

# India and the arctic: revisionist aspirations, arctic realities

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**Abstract** India has divergent views about circumpolar affairs. One dominant view holds that the region is a “global commons,” rather than the preserve of the Arctic coastal states with their narrow national interests, and that India should lead international efforts to preserve the Arctic environment and freeze out resource development and militarization (akin to the Antarctic model)—in short, a *Polar Preserve* narrative. Another view suggests that geostrategic dynamics and weak governance point to a growing *Arctic Race* that threatens to undermine regional (and even global) peace and security. Accordingly, some commentators argue that India, as a strong advocate of nuclear disarmament, should push for a demilitarized and nuclear-free Arctic. Others frame India’s interests in the context of regional rivalries, particularly with China, and potential impacts on Indian security from the “new Great Game” emerging in the Arctic. Another emerging Indian narrative argues that India should avoid the role of a “revisionist actor” and, instead, can benefit from engaging in established governance fora like the Arctic Council, improving its understanding of emerging Arctic political, economic, and strategic dynamics, and partnering with Arctic states on science and resource development. This narrative situates India in an emerging *Arctic Saga*, where enhanced cooperation and coordination with Arctic states (particularly Norway and Russia) can serve India’s national and international interests—and those of the world’s inhabitants more generally.

**Keywords** Arctic realities · India · Revisionist · *Arctic Saga*

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The impact of rapid changes in the Arctic region goes beyond the littoral states and any legitimate and credible mechanism to respond to these challenges calls for active participation of all those actors who have a stake in the governance of global commons. The interplay between science and policy has the potential to contribute to the better handling of the complex issues facing the Arctic. India which has a significant expertise in this area from its association with the Antarctic Treaty System can play a constructive role in securing a stable Arctic. India in its new role as a permanent observer in the Arctic Council is committed to contribute to the deliberations of the council to develop effective cooperative partnerships that can contribute to a safe, stable and secure Arctic.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

The Arctic Council accepted six new applications for accredited observer status at the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting in May 2013: China, India, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, and Singapore. This decision reinforces the globalization of Arctic issues over the last decade. A growing realization of the disproportionate impact of climate change on the circumpolar region, and concomitant social, economic and environmental consequences for the rest of the world, now commands global attention. Although non-Arctic observers have traditionally confined their polar interest to scientific research and environmental issues, over the past decade significant international interest and attention has turned to oil, gas and minerals, fisheries, shipping and Arctic governance. This, in turn, has generated debates amongst Arctic states about non-Arctic states' intentions and their receptiveness to welcoming Asian countries in particular "into the Arctic cold."<sup>2</sup>

The proliferating academic literature on Asian interests in the Arctic is dominated by work on China and, to a lesser extent, other East Asian states.<sup>3</sup> India, as an emerging actor with little previous engagement in Arctic affairs, has attracted limited attention from Western commentators to date—although the Arctic conversation *within* India has certainly gathered momentum in recent years. In June 2011, Shyam Saran, former foreign secretary of India and now Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board and a Senior Fellow with the Centre for Policy

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, *India and the Arctic*, June 10, 2013, <http://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?21812/India+and+the+Arctic>.

<sup>2</sup> Per Erik Solli, et al., *Coming into the Cold: Asia's Arctic Interests*, 36(4) POLAR GEOGRAPHY 1–18 (2013).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Id.*; ORAN YOUNG, ET AL., EDS., *THE ARCTIC IN WORLD AFFAIRS: A NORTH PACIFIC DIALOGUE ON ARCTIC MARINE ISSUES* (2012); Linda Jakobson & Syong-Hong Lee, *The North East Asian States' Interests in the Arctic and Possible Cooperation with the Kingdom of Denmark*, REPORT FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK (April 2013), <http://www.sipri.org/research/security/arctic/arcticpublications/NEAsia-Arctic.pdf>; James Manicom & P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *East Asian States, the Arctic Council and International Relations in the Arctic*, (Ctr. for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Policy Brief No. 26, 16 April 2013), <http://www.cigionline.org/publications/2013/4/east-asian-states-arctic-council-and-international-relations-arctic>.

