting, the aforementioned Finnish-commissioned report advises that "The future of US Arctic policy is increasingly precarious." Thus, if the Arctic Council, with Finland as its leader, wants to effectively navigate this tenuous era, it should consider expanding its current state-centric model of operation.

¹¹ "Rex Tillerson, ExxonMobil and Climate Lobbying," *InfluenceMap.org*, December 13, 2016, https://influencemap.org/site/data/000/237/Exxon_Dec_2016.pdf.

¹² John Schwartz, "Exxon Mobil Fraud Inquiry Said to Focus More on Future Than Past," *The New York Times*, August 19, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/20/science/exxon-mobil-fraud-inquiry-said-to-focus-more-on-future-than-past.html?_r=0.



Where the Arctic Council Stands at the US – Finnish Transition

In the summer of 2014, Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr. was named the first ever State Department Special Representative for the Arctic. In all but name, Admiral Papp was the US Ambassador to the Arctic, dedicated to the advancement of US interests in the region. And as the public face of America's Arctic policy ahead of its Arctic Council Chairmanship, Admiral Papp not only had to outline Washington's priorities for its two-year leadership of the Council in a whirlwind of public events, private meetings, and Arctic conferences-- he also had to simultaneously sell America on the Arctic, and the Arctic on America. Creating the position of Arctic ambassador was a first step in selling the Arctic on America. This marked the first time the US had given an individual authority to advocate on behalf of, educate the public about, and engage with the Arctic.

To sell Americans on the Arctic, Admiral Papp published a blog post titled America Is an Arctic Nation in the winter of 2014.¹³ The post declared that America's future was inextricably linked to the future of the circumpolar region, and that, as an Arctic nation, America had a moral obligation to use its human, financial, and scientific resources to mitigate global climate change and help those in the region adapt. Over the next two years, the phrase 'America is an Arctic nation' was taken up by journalists, government agencies, senior Arctic officials, and policy researchers. Thus, prior to the irrelevance with which the Trump administration would treat the Arctic, the Obama Administration made a valiant effort to fulfill Admiral Papp's call to remind America of its Arctic identity. Ahead of the Chairmanship, President Obama reinforced an earlier National Security Presidential Directive about the Arctic by issuing a National Strategy for the Arctic Region in 2013¹⁴, followed by an Implementation Plan for the strategy a year later.¹⁵ While this was the first US national strategy for the Arctic, many other Arctic states had previously outlined their Arctic ambitions at the national scale.

Prior to the irrelevance with which the Trump administration would treat the region, America was on its way to becoming an *Arctic Nation*.

For its Chairmanship priorities, the US drew on three critical areas important not only to the US strategy, but also critical and common to all Arctic states under the "One Arctic" slogan. By focusing

¹³ Adm. Robert J. Papp, Jr., "America Is an Arctic Nation," The White House of President Barack Obama Blog, December 2, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/12/02/america-Arctic-nation>.

¹⁴ "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," The White House, May 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_Arctic_strategy.pdf.

¹⁵ John P. Holdren, Amy Pope, and Mark Brezezinski, "Advancing Implementation of the National strategy for the Arctic Region," The White House of President Barack Obama, March 9, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/03/09/advancing-implementation-national-strategy-Arctic-region>.

on improving economic and living conditions, Arctic Ocean safety, security and stewardship, and addressing the impacts of climate change, the Obama Administration fought against the narrative of the Arctic as a remote, wild place and instead highlighted the global responsibility for protecting the Arctic and empowering its people. When the US began its Chairmanship in 2015, President Obama hit the ground running. In January 2015, the White House established an Arctic Executive Steering Committee to provide guidance and coordinate priorities and activities across the multiple executive agencies that work on Arctic issues, but whose funding streams are not coordinated.¹⁶ One of Steering Committee's first initiatives was to work with the State Department on the GLACIER Conference, held in Anchorage, Alaska in August 2015. In the days and months following the conference, the Obama Administration announced several new initiatives and funding opportunities for America's northernmost citizens, particularly regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation.

President Obama's the trip to Alaska did more than make history. It enabled him to empathize with people having to watch their homeland be eroded by rising tides.

While unprecedented, the trip to Alaska did more than make history. It also provided President Obama with first-hand experience in understanding the impacts of climate change, and enabled him to empathize with people having to watch their homeland be eroded by rising tides. This was an experience he took with him from Alaska to Paris, evident in his advocacy for a binding global agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. In his address to state leaders at the 21st UN Climate Summit, he recalled his

trip, where he "saw the effects of climate change firsthand in our northernmost state, Alaska, where the sea is already swallowing villages and eroding shorelines; where permafrost thaws and the tundra burns; where glaciers are melting at a pace unprecedented in modern times."¹⁷ For President Obama, Alaska "was a preview of one possible future — a glimpse of our children's fate if the climate keeps changing faster than our efforts to address it. Submerged countries. Abandoned cities. Fields that no longer grow. Political disruptions that trigger new conflict, and even more floods of desperate peoples seeking the sanctuary of nations not their own."¹⁸ President Obama translated his experience into words to provide momentum that culminated in the success of the Paris Accord.

