
II. Humanity Starts on a New Path

Russia, China Develop the Arctic— Will the United States Join?

by Mike Billington

June 12—Russia and China are escalating their efforts to develop one of the last, relatively untouched frontiers for mankind on Earth—the vast expanse of the Arctic’s rich resource base. While Russia’s huge coastline on the Arctic Ocean is the primary base of operations, China is heavily engaged in building the infrastructure needed to make the exploitation of these resources feasible.

Will the U.S. under President Trump engage in this process? The answer to this question will play a crucial role in the broader issue that will, to a significant degree, determine the fate of mankind—whether or not Trump will fully integrate the United States into the Belt and Road Initiative, the New Silk Road process first promoted by Lyndon and Helga LaRouche in the 1990s, and now fully adopted and implemented by Chinese President Xi Jinping on behalf of all nations on Earth.

A major physical driver for this initiative is the fact that the northeast passage—the route from Asia to Europe via the Arctic Ocean—has become increasingly viable due to the receding of the Arctic ice cap. While the green movement is quick to claim that (non-existent) manmade climate change is responsible for this recession of the Arctic ice cap, the Russian government and Russian scientists (among others) have proven that this is a cyclical phenomenon unrelated to carbon—and indeed, very beneficial to mankind. Not only is trade facilitated by this reces-

sion, but Arctic resources are also rendered more accessible — if the world chooses to take advantage of the new circumstances.

One Belt, One Road, One Circle

Hu Angang, a leading Chinese economist at Tsinghua University, coined the term “One Circle”—referring to the encirclement of the entire Eurasian land



A graphical comparison between the Northern Sea Route (blue) and the southern maritime route (red).

Kazakhstan

mass by the completion of the north-east passage—to go along with the “One Belt, One Road” policy initiated by President Xi Jinping in 2013. The New Silk Road Economic Belt, connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa over land, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, connecting Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas by sea, can now be joined by the Arctic “One Circle” route, cutting shipping time by over 30% from East Asia to Europe.

Beside shipping time, the resources waiting to be developed—waiting only for the human race to develop the technologies needed to facilitate such development in a harsh environment, in a manner acceptable to human habitation—include vast deposits of gold and other minerals, as well as an estimated 30% of the world’s undiscovered natural gas and 13% of undiscovered oil, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

While issues of sovereignty apply to the resources near the borders of the Arctic nations (Russia, United States, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark), the vast territory of the Arctic is mostly outside of territorial waters, and is thus subject only to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which allows only for joint development of the resources under consensus agreements. Governing this process is the Arctic Council, comprising the eight Arctic nations, with others present as observers, including China. China considers itself a “near-Arctic” state, and points out that the region holds “the inherited wealth of all humankind.” The last biennial summit of the Arctic Council took place in Juneau, Alaska in March, where Finland took over as president for the current two-year term.

On his way to visit President Trump in Florida in April, President Xi Jinping stopped in Finland to discuss Finland’s role in the Belt and Road, but he also arranged for Finland to represent China in meetings of the Arctic Council.

While the deliberations of the Council have thus far avoided efforts to introduce geopolitical conflicts, some members of U.S. Congress have used the fact that



DSME

South Korean shipbuilder Daewoo Shipbuilding Marine Engineering (DSME) completed the construction of the first Arctic LNG carrier, the Christophe de Margerie.

Russia has security concerns along its extensive Arctic border, to call on the United States to prepare military capacities to challenge Russian dominance of the region. That is absurd, given that the United States has a grand total of one functioning ice-breaker, while Russia has 40, and is in the process of building or ordering (primarily from South Korea) the construction of dozens more.

Just this week, President Putin oversaw the christening and naming of the world’s largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) ice-breaker in St. Petersburg, built for Russia by South Korea’s Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Corporation. Clearly not intended for military purposes, the ship will be used at the Yamal project on the Yamal Peninsula on the Arctic, at the northern end of the Ural Mountains. This region holds huge natural gas deposits that are being developed by a consortium involving Russia’s Novatek, France’s Total, and the China National Petroleum Corporation. The ship is the most modern tanker of a high-ice class, and will become the flagship in a fleet of 15 similar vessels. The Yamal project aims to produce 16.5 million tons of LNG a year.

Speaking at the christening, Putin said: “The Yamal project paved the way for the Arctic route. It will contribute to the development of the energy industry in the whole world, as well as Russia and Europe. . . . Yamal LNG plays an important role in the development of the



Russia is building a Northern Latitude Railway to connect the Yamal Peninsula within the Arctic Circle (dashed circle) to the region of the Ural Mountains to the south (mountains not shown). China's Poly Group is planning a deep water port and a southward rail connection in the Arkhangelsk region, just south of the Arctic Circle.

Northern Sea Route, and in the further study and exploration of the Arctic. I am counting on the successful launch of new, promising, large-scale projects with our French, Chinese, and foreign partners, as well as on our growing cooperation in the extremely rich Arctic Region.”

Russia is also building a Northern Latitude Railway to connect Yamal with the Ural regions to the south and the nation’s transportation arteries, ensuring year-round transport of the region’s mineral resources.

In another major development zone, that of the Arkhangelsk region south of Murmansk near the Norway and Finland border, China’s Poly Group Corporation is planning a \$5.5 billion development project, involving a new deep water port and a rail connection to the south. The intention is to ship coal, fertilizer, oil, and other goods from Siberia and the Urals via the Arctic, and then south by rail. Igor Orlov, the governor of Arkhangelsk, estimates that the project will generate 40,000 jobs when it is completed in 2023.

A long-range intention of the Russian development of Arctic facilities is the testing of structures required for human outposts on the Moon and on Mars.

U.S. Cooperation

A ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Fairbanks, Alaska on May 11 was projected to be contentious by those who are trying to sabotage President Trump’s effort to establish cooperative and friendly relations with Russia. Such projections were proven futile. Among the outcomes of the meeting, chaired by the United States, was the signing of a binding agreement to facilitate cooperation in scientific research in the region, ensuring that scientists and their equipment and data can flow more freely across international borders within the Arctic. An Arctic Shipping Traffic Database has been set up, while a new Arctic Economic Council and a Task Force on Improved Connectivity are becoming operational.

David Balton, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries, who represented the U.S. at the meeting, countered the neocon dreams of confrontation with Russia, saying that the Arctic remains stable and peaceful. “Through the Arctic Council, we have a venue that has been doing very well in promoting international cooperation among all eight nations, including Russia,” Balton said, adding that “Whatever other differences may exist between the United States, Russia, and other members of the Arctic Council, and Russia related to other parts of the world, don’t manifest themselves in the world of the Arctic Council. That has remained a very cooperative body.”

The Wilson Center’s Arctic Circle Forum is hosting a conference in Washington on June 21-22, titled “The United States and Russia in the Arctic.” Balton will speak, along with many others from the United States, Russia, and other Arctic Council nations. It is precisely this kind of cooperation—pushing forward the frontiers of development and the frontiers of human knowledge—that, like the New Silk Road, is moving the world into a new paradigm of peace through development.