Research, New Delhi, laid out a case for why the Arctic is important to India. “Developments in the Arctic Ocean will redraw the geopolitical map of the world, and emerging countries like India and China should place this region on the international agenda,” he asserts. Citing the common themes of climate change, the emergence of new shipping routes, and newly exploitable energy and mineral deposits, he anticipates that Arctic developments could “redistribut[e] power and influence among countries even while threatening the fragile life sustaining systems of our Planet Earth.”<sup>4</sup> This narrative frame<sup>5</sup> is indicative of the Indian discourse more generally, raising fundamental questions about how to negotiate climate change, science, resource development, geopolitics, and regional or global governance in the circumpolar north. Indian answers to these questions indicate strains of realism and idealism, reflective of India’s experiences in Antarctica, its aspirations and challenges as an emerging global power, and its attentiveness to economic and strategic opportunities (or those perceived by its competitors). Dilemmas abound. “The Arctic today has is in an antithetical situation where, on the one hand, there are strong and important economic interests, and on the other, a need for climate protection and resource governance,” Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses fellow Uttam Kumar Sinha observes. “In both cases, there is need for further research and findings, data collection, and clearer information to strengthen both adaptation and mitigation policies in India.”<sup>6</sup>

Although most Indian narratives on the Arctic have traditionally focused on scientific contributions, commentators have hailed India’s successful application for observer status at the Arctic Council (approved by the Arctic member states and indigenous permanent participants at the Kiruna ministerial meeting in May 2013) as an “Arctic victory” and “a major diplomatic achievement” for foreign minister Salman Khursid.<sup>7</sup> Such grand language begs the question of what India seeks to accomplish as an Arctic actor. Although the country has not articulated an official “Arctic policy,” the Ministry of External Affairs released a short document in June 2013 outlining India’s interests. “Arctic region, the enormous area around the North Pole spreading over one-sixth of the earth’s landmass (approximately the size of Russia, China and India put together!), is increasingly being effected by external global forces—environmental, commercial and strategic and in turn is poised to play an increasingly greater role in shaping the course of world affairs,” it notes. “India has been closely following the developments in the Arctic region in the light of the

<sup>4</sup> Shyam Saran, *Why the Arctic Ocean is Important to India*, BUS. STD., 12 Jun. 2011, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/shyam-saran-why-the-arctic-ocean-is-important-to-india-111061200007\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/shyam-saran-why-the-arctic-ocean-is-important-to-india-111061200007_1.html).

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting recent study on this subject, see Rebecca Pincus & Saleem H. Ali, *Have you been to ‘The Arctic’? Frame Theory and the Role of Media Coverage in Shaping Arctic Discourse*, 39(2) POLAR GEOGRAPHY 83–97 (2016).

<sup>6</sup> UTTAM KUMAR SINHA, CLIMATE CHANGE NARRATIVES: THE ARCTIC (2013) 74. See also Sinha, *The Arctic: An Antithesis*, 37(1) STRATEGIC ANALYSIS (2013) 34–39; Sinha, *Arctic: A Paradox and Antithesis*, in ASIA AND THE ARCTIC: NARRATIVES, PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES 15–26 (Vijay Sakhuja & Kapil Narula eds., 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Shastri Ramachandaran, *India’s Arctic Victory: A major Diplomatic Achievement*, DNA INDIA, May 21, 2013, <http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/1837429/column-india-s-arctic-victory-a-major-diplomatic-achievement>.

new opportunities and challenges emerging for the international community due to global warming induced melting of Arctic's ice cap. Today India's interests in the Arctic region are scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic."<sup>8</sup> While identifying climate change as the main driver of international attention, New Delhi offers no specifics on its particular commercial and geostrategic interests. Turning to the unofficial debate in India provides insight into what these might include.

While most Indian academic and media commentators highlight responsible environmental management and cooperative scientific research, they have also offered a myriad of perspectives on shipping, resource development, governance, and the geostrategic implications of Arctic change. Much of this plays on popular (mis)conceptions of the region as the scene of the "new Great Game" between rival powers seeking wealth and strategic advantage. "Arctic literature is already rife with semantics like 'gold rush', 'resource scramble', 'land grab', 'great game moves north', 'high stakes in the High North', and so on, creating an imagery of the chaos that will emerge from intensified resource competition," Uttam Kumar Sinha notes.<sup>9</sup> This fits with dominant international media and political frames of the Arctic as a zone of potential conflict that, in turn, influence "the kind of politics that can be pursued" and "serve to shore up particular policy approaches and power relations."<sup>10</sup>