To round out his Administration's tenure at the helm of the Arctic Council, the Steering Committee sponsored the first-ever White House Arctic Science Ministerial Meeting in September 2016, gathering science ministers from 25 countries and the EU to discuss Arctic research priorities.¹⁹ The ministers signed a joint statement on increased international collaboration and agreed on the draft text of a

¹⁶ For information on the Arctic Executive Steering Committee's work, please see the presentation by the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the office of the President of the United States:

http://www.iiasa.ac.at/web/home/about/events/Topic_2_Brzezeinski_AESC_One_Year_In_160211.pdf.

¹⁷ The White House, "Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of Cop21," Le Bourget, Paris, France, November 30, 2015, The White House of President Barack Obama, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/30/remarks-president-obama-first-session-cop21>.

¹⁸ The White House, "Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of Cop21," Le Bourget, Paris, France, November 30, 2015, The White House of President Barack Obama, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/30/remarks-president-obama-first-session-cop21>.

¹⁹ United States Arctic Research Commission and Arctic Executive Steering Committee, eds. 2016. *Supporting Arctic Science: A Summary of the White House Arctic Science Ministerial Meeting, September 28, 2016, Washington, DC*. United States Arctic Research Commission, Arlington, VA, 78 pp. https://storage.googleapis.com/Arcticgov-static/publications/other/Supporting_Arctic_Science_1.pdf.

legally-binding agreement on enhancing international Arctic scientific cooperation, which will be signed during the Fairbanks Ministerial.

Beyond these three monumental events, the US Arctic Council Chairmanship promoted many smaller initiatives, programs, and projects that advanced the Council's domestic and regional work. The Our Arctic Nation campaign, comprised of 50 blog posts, connected Americans across the country with their Arctic heritage.²⁰ The Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy, ARENA, was launched to promote peer-to-peer knowledge transfer and establish professional networks related to microgrids and renewable resource integration for remote Arctic communities.

The US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council came at a crucial moment, when the effects of climate change were becoming evident in the region—and the Obama Administration's ambitious efforts largely rose to meet that challenge, providing a considerable leap forward in America's commitments to Alaska, to the Arctic, and to the Council.

The US Chairmanship came at a crucial moment, when the effects of climate change were becoming evident in the region—and America rose to meet that challenge.

Finland will assume the Arctic Council Chairmanship from May 2017 to May 2019. The Finnish government has thus far announced the Chairmanship will focus on the core pillars of the Arctic Council: mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, sustainable development, and implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UN sustainable development goals in Arctic cooperation. It will also prioritize work on environmental protection, meteorological cooperation, connectivity, and education.

In many ways, Finland is the birthplace of modern Arctic cooperation. At a time when international Arctic engagement was limited—and at times unimaginable—the first real sign of change was Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's Murmansk speech in 1987 where he introduced the idea of the Arctic as a “zone of peace.”²¹ Two years later, Finland invited Arctic state representatives to Rovaniemi to jump-start a negotiation process (now known as the Rovaniemi Process) to promote international cooperation on Arctic environmental protection.²² This culminated in the first-ever ministerial level meeting of Arctic states and Arctic indigenous peoples in Rovaniemi in 1991 and the establishment of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (APES). The meeting in Rovaniemi was a stepping stone for international environmental cooperation in the Arctic region, and eventually led to the founding of the Arctic Council—an effort co-led by Canada. Finland previously chaired the Arctic Council from 2000 to 2002, and focused on launching projects to advance economic and social development and strengthen the Arctic Council's international reputation.²³ In doing so, it initiated an evaluation process for the Arctic Council's activities to enhance environmental protection, promote sustainable development, and encourage closer cooperation between the European Union and the Arctic Council.

²⁰ To see all 50 posts of *Our Arctic Nation*, see: <https://medium.com/our-Arctic-nation>.

²¹ For a contemporary connection to the Murmansk Speech, please see <https://www.adn.com/Arctic/article/how-gorbachev-shaped-future-Arctic-policy-25-years-ago/2012/10/01/>.

²² Markku Heikkilä, “It All Started in Rovaniemi,” Shared Voices Magazine 2016 Special Issue, *University of the Arctic*, March 18, 2016, <http://www.uArctic.org/shared-voices/shared-voices-magazine-2016-special-issue/it-all-started-in-rovaniemi/>.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, “Program for the Finnish Chair of the Arctic Council 2000-2002,” Working Paper, November 20 2001, <https://oaarchive.Arctic-council.org/handle/11374/1781?show=full>.

That same commitment to strengthening the Arctic Council's external image and internal effectiveness will characterize Finland's Chairmanship. At the 2016 Arctic Circle meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland – the largest international conference on the Arctic – Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs Timo Soini announced intentions “to strengthen continuity between the chairmanships.”²⁴ He went on to explain that “This means that we are ready to continue with important initiatives launched during the US Chairmanship. In addition, we want that Iceland will have a solid base for building their own program when they follow us as the next chair.”²⁵ In this vein, it is expected that the Fins are expected to continue an ongoing but informal effort of providing the Council with a sense of long-term continuity.²⁶ This may mean moving beyond the model of setting new priorities at outset of each chairmanship to instead (or in addition) establish a multi-year work program.

Such a strategy would guide the Council's work for longer than two year periods, instead moving to five or even ten year plans. For an organization that has undergone a change in leadership and in turn focus every two years for the past two decades, continuity has been a long-sought after goal. A strategy of continuity would ensure active engagement from all states regardless of domestic political turnover. Moreover, issues like mental health, ecosystem conservation, and search and rescue are challenges last beyond the tenure of any one country's chairmanship, and thus any project or initiative to mitigate them requires a lifespan beyond the tenure of a single Chairmanship. Implementation of the Paris Agreement and work on the UN sustainable development goals illustrate the urgent need for continuity, and arguably are the two of the most important challenges demanding long-term commitments.

²⁴ Timo Soini, “Remarks by Minister Soini at the Arctic Circle Conference,” *Arctic Circle*, October 10, 2016, <http://www.uArctic.org/news/2016/10/remarks-by-minister-soini-at-the-Arctic-circle-conference/>

²⁵ Timo Soini, “Remarks by Minister Soini at the Arctic Circle Conference,” *Arctic Circle*, October 10, 2016, <http://www.uArctic.org/news/2016/10/remarks-by-minister-soini-at-the-Arctic-circle-conference/>

²⁶ For context, please see <http://Arcticjournal.com/politics/2993/coasting-finnish> and <http://Arcticjournal.com/politics/2605/mr-consistency>.



At the Nexus of Dramatic Political and Climate Changes

Finding Continuity in a Volatile Political and Environmental Climate

However, agreement on and adoption of a five or ten-year strategy will be difficult for all eight Arctic states and Permanent Participants, particularly when the US federal government is not willing to engage with important circumpolar topics like climate change. In the final months of the US Chairmanship, the White House under the Trump Administration has gone quiet in its vision and pledges to the region. Just a few months ago, the White House website hosted several informational multimedia pages on the Arctic—however, the site currently lacks any mention of the region save for single line in the Joint Readout of the meeting between Trump and Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen.²⁷ This virtual absence is indicative of the Trump Administration’s overall deficiency in Arctic policy thus far – leading to the “increasingly precarious” description.

President Trump’s “scorched-earth approach to environmental protection” comes at a time of unprecedented climate volatility in the Arctic.

In addition to the lack of Arctic-specific announcements to date, the Trump Administration’s leadership appointments, budget cuts, and rhetoric in opposition of science-based policymaking, climate change action, and multilateralism are cause for concern. President Trump has used his first 100 days in office to abandon and roll back the Obama Administration’s efforts to mitigate and adapt to a rapidly warming world. Actions taken by President Trump have effectively killed the Clean Power

Plan,²⁸ new vehicle emissions standards, clean water regulations, and curbs on toxic discharge from power plants.²⁹ His administration has approved two highly controversial oil pipeline projects, Keystone XL and Dakota Access, and he has signed an executive order aimed at expanding offshore oil and gas drilling in the Atlantic and the Arctic. The world also fears that President Trump will move to withdraw the US from the historic Paris Agreement.

This “scorched-earth approach to environmental protection” comes at a time of unprecedented climate volatility in the circumpolar region.³⁰ In November 2016, an Arctic heat wave pushed

²⁷ “Joint Readout of Meeting Between President Donald J. Trump and Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen,” *Office of the Press Secretary, The White House*, March 30, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/31/joint-readout-meeting-between-president-donald-j-trump-and-danish-prime>

²⁸ David Smith, “Trump Moves to Dismantle Obama’s Climate Legacy with Executive Order,” *The Guardian*, March 28, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/28/trump-clean-power-plan-executive-order-coal-industry>.

²⁹ Oliver Milman, “Trump Begins Rollback of Obama’s Car Pollution Standards to Curb Emissions,” *The Guardian*, March 15, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/15/car-pollution-carbon-emissions-obama-trump-epa>.

³⁰ Oliver Milman, Jonathan Watts, and Tom Phillips, “Worried World Urges Trump Not to Pull Out of Paris Climate Agreement,” *The Guardian*, May 7, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/07/trump-climate-change-officials-worried>.

temperatures 36 degrees Fahrenheit above normal over the north's highest latitudes and western region. Simultaneously to the east, lower latitudes in Siberia faced a cold front that kept temperatures 60 degrees Fahrenheit below normal for weeks. Residents, researchers, and journalists alike were troubled by "one of the most bizarre juxtapositions" they had ever seen.³¹ This contrast would have been alarming even if it was a one-time, bizarre event. But it was not.

A month later, a buoy close to the North Pole registered a temperature at the melting point (32 degrees), far higher than the seasonal average.³² Beyond the buoy, the entire Arctic north of 80 degrees, temperature spikes in late December 2016 saw levels 30 to 35 degrees above normal.

Yet again in February 2017, temperatures near the North Pole were more than 20 degrees above average. Following days of continued warm air and sea temperature during the polar night, the US National Snow and Ice Data Center announced the following month that the Arctic has less sea ice at winter's end than ever recorded in nearly four decades of satellite measurements – the ice coverage was a daunting 470,000 square miles below the 1981 to 2010 long-term average.³³

These dramatic temperature shifts have tangible impacts on public health, food security, travel, safety, cultural heritage traditions, and economies for the four million people that call the Arctic home. In a time of such dramatic changes, the Arctic – and the American citizens who live there – cannot afford a federal government promoting inaction at home and disengagement abroad. It is likely that the Trump Administration will do an about-face on the Obama Administration's commitment to climate change action or to the goals established by the UN to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.