"The Future of Arctic Marine Navigation in Mid-Century," a series of scenario narratives produced by the Global Business Network for the Arctic Council's Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group in 2008, conceptualizes plausible Arctic futures. The matrix treats two variables as the most important and uncertain: governance and resources & trade. The horizontal axis describes the degree of relative governance stability within and beyond the Arctic region. Less stability implies shortfalls in legal structure and transparency, as well as a propensity for actors and stakeholders to work on a more unilateral basis rather than by collaborating in a cooperative, international fashion. More stability implies efficiently operating legal and regulatory structures, as well as an international atmosphere more conducive to collaborative and cooperative development. The vertical axis describes the level of demand for Arctic resources and trade, including potential global market developments. More demand implies a growing demand from players and markets around the world for Arctic resources, while less demand implies fewer players interested in fewer Arctic resources.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), *India and the Arctic*, Jun. 10, 2013, <http://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?21812/India+and+the+Arctic>. Although India has not adopted an official national strategy or policy on the Arctic, a recent edited volume by Indian scholars suggests that this document should be considered the clearest "articulation of the Indian government on the Arctic." *Appendix B: Asian Countries' Positions on the Arctic*, in *ASIA AND THE ARCTIC: NARRATIVES, PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES* 133 (Vijay Sakhujia & Kapil Narula eds., 2016).

<sup>9</sup> SINHA, *supra* note 6, at 34–35.

<sup>10</sup> Elana Wilson Rowe, *A Dangerous Space? Unpacking State and Media Discourses on the Arctic*, 36(3) *POLAR GEOGRAPHY* 234 (Oct. 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Global Business Network (GBN), *The Future of Arctic Marine Navigation in Mid-Century*, [Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group, May 2008].



**Fig. 1** GBN Future Arctic Marine Navigation Matrix (2008)

This framework yields four scenarios (see Fig. 1). Much of the alarmist rhetoric swirling in the media suggests a looming *Arctic Race*: more demand for resources and trade, coupled with less stable governance. The “no holds barred” race for resources in the Arctic frontier presupposes intense competition and a corresponding willingness to violate rules, growing military activity, unilateral action, and political friction over states’ willingness to allow trans-Arctic passage. National interests are paramount, shared interests are few and unreliable, and rapid climate change will fuel a feeding frenzy in an anarchic region bereft of robust political or legal structures. By contrast, an *Arctic Saga* anticipates greater demand for resources and trade alongside more stable governance. This scenario envisages “a healthy rate of development that includes concern for the preservation of Arctic ecosystems and cultures,” based upon a worldview “driven by business pragmatism that balances global collaboration and compromise with successful development of the resources of the Arctic.”<sup>12</sup> Shared economic and political interests, global economic prosperity, and systematic resource development will permit a range and variety of maritime activity, with navigational

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

infrastructure and improved technology making marine transport safer, more efficient, and more economically viable. In a *Polar Low* scenario, low demand for resources and unstable government produce an under-developed future featuring low levels of investment, and limited and unsafe maritime activity governed by few regulations. In a *Polar Preserve* situation, low global demand for Arctic resources creates a less contentious geopolitical space, with robust regulatory regimes, a slow pace of development, and an extensive Arctic “eco-preserve” with stringent no-shipping and no-development zones.

Vijay Sakhuja, the director of research at the Indian Council of World Affairs in New Delhi and India’s most prolific commentator on Arctic affairs since 2010, observes various competing narratives in India as the country’s views on circumpolar affairs—and its role and place in Arctic governance—evolve.<sup>13</sup> One dominant view holds that the region is a “global commons,” rather than the preserve of the Arctic coastal states with their narrow national interests, and that India should lead international efforts to preserve the polar environment and freeze out resource development and militarization (akin to the Antarctic model)—in short, a *Polar Preserve* narrative. Another view suggests that geostrategic dynamics and weak governance point to a growing *Arctic Race* that threatens to undermine regional (and even global) peace and security. Accordingly, some commentators argue that India, as a strong advocate of nuclear disarmament, should push for a demilitarized and nuclear-free Arctic. Others frame India’s interests in the context of regional rivalries, particularly with China, and potential impacts on Indian security from the “new Great Game” emerging in the Arctic. Another emerging Indian narrative argues that India should avoid the role of a “revisionist actor” and, instead, can benefit from engaging in established governance forums like the Arctic Council, improving its understanding of emerging Arctic political, economic, and strategic dynamics, and partnering with Arctic states on science and resource development. This narrative situates India in an emerging *Arctic Saga*, where enhanced cooperation and coordination with Arctic states (particularly Norway and Russia) can serve India’s national and international interests—and those of the world’s inhabitants more generally.