³¹ Jason Samenow and Justin Grieser, "While the North Pole Warms beyond the Melting Point, It's Freakishly Cold in Siberia," Washington Post, November 18, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2016/11/18/while-the-north-pole-warms-beyond-the-melting-point-its-freakishly-cold-in-siberia/?utm_term=.57f047394049.

³² Jason Samenow, "Temperature near North Pole Jumped to 32 Degrees This Week," Washington Post, December 22, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2016/12/22/weather-buoy-near-north-pole-hits-melting-point/?utm_term=.aec8f86789b6.

³³ Marcia Gallucci, "Global Sea Ice Hit Record Lows During Extremely Warm February," March 19, 2017, <http://mashable.com/2017/03/19/february-2017-second-warmest-on-record/#jMuIBseU1mq0>.



An Evolving Arctic Council

Inviting Sub-National Actors to the Table

One way to adapt to an inactive national government is to be more inclusive of subnational actors in the Arctic Council. By including local stakeholder and representatives in Arctic Council meetings and empowering them to implement Arctic Council initiatives outside of the direct management of national governments, continuity between Chairmanships and progress on climate change could be maintained despite a lack of commitment from national governments.

A diverse array of sub-national actors – actors that exist within a nation-state below the national level of governance – exists in the Arctic. Provinces, territories, states, autonomous regions, municipalities, cities, First Nations, and aboriginal governments all participate and interact with the Arctic as a region in new ways. For purposes of this brief, subnational actors can be taken to mean “a coherent territorial entity situated between the local and national levels with a capacity for authoritative decision making.”³⁴ That is, the level of government below the central authority that has competences and administrative resources above the city level. The subnational actors listed herein are taken from those identified in the Arctic Human Development Report, an assessment of human development and transformations of the region.³⁵³⁶

Altering the Arctic Council to include sub-national representatives has gained traction in recent years. In the 2015 and 2016 Arctic Yearbook publications, several authors advocated for expanding the Council’s framework to include regional and local representatives.³⁷ The arguments focused in part on the special status of indigenous organizations and encouraged a comparable position for northern sub-national actors like Alaska, Greenland, the Canadian territories, Nordic municipalities, and Russia’s

³⁴ Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary N. Marks, and Arjan H. Schakel. *The rise of regional authority: A comparative study of 42 democracies*. Routledge, 2010.

³⁵ Einarsson, Niels, Joan Nyman Larsen, Annika Nilsson, and Oran R. Young. *Arctic human development report*. Stefansson Arctic Institute, 2004. And Larsen, Joan Nyman, and Gail Fondahl, eds. *Arctic human development report: Regional processes and global linkages*. Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015.

³⁶ In the North American Arctic, the subnational actors discussed in this Brief are the state of Alaska, the Yukon, Northwest, and Nunavut Territories, Northern Quebec, and Northern Labrador; in the Kingdom of Denmark, they include Greenland and the Faroe Islands; in Norway, they include the countries of Finnmark, Troms, and Norland; in Sweden, Norrbotten; Lapland in Finland; and in Russia, Murmansk Oblast, Nenets Okrug, Komi Republic (including Vorkuta City), Yamal-Nenets Okrug, Taymyr (Dolgan-Nenets) Okrug, Krasnoyarsk Krai (including Norilsk and Igarka), Sakha Republic; and Chukotka Okrug. Because of Iceland’s size, it does not have an equivalent to the level of subnational actor as a state in the United States or Territory in Canada. Its eight regions are used for statistical purposes and constituencies are largely used for national parliamentary elections. The 74 municipalities in Iceland govern more localized matters like school, transportation, and zoning, and are thus not included herein – particularly because the only municipality located above the Arctic Circle in Iceland is Akureyri, when it merged with the island of Grímsey in 2011.³⁶ Thus, due to the limited scope of this Brief, further research is needed in order to identify the most effective and suitable way to engage Iceland subnationally.

³⁷ Arctic Yearbook 2016: “The Arctic Council: 20 Years of Cooperation and Policy-Shaping,” eds. Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot, Joel Plouffe, October 2016, <http://www.uArctic.org/news/2016/10/Arctic-yearbook-2016-published/>.

republics. For them, these “ethnically and linguistically unique [regions], with political legitimacy granted by their domestic election,” necessitate the creation of a mechanism by which to formally include them in the Council’s work.³⁸ To fully understand the importance of this recent criticism of the Arctic Council’s preclusion of subnational actors, it must be understood in the context of the origins of transnational cooperation in the years following the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union.

In its initial years, the Council was viewed as an informal research apparatus with limited regional diplomatic or local capacity building value. When it was established in 1996, the primary focus of the Arctic Council was dictated by the 1991 Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), led by state diplomats. Most efforts revolved around four already existing working groups in environmental science research and cooperation: the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP); the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response group; and the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME). However, the state-centric AEPS and later Arctic Council developments around multilateral environmental protection and research failed to adequately engage northern leaders and the everyday challenges they faced. In response, leaders from 14 sub-national governments across the Arctic formed a separate association in 1991, the Northern Forum. Rather than focus purely on broad scientific aims like the Arctic Council, the Northern Forum was founded to bring together subnational leaders like governors and other stakeholders to address shared immediate political, environmental, and economic issues.

In its first decade, the Northern Forum had arguably more successes than the Arctic Council. Although denied Permanent Participant status in the Arctic Council in 1998, the Northern Forum received Observer status as well as analogous standing at the UN Economic and Social Council and the UN Development Program. More importantly, The Northern Forum completed impact-oriented projects for the wellbeing of Northern communities, including the 1996 Environmental Health and Emergency Response project and the 1998 Management of Marine Resources project. Its membership included 25 governments across 10 countries by 2003 and was actively promoting cooperation and engagement with the Council.

But during the period of the Northern Forum’s prominence, the Arctic Council also grew in reputation, and today, the Arctic Council is seen as the most prominent, credible, and relevant international forum for Arctic issues. Through a strategic communications rebranding (2012) and the establishment of two legally binding agreements on search and rescue (2011) and oil spill cooperation (2013), the attention of the north – and media outlets – turned from the Forum to the Council. The Arctic Council meetings were increasingly identified as a distinguished setting for establishing the region’s agenda, attended by high ranking officials and covered by international news outlets like the BBC and CNN. With the Arctic Council accruing broad, sweeping successes at the regional level, the Forum’s mission seemed less important to some of its members, eventually resulting in less funding from some subnational governments while others, like Alaska, withdrew altogether.³⁹

Increasing international prominence also altered the involvement of subnational actors in national delegations at the Council. While subnational representatives were once invited to take a seat at the negotiation table alongside state representatives at ministerial meetings, Greenland and the Faroe

³⁸ Lawson Brigham, Heather Exner-Pirot, Lassi Heininen, & Joel Plouffe, “Introduction The Arctic Council: Twenty years of Policy Shaping,” pg. 17 In Heininen, L.; Exner-Pirot, H. & Plouffe, J. (eds.), *Arctic Yearbook 2015: Arctic Governance and Governing*. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum.

³⁹ Alaska withdrew from the Forum in 2011, and was readmitted in 2016.

Islands found themselves excluded from the executive Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) meetings – the place where the most high-level political negotiations and decisions are made— during the 2011-2013 Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. After abstaining from Council activities, a compromise on how to better include Greenland was found during the Canadian Chairmanship in 2013.^{40,41}

Regardless of this reconciliation, the Arctic Council is still an intergovernmental forum where national politicians wield the most influence. The new binding agreements mentioned above are agreed to by the eight Arctic states. Apart from Canada, which has a long history of appointing Northerners to be their representatives, other Arctic States' senior Arctic officials and Arctic council ministers are usually civil servants working in southern

capitals. In this colonial structure, Arctic regional representatives must go through southern capitals to have their voices heard, and feel as though Arctic Council officials now speaks on behalf of and is making decisions about its northern geographies without their representation.⁴²

Solving these complex problems requires a diverse array of political actors, authorities, institutions, nations, movements, and associations that go beyond territorial borders.

However, the tides are turning against the Arctic's Westphalian nature. The inability of individual national governments to address issues like climate change and the sustainable development goals points to the need for a devolution of power to include other stakeholders and go beyond state negotiations. Solving these complex problems requires a diverse array of political actors, authorities, institutions, nations, movements, and associations that go beyond territorial borders. While much Arctic problem solving still occurs at the national level, today's challenges have opened the global policy agenda to subnational actors, as the rapid environmental, economic, and social changes happening on the ground today have renewed a desire to collaborate across sub-national regions to address challenges quickly and locally. Since the 1970s, there has been a devolution of power to local authority through domestic political decentralization, leading to the creation of Nunavut in Canada and home rule (1979) and Self Government in Greenland since 2009.⁴³ This transfer of authority to empower localities not only enabled local governments and political leaders to govern policy in their domestic constituencies – it also emboldened their participation in internal fora like Arctic Frontiers, Arctic Circle, and the Northern Forum. In these settings, subnational actors have embraced their internationalization and position as key hubs of the regional economy. Their firsthand experience with some of the most dramatic impacts of climatic changes also provides them with the national and international political legitimacy to act in the Arctic's foreign relations.

⁴⁰ Greenland Government (2013a). Udenrigspolitisk Redegørelse 2013 side 8/Annual Foreign Policy Report to the Greenland Parliament.

⁴¹ To note, Former Greenland Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond was widely criticized by the opposition for this boycott, though they were equally dissatisfied with Greenland's new status at Arctic Council meetings. For more, see: Jacobsen, M. (2015), 'The Power of Collective Identity Narration: Greenland's Way to a more Autonomous Foreign Policy.' In Heininen, L.; Exner-Pirot, H. & Plouffe, J. (eds.), Arctic Yearbook 2015: Arctic Governance and Governing. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum.