## 2 Science and climate change

When asked in 2013 about India’s motivation for seeking a seat at Arctic Council meetings, a spokesperson from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) emphasized that “unlike China and South Korea which are going for commercial benefit, our interest is purely scientific.”<sup>14</sup> Insisting that India’s main interest in the Arctic is to

<sup>13</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, *The Evolving Indian Narrative*, 8(1) INDIAN FOREIGN AFF. J. 13 (2013). On how Indian policy discourse has yet to produce a coherent or “dominant” opinion on the country’s place in Arctic affairs, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *India’s Emerging Arctic Interests*, in ARCTIC YEARBOOK 2013, 1–24 (Lassi Heininen ed., 2013) which critically examining the writings of five Indian commentators on Arctic affairs.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Meena Menon & Sandeep Dikshit, *India Gets Observer Status in Arctic Council*, THE HINDU, May 15, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/india-gets-observer-status-in-arctic-council/article4717770.ece>.

contribute to global scientific efforts seeking to better understand the region's role in modulating global climate change, and specifically how this affects India and can contribute to adaptation on global, regional, and local levels,<sup>15</sup> serves two functions. First, it reflects a deepening awareness of the need to appreciate the drivers of climate change and the impacts that a warming Arctic will have on global systems. Second, by differentiating Indian from other Asian states who prioritize short-term economic interests in the Arctic over environmental ones (and thus asserting a form of Indian exceptionalism),<sup>16</sup> India is positioned to play an important leadership role in convincing the world to take action to change resource consumption practices and “save” the Arctic—and the planet.

Many Indian commentators emphasize that their country has been involved in polar scientific research and governance for decades, tracing their narrative back to Britain's signature on the 1920 Svalbard (Spitsbergen) Treaty on behalf of its overseas dominions.<sup>17</sup> This is a convenient distortion of India's historic polar emphasis. In practice, India's political and research interests have typically focused on Antarctica, given its comparatively close proximity across the Indian Ocean and its link to the country's geostrategic, resource, and meteorological interests.<sup>18</sup> Compared to some East Asian states, India is a newcomer to Arctic research.<sup>19</sup> India launched its Arctic research program and mounted its first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2007, with a particular focus on climate change. The following year, the Indian National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) opened the Himadri research facility at the International Arctic Research Base at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, to conduct work in glaciology, atmospheric sciences, biochemistry, geological mapping, and paleoclimatology. India also reached an agreement with the Norwegian Polar Research Institute for scientific cooperation and a Norwegian state-owned company for logistical support and maintenance at the research base. The country joined the Council of the International Arctic Science

<sup>15</sup> Shailesh Nayak, *Balancing Development and Environmental Concerns in the Arctic*, in ASIA AND THE ARCTIC: NARRATIVES, PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES 27–28 (Vijay Sakhuja & Kapil Narula eds., 2016).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Uttam Kumar Sinha & Arvind Gupta, *The Arctic and India: Strategic Awareness and Scientific Engagement*, 38 (6) STRATEGIC ANALYSIS 872–885 (2014); Sinha, *supra* note 6, at 23.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Vijay Sakhuja, *China's Arctic Calculus and Iceland* (SSPC Issue Brief, Sept. 2011); Ministry of External Affairs, *supra* note 1.

<sup>18</sup> KLAUS DODDS, *GEOPOLITICS IN ANTARCTICA: VIEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN OCEANIC RIM* (1997) 135–155; SANJAY CHATURVEDI, *THE DAWNING OF ANTARCTICA* (1990) 161–162. India initiated research in Antarctica in 1981 and established a research station on the southern continent two years later. Some Indian commentators also point to *Lokmanya* Bâl Gangâdhar Tilak's 1903 book *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, which suggests that the North Pole was the home of Aryans eight thousand years ago before they moved to India, as another link between India and the Arctic. Sergey Lavrov, *India goes to the Arctic*, RUSSIAN INT'L AFFAIRS COUNCIL, Apr. 6, 2012, [http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id\\_4=281#top](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=281#top); Sanjay Chaturvedi, *Tiffin Talk: Geopolitics of Climate Change in the Arctic: Emerging Indian Perspectives*, AUSTRALIA INDIA INSTITUTE, May 9, 2013, <http://www.aii.unimelb.edu.au/events/tiffin-talk-geopolitics-climate-change-arctic-emerging-indian-perspectives-dr-sanjay-uttam-kumar-sinha>, *India and the 'Age of the Arctic*, 8 INDIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS J. 27 (2013).