⁴² Inuuteq Holm Olsen & Jessica M. Shadian, "Greenland & the Arctic Council: Subnational Regions in a Time of Arctic Westphalianisation," pg. 269 in Heininen, L.; Exner-Pirot, H. & Plouffe, J. (eds.), Arctic Yearbook 2016: 20 Years of Cooperation and Policy-Shaping. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum.

⁴³ Larsen, J. N., & Fondahl, G. (Eds.). E. Carina, H. Kesikalo, and Chris Southcott. (2015). "Chapter 10 Globalization," *Arctic human development report: Regional processes and global linkages*. Nordic Council of Ministers.

These advances, combined with President Trump's disengagement with the Arctic, are a catalyst for the Arctic Council to seriously consider the role of subnational circumpolar actors. The Finnish Chairmanship's goals cannot be attained if the United States, the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter, follows through with its threat to withdraw from the Agreement.⁴⁴ Examining the problem from the bottom-up instead of top-down paints a more promising picture. Sub-national stakeholders already can and are taking steps to change the paradigm, even if they are in countries who are more reluctant to take national climate action. The current Administration's refusal to take climate change and sustainable development seriously is an important push factor for the Council to consider subnational involvement. But there are equally important pull factors that show why including subnational actors is vital to the future viability of an effective Arctic Council.

Climate Change is a Local Reality

Unlike state officials from southern cities involved in Arctic Council negotiations, Arctic residents, including its government officials, are directly affected by the impacts of climate change. Arctic-based representatives, particularly those living on the coast, are already exposed to hazards like thawing permafrost, sea ice loss, rising sea levels, and more frequent, intense weather events that lead to erosion extreme enough to force some communities to relocate. These dangers pose real and heightened risks to life, health, and economic prosperity at the sub-national level. Accordingly, reducing emissions, assessing vulnerabilities and identifying plans to address them, and investing in resilience have become a much higher priority for sub-national actors than states.

This need for immediate security from imminent ecological shifts has spurred many sub-national actors to adopt climate mitigation and adaption plans, some of which go beyond action at the national level. In Alaska, for example, the Final Report of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission, a group tasked with creating Alaska's Arctic Policy, notes that, "Alaskans understand that our climate is changing; we are watching it happen, here, in our home. We are watching our permafrost melt, our shores erode and are on the verge of having some of the world's first climate change refugees."⁴⁵ A 2009 report by the US Army Corps of Engineers identified more than 180 villages in Alaska affected by flooding and shoreline erosion, 31 of which are in "imminent" danger of becoming uninhabitable. At least 12 of the 31 are now exploring relocation options, in part or entirely, to escape these impacts.⁴⁶

Because of this, the resulting Arctic Policy and Implementation Plan for the State of Alaska recommends the state to, "anticipate, evaluate and respond to risks from climate change related to land erosion and deterioration of community infrastructure and services and support community efforts to adapt and relocate when necessary." It continues to list 8 legislative actions related to climate change adaptation efforts and three success metrics, including (1) relocation of highest priority communities; (2) risk mitigation measures implementation; and (3) state-federal investment leveraged effectively for greatest efficiency of effort.⁴⁷ These commitments, and the concrete actions that accompany them, exist absent national action on relocation and risk mitigation measures, because for

⁴⁴ Justin Worland, "World Leaders On Edge As President Trump Weighs Pulling U.S. Out of Paris Climate Deal," Time Magazine, April 18, 2017, <http://time.com/4723481/donald-trump-paris-agreement-withdraw/>.

⁴⁵ "Final Report of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission," *Alaska Arctic Policy Commission*, January 30, 2017. http://www.akArctic.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/AAPC_final_report_lowres.pdf.

⁴⁶ "Alaska Baseline Erosion Assessment: Study Findings and Technical Report," *US Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District*, March 2009. <http://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Portals/34/docs/civilworks/BEA/AlaskaBaselineErosionAssessmentBEAMainReport.pdf>.

⁴⁷ "Implementation Plan for Alaska's Arctic Policy," *Alaska Arctic Policy Commission*, January 30, 2015. http://www.akArctic.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/AAPC_ImplementationPlan_lowres.pdf.

Alaska, climate change is not a theoretical threat but a local reality. Even amid the discussion that the Trump Administration may withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the national government's wavering has not thwarted Alaska's resolve. In his state of the state address on January 18, 2017, Alaskan Governor Bill Walker said that, "Alaska is the only Arctic state in the nation – and we are ground zero for climate impacts."⁴⁸

Climate change is also directly related to several issues already on local policy response agendas, such as air quality and natural disaster response. Many sub-national governments go beyond recognizing their role in contributing to GHG emissions— they understand the direct consequences of future climate risks if they do not. Even in the absence of a national commitment to targets or international agreements, sub-national Arctic governments have and will most likely continue to enact climate change mitigation and adaptation legislation.

Small Enough to Act, Big Enough to Matter

While sub-national actors may not have as many resources at their disposal as federal governments, because of their limited geographic scope states, territories, and counties can target action to rapidly address tangible, context-specific challenges across different parts of subnational government. Local action in the Arctic holds the most promise to change the energy paradigm, as sub-national entities can craft and implement greenhouse gas reducing policies targeted at Arctic communities. National governments and the Arctic Council do not get a free pass (the need for cooperating with and garnering the support of national governments will be addressed), but sub-national governments have control over implementation, and can act to implement the Paris Agreement and UN sustainable development goals through their responsibility in providing public services. Transportation, existing building retrofits, waste management, water, energy supply, outdoor lighting, planning and urban land use, and food and agriculture are just a few of the jurisdictions sub-national actors can change to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Yukon Government's 2009 Climate Action Plan is just one example of this. The Plan was created and released at a time when the national government of Canada refused to act or acknowledge climate change – Canada would become the only country to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol two years later. Despite national inaction, the Plan set the Yukon Territory on a path "to adapt to, understand, and lessen [their] contribution to climate change," acknowledging that "many climate impacts are already being observed in the North."⁴⁹ Under its goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Plan put forward action items on transportation, commercial and residential buildings, and waste management.⁵⁰ Its 2015 update highlighted progress in meeting those targets both within Territorial government operations and territory-wide improvements for residents (the actual GHG reduction calculations will not be available until later this year). In that update, the government highlighted 28 new initiatives to ensure continual progress towards its goal of becoming a carbon neutral government by 2020.⁵¹ While the Yukon constitutes a relatively small percentage of Canada's overall greenhouse

⁴⁸ Rachel Waldholz, "Walker, House Dems Aim to Put Climate Policy Back on the Table," *Alaska Public Media*. February 6, 2017. <http://www.alaskapublic.org/2017/02/06/walker-house-dems-aim-to-put-climate-policy-back-on-the-table/>.

⁴⁹ "Yukon Government Climate Change Action Plan," *Yukon Government, Environmental Programs Branch*. February 2009. http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/publications-maps/documents/YG_Climate_Change_Action_Plan.pdf.

⁵⁰ "Yukon Government Climate Change Action Plan," *Yukon Government, Environmental Programs Branch*. February 2009. http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/publications-maps/documents/YG_Climate_Change_Action_Plan.pdf.

⁵¹ "Yukon Government Climate Change Action Plan Progress Report," *Yukon Government, Environmental Programs Branch*. December 2015. http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/air-water-waste/documents/CCAP_progressreport_eng_2015.pdf.

gas emissions, Finland's goal of implementing the Paris Agreement in the Arctic puts an added importance on the green transition of subnational regions of the North.

In instances in which the national government is either slow to act or refuses to act on climate change and sustainable development, as was the case in Canada during the Harper administration and is now the case in the US under the Trump administration, subnational governments can continue to engage with the Arctic Council through their own policies. The Yukon Government's climate change plan highlights its leadership role in the Arctic Council's Arctic Adaptation Exchange project, which provides online access to information resources specific to the circumpolar north. One of the goals of Alaska's Arctic Policy is to "sustain and enhance state participation in the Arctic Council," including climate change projects.⁵²

In addition, because of more flexible governance structures, sub-national leaders who confront budget and funding constraints, likely to persist in the coming decades, have the leeway to devise creative responses. Creativity is enabled by the ability of local governments to champion change, engage the public, enact legislation, implement new programs, and create partnerships more quickly and in more targeted ways. Sub-national governments are also flexible enough to work closely with the private sector, generating more opportunities for private companies to become involved in climate mitigation. By contrast, nationally-driven financing proposals to fund projects related to Paris implementation or the sustainable development goals in the Arctic can be hampered by politics and require a much longer time frame to build the broad support necessary for passage. For instance, a proposal for a national infrastructure bank by Senator John Kerry, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, and Senator Mark Warner, and a similar idea proposed by President Obama's administration, were stifled by partisanship in Washington. While the idea for an infrastructure or green bank never came to fruition at the national level, stakeholders in Alaska have been moving forward in establishing a green bank for the state – despite, or perhaps as a reaction to, the state's budget deficit. The flexibility of a state, territory, republic, or county to address fiscal concerns is critical for facilitating the necessary shift in managing energy assets.

⁵² "Yukon Government Climate Change Action Plan," *Yukon Government, Environmental Programs Branch*. February 2009. http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/publications-maps/documents/YG_Climate_Change_Action_Plan.pdf.



A First Step

Creating a Subnational Working Group

Sub-national actors are well poised to take on climate mitigation, adaption, and sustainable development projects, and have done so by transforming themselves into international actors capable of collaborating and negotiating across scales. However, this is by no means an argument to supersede the national with the sub-national. Sub-national actors can be limited by budgets, technical expertise, and management infrastructure. They lack the power to coordinate different levels of authority, organize power-sharing between levels, and promote cooperation across levels of hierarchy to achieve an overarching vision for mitigating climate change and fostering sustainable development. Subnational actors widely vary in their abilities, and their ambition, to pursue climate policies. While Iceland's geothermal industry provides the country with most their energy and lead the way worldwide for effective emissions mitigation, other northern geographies like Nunavut run on 99.94 percent diesel. Sub-national governments can fill the policy gap left by inert national actors can prove true, but they cannot replace national involvement altogether.