<sup>19</sup> A few Indian commentators acknowledge this reality. See, for example, H.P. Rajan, *Arctic Governance Issues: India should Take a Lead Role*, 8 INDIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS J. 39 (2013).



Committee (IASC) in 2012 and has committed more than \$12 million (US) to Arctic research from 2013–2018.<sup>20</sup>

Asian national polar programs, including India's, are likely to remain centred on climate change and atmospheric sciences over the next two to three decades.<sup>21</sup> As the world's third largest carbon emitter, India bears partial responsibility for the warming of the planet—even though official statements insist the developed Western nations have a disproportionate responsibility to curb resource consumption patterns given the cumulative impact of accumulated GHGs in the planetary atmosphere and India's comparatively low per capita emissions.<sup>22</sup> Indian researchers have indicated “teleconnections” between the Arctic region and the intensity of India's monsoons—a vital issue given that the country's monsoon season provides eighty percent of India's annual rainfall, and directly affects the Indian agricultural sector which employs 600 million people and comprises one-fifth of the economy.<sup>23</sup> In human security terms, India's large coastal population could be at risk from rising sea levels. Furthermore, its neighbour Bangladesh would likely “generate a steady flow of displaced people” forced from their homes and seeking access to India.<sup>24</sup>

Although it is overzealous to conclude, as one Indian commentator has, that India's *Himradi* station “has propelled India to the forefront of polar research in the world,”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> P. Sunderarajan, *New Indian research station at the Arctic*, THE HINDU, Jul. 2, 2008; Shailesh Nayak, *Polar Research in India*, 37(4) INDIAN J. MARINE SC. 352–357 (2008); National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), *Ny Alesund Science Plan*, <http://www.ncaor.gov.in/arctics/display/123-ny-alesund-science-plan>; S. Rajan & K.P. Krishnan, *India's Scientific Endeavours in the Arctic*, in ASIA AND THE ARCTIC: NARRATIVES, PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES 43–48 (Vijay Sakhuja & Kapil Narula eds., 2016) (who describe India's “initial footsteps” in the region as “spectacular, to say the least”).

<sup>21</sup> *Digambar Kamat Inaugurates Meeting on Polar Sciences*, THE HINDU, Aug. 26, 2011. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/article2398984.ece>; K. S. Sudhi, *Indian Researchers Exploring the Arctic*, THE HINDU, Jun. 16, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/Indian-researchers-exploring-the-Arctic/article14429926.ece>; Kabir Taneja, *North Pole to the Third Pole: Following Climate Change Debate from the Arctic to the Himalayas*, DNA India, Feb. 10, 2016, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-north-pole-to-the-third-pole-following-climate-change-debate-from-the-arctic-to-the-himalayas-2175894>.

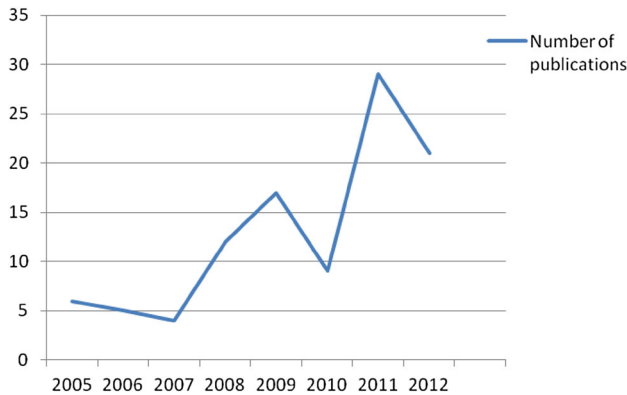
<sup>22</sup> Government of India, Minister of Environment and Forests, *India's Position on Climate Change Issues*, Jul. 4, 2009, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=49738>. The Indian government has pledged to engage actively in UNFCCC negotiations and to adopt an approach consist with India's “role as a responsible and enlightened member of the international community.” See Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, *National Action Plan on Climate Change*, Jun. 30, 2008, [http://pmindia.gov.in/climate\\_change\\_english.pdf](http://pmindia.gov.in/climate_change_english.pdf). However idealistic its rhetoric, India has not proven willingness to sacrifice economic growth for practical global climate change action.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Architesh Panda, *Assessing Vulnerability to Climate Change in India*, 44 (16) ECON. & POL. WEEKLY 105–107 (2009); Sidharth Pandey, *Indian Monsoon and the Arctic Connection*, NDTV, Jul. 30, 2013, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/indian-monsoon-and-the-arctic-connection-398707>; Dinesh C. Sharma, *Stakes in the Arctic are High*, INDIA TODAY, Jun. 15, 2013, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/stakes-in-the-arctic-are-high/1/280258.html>; Amar Tejaswi, *Arctic Ice Melt Can Affect Climate in India, Say Experts*, DECCAN CHRONICLE, Nov. 22, 2013, <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/131122/news-current-affairs/article/arctic-ice-melt-can-affect-climate-india-say-experts>.