Rather than sub-national Arctic actors taking on the full responsibility and leadership privileges parallel to Arctic states, the Arctic Council should reconsider its structure to include, empower, and utilize the vital assets local authorities offer. This could require creating a tertiary category of actors between permanent member states and observer states for sub-national actors, or require a more comprehensive restructuring of the Council and its decision-making process and project implementation.

While it is unlikely that any such major revision of the Council's mandate and structure will change in two years under the Finnish Chairmanship, the Fins can jumpstart this process through a relatively simple first step: establish an Arctic Council Working Group on sub-national inclusion, including both officials from southern capitals and sub-national leaders themselves. The Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, a biennial conference for parliamentarians representing the Arctic Countries and European Parliament and Observer Organization of the Arctic Council, provides a roster for such a working group. It includes sub-national leaders from all eight Arctic states, and could be expanded to foster inclusion in the Council's work.

At the outset, the working group could focus on two tasks: creating a vision for how to include subnational governments in the Council's structure and providing input to a guideline for project selection and development. The working group could establish a vision for the process and goal of including sub-national leaders in Arctic Council negotiations. Visions provide the common, universal goals or outcomes that can coordinate many actors working at different levels. Establishing key priorities for regional outcomes can ensure that intended impacts are met. This could help reset the conventional, oftentimes neglected role of Arctic regional actors and push the Council in a more inclusive direction.

The working group could also consider the role sub-national actors can play in establishing innovative project selection and development schemes for Council initiatives. In Alaska, for example, there is a growing sense that that subnational regions are not given a voice in Arctic Council projects and proceedings.⁵³ One option for ameliorating the feeling of disconnect is to provide sub-national actors with a more direct role in the selection and development of Arctic Council projects. Once a vision and strategic priorities for Arctic sub-national involvement are set, the working group could establish a guidance document for project selection and development to refocus initiatives on projects based on and in support of local actors' needs. Locally-driven guidelines are critical to connect local execution to the broader goals of the Council, and should set broad parameters all Arctic actors can respond to appropriately. Creating benchmarks for thoughtful projects and programs in the Arctic can ensure that projects meet long-term goals and support sustainable Council initiatives that outlast any one Chairmanship. Any project selection scheme that came to fruition from the working group can use baseline data from already existing sources of research in natural science, social science, and traditional knowledge from the Arctic Council's robust research support. Research from the six working groups of the Council on biodiversity, oceans, Arctic peoples, environment, and climate can be used to establish metrics for selection criteria. Sound baseline data is not only vital in project selection; it also plays a key role for development, evaluation, and subsequent improvement of projects.

Ultimately, the plan for the working group can be established in due time—the most important first step is for the Finnish Chairmanship to ensure continuity and focus on long-term planning. If it fails to do this, the Council and its permanent members cannot wait to begin building this supportive relationship with sub-national governments.

⁵³ Inuuteq Holm Olsen & Jessica M. Shadian, "Greenland & the Arctic Council: Subnational Regions in a Time of Arctic Westphalianisation," pg. 269 in Heininen, L.; Exner-Pirot, H. & Plouffe, J. (eds.), *Arctic Yearbook 2016: 20 Years of Cooperation and Policy-Shaping*. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum.



A New Arctic Council for a New Arctic Reality

As ice melts and permafrost thaws, a new Arctic is emerging—and like all new realities, uncertainty is high. Maps that once recorded regular sea ice extent and expanses of permafrost now display anticipated ice retreats and large-scale thaws. Global warming holds the power to redefine the economic, political, and human structures of the North – for better and for worse. The opening of Arctic waters as summer sea ice continues a thirty-year retreat could cut shipping distances between Northwest Europe and the Far East by a third. However, in a region where favorable market conditions, good weather guarantees, and nonlinear climate shifts are all uncertain, the macro effects of Arctic shipping routes remain to be seen. With the potential increase of heavy fuel oils pollution from shipping, the introduction of invasive species, and in-transit oil spills looming, each additional trans-Arctic trip increases the potential for a devastating environmental accident. Despite these uncertainties, one thing is certain: the future of the Arctic will require new policy frameworks to address the challenges and opportunities of a constantly evolving region. The demands on the Arctic Council to meet these trials and chances of uncertainty are no exception.

This new Arctic of the 21st Century necessitates a renewed Arctic Council that is forward-thinking, collaborative, and flexible. The Council will need to build on existing subnational and non-governmental partnerships to create cross-border climate and sustainable development programs that bypass national states. It must rethink its strategic networks of regional actors to include localities outside the ministerial level to ensure that research, sustainable development, and environmental protection guidance are keeping pace with the rapid changes afoot in the Arctic today. It must be adaptable in its formal meetings and forums to create spaces that facilitate the ascendance of sub- and transnational actors in Arctic enviro-civic processes.

To truly address climate change and sustainable development in a meaningful way now and in the future, Finland must use its Chairmanship to not only bolster subnational cooperation amongst already engaged actors today, but also expand its commitment to include northern communities, nonprofits, industries, and sub-national governments dedicated to addressing the most immediate effects of climate change regardless of federal inertia. The years to come are projected to be just as record-breaking as this winter. As this new Arctic reality develops, the Arctic Council must rise to meet its challenges with creativity, inclusivity, and innovation.

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