<sup>24</sup> Neil Gadihoke, *Arctic Melt: The Outlook for India*, 8(1) MARITIME AFFAIRS 7–8, 11, (2012).

<sup>25</sup> Kishore Kumar, *Push for a ‘Global Commons’ Theory*”, 8 (1) INDIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS JOURNAL 21 (2012).





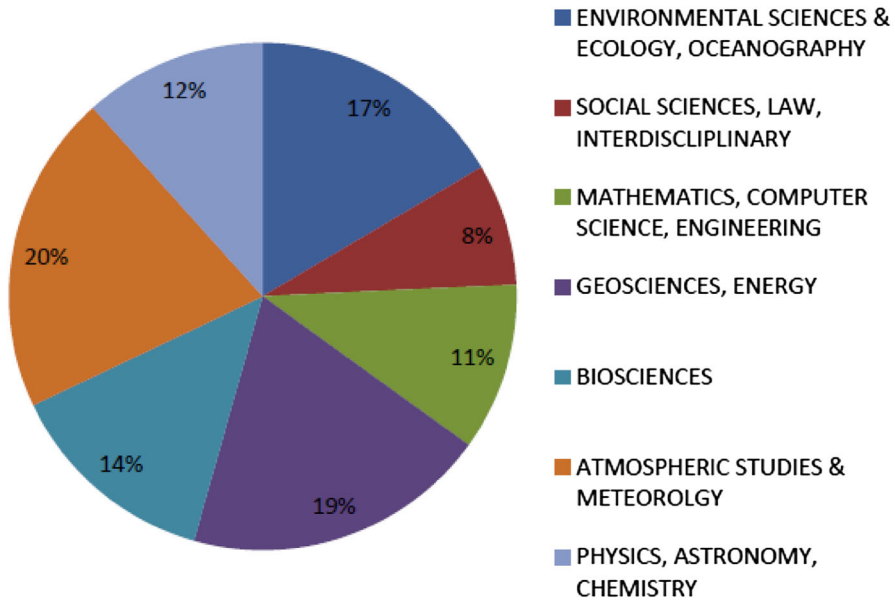
**Fig. 2** Arctic research publications with Indian author(s), 2005–2012. *Source:* Based on data in Iselin Stensdal, *Asian Arctic Research 2005–2012: Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger* (Oslo: Fridtjof Nansen Institute Report 3/2013), 13. Stensdal notes that the largest share of articles concerned atmospheric studies and meteorology (21, or 20 %). The output for geosciences (20, 19 %) and environmental sciences (17, 17 %) was similar. Furthermore, 12 % (12) of the articles related to observations of sea ice using radiometry or other forms of remote sensing

its scientific efforts in the Arctic are held up as a primary rationale for India to secure greater say in regional affairs. While the publication output of Indian Arctic researchers (see Figs. 2, 3) is small compared to China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, New Delhi anticipates that its observer status at the Arctic Council will “boost its nascent field of Arctic research” and will allow Indian think tanks “to develop close co-operation with their Arctic counterparts to understand the evolution of the Arctic sea.”<sup>26</sup> In particular, commentators cite Norway as India’s premier scientific partner, building upon the two countries’ longstanding work in Antarctica and more recent cooperation on Svalbard.<sup>27</sup> Aspiring to international collaboration indicates a break from the trends identified by Iselin Stensdal in her analysis of Asian Arctic research from 2005–2012. According to her work, Indian Arctic researchers had the lowest rates of international collaboration and tended to publish in Indian periodicals rather than international ones. Furthermore, Indian scholars and commentators have been slow to engage in discussions about Arctic policy and governance compared to their East Asian counterparts. In recent years, however, Indian think tanks have begun to host conferences and produce papers on geopolitics of the polar regions,<sup>28</sup> and an

<sup>26</sup> Arvind Gupta, *India’s Gains from Arctic Council*, THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS, Jul. 16, 2013, <http://newindianexpress.com/opinion/Indias-gains-from-Arctic-Council/2013/07/31/article1709960.ece>.

<sup>27</sup> The Norwegian Minister for Research and Education, Tora Aasland, explained in 2011 that “India has been doing polar research for many years, not the least because of the Himalayas, the third pole. And Indian research in polar questions, like air pollution, ocean pollution, changes in the glaciers and changes in the behaviour of animals, are the ones that Norway is also interested in. And that’s the reason why the two nations have found each other.” Quoted in Ramesh Ramachandran, *India, Norway for Joint Polar Research*, THE HINDU, Feb. 7, 2011. See also Sidharth Pandey, *India to Expand Engagement in the Arctic*, NDTV, Jun. 13, 2013, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/india-to-expand-engagement-in-the-arctic-379182>.

<sup>28</sup> Iselin Stensdal, *Asian Arctic Research 2005–2012: Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger* (Fridtjof Nansen Institute Report 3/2013) 13–16.



**Fig. 3** Arctic research publications by discipline, 2005–2012. *Source:* Iselin Stensdal, *Asian Arctic Research 2005–2012: Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger* (Oslo: Fridtjof Nansen Institute Report 3/2013), 14

outpouring of newspaper stories on Arctic issues indicate a burgeoning interest in the ethical, economic, and strategic implications of environmental change in the region.

### 3 Exploiting Arctic resources

Debates within India about the country's potential commercial and strategic interests in increasingly accessible Arctic energy and mineral resources reveal a lack of consensus on what stance Indians should take on actual development. Core to the debate is the "Arctic paradox" noted by political scientist Sanjay Chaturvedi: that the main driver of climate change, which is transforming the physical and cultural environment, is the oil and gas that is the primary catalyst for international interest in the region.<sup>29</sup> While some commentators envisage India as a global steward that should protect the Arctic from the greed and destructive power of the Arctic states,<sup>30</sup> other commentators (and Indian companies) express keen interest in the Arctic resource sector to satisfy the country's growing demand for energy and raw materials necessary to achieve its broad social and economic development objectives.

<sup>29</sup> Chaturvedi, *supra* note 17. See also Sinha, *supra* note 6, for similar logic.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Shyam Saran, *India's Stake in Arctic Cold War*, THE HINDU, Feb. 28, 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-stake-in-arctic-cold-war/article2848280.ece>; and Prerna Madan, *Why You Should be Concerned About Oil Exploration in the Arctic*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, Jul. 5, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world/why-you-should-be-concerned-about-oil-exploration-in-the-arctic/story-kLqW9cfSCUbQB6JWLtkkP.html>.

Several Indian commentators who highlight the Arctic's ecological fragility and uniqueness as a polar space suggest that international efforts should be directed towards a *Polar Preserve* scenario: stopping Arctic resource development, slowing climate change, and preserving the region. Shyam Saran, former Indian foreign secretary and now Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board and a Senior Fellow with the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, asserts that:

It is hypocritical of the developed, industrialised countries, in particular, the rich Arctic states, to preach low carbon development strategies to poor, developing countries, while they themselves, rush headlong into ensuring the perpetuation of their own carbon and fossil fuel intensive patterns of production and consumption. This hypocrisy lies at the heart of the relentless spoilage and ravaging of one of the last pristine frontiers of our endangered planet. If we keep silent and look away because of the prospect of sharing in this unseemly Gold Rush, India's credentials as a responsible member of the international community and as a champion of the principle of equitable burden-sharing and inter-generational equity, would become deeply suspect.<sup>31</sup>

Saran and others have called for a moratorium on resource development, which would end the so-called Arctic "race for resources" and the geopolitical competition associated with it.

Other Indian commentators suggest that India should seek opportunities for resource exploitation by "joining hands" with the Arctic coastal states—particularly Russia.<sup>32</sup> "Asian countries are convinced that the Arctic will be the future energy lake and the Arctic waters new fishing grounds that would merit sophisticated resources diplomacy by Asian countries," Vijay Sakhujā asserts. "They would like to contribute to the resource exploitation initiatives through joint ventures with the Arctic states."<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, he urges India to seek strategic investments in "deep-sea-cold-climate oil" and mineral extraction and to contemplate "sophisticated resource diplomacy and infrastructure capacity" to exploit energy and "new fishing grounds" in Arctic waters.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, energy analysts such as Dhanasree Jayaram

<sup>31</sup> Shyam Saran, *India's Date With the Arctic*, THE HINDU, Jul. 16, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> *India taking Interest in Russia's Arctic Wealth*, RUSSIAN RADIO, Dec. 26, 2012, [http://indian.ruvr.ru/\\_print/99335441.html](http://indian.ruvr.ru/_print/99335441.html); Sandeep Dikshit, *India Gets Observer Status in Arctic Council*, THE HINDU, May 16, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/india-gets-observer-status-in-arctic-council/article4719263.ece>. See also Jyoti Prasad Das, *India and China in the Arctic*, 24 FOREIGN POLICY J. Jul. 24, 2013, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2013/07/24/india-and-china-in-the-arctic/>; Kabir Taneja, *Moscow: India's Ticket to the Energy Riches of the Arctic*, PRAGATI: THE INDIAN NATIONAL INTEREST REV., Apr. 4, 2014, <http://pragati.nationalinterest.in/2014/04/moscow-india-ticket-to-the-energy-riches-of-the-arctic/>; Uttam Kumar Sinha, *India Must Take Advantage of Moscow's Leverage in the Arctic Region*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, Dec. 9, 2014, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-view/india-must-take-advantage-of-moscow-s-leverage-in-the-arctic-region/story-KmCi7zcLGKHLludlvGmD9I.html>; Anil Sasi, *Russia Energy Ties: India Hits the Gas*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, Jul. 11, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/business/business-others/russia-energy-ties-india-hits-the-gas/>.

<sup>33</sup> Vijay Sakhujā, *The Changing Arctic—Asian Response*, 7(1) INDIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS J. 71 (2012).

<sup>34</sup> Sakhujā, *China: Breaking into the Arctic Ice*, INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS (ICWA), Apr. 2010; Sakhujā, *China and India Compete for Energy in the Arctic*, INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS, August 19, 2010.

suggests that India should seek Arctic resources to secure its domestic energy needs by sharing its expertise in the safe extraction of offshore gas hydrates and building upon pre-existing relationships with Russia in Siberian development, such as its 20 percent stake in the Sakhalin-1 project.<sup>35</sup> The Indian government appears to agree. Visits by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Narendra Modi to Moscow to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin from 2013–2015, yielding agreements between ONGC Videsh Ltd. (the international subsidiary of India's largest oil and gas company) and Rosneft to pave the way for cooperation in subsurface surveys, exploration and appraisal activities and hydrocarbons production in Siberian oilfields and Russia's offshore Arctic, portend further bilateral cooperation to address India's energy security needs and Russia's need for foreign capital in the face of ongoing Western economic sanctions.<sup>36</sup>

There are also signs of modest skepticism in some Indian circles about the prospective benefits of Arctic resource development. Uttam Kumar Sinha intimates that "India does not have the resources to venture in a big way in the region" and that "all that oil and gas under the ice sheet is probably not worth the scramble." He cites the lack of exploration activity by Gazprom and Rosneft in the Eastern Siberian and Chukotka seas and the effects of the global economic crisis on exploration more generally. Instead, he encourages India to focus its "resource diplomacy" on mineral and seaport development in the Barents region with partnering with Norway and with "its traditional partner" Russia.<sup>37</sup> This sobering conclusion, shared by some other recent Indian commentators,<sup>38</sup> echoes Western studies that indicate high costs, long lead times, volatile pricing, and access to other sources of unconventional and conventional oil and gas make the Arctic—despite its vast holdings of petroleum resources—a future rather than short-term frontier.<sup>39</sup>

Indian policymakers thus encounter competing domestic discourses. "With ice cover at a record low and exploration at an all-time high, the Arctic presents a paradox—exploiting the melting sea ice to drill for more oil given that burning oil

<sup>35</sup> Dhanasree Jayaram, *India Reaches North for Energy Options as Arctic Ice Slowly Melts Away*, GLOBAL TIMES, Jan. 16, 2014. See also Taneja, *supra* note 32.

<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Radyuhin, *Russia Begins Oil Production in the Arctic*, THE HINDU, Dec. 21, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/russia-begins-oil-production-in-the-arctic/article5487104.ece>; Sanjay Chaturvedi, *India's Arctic Engagement: Challenges and Opportunities*, 18 (1) ASIA POLICY 73–79, (2014); ONGC Videsh, IOC, *Oil India Sign Deals to Access Russia's Lucrative Hydrocarbons Sector*, FIRSTPOST.COM, Dec. 25, 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/business/ongc-videsh-ioc-oil-india-sign-deals-to-access-russias-lucrative-hydrocarbons-sector-2559852.html>; Atle Staalesen, *A Role for India in Russian Arctic*, BARENTS OBSERVER, Oct. 18, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Sinha, *supra* note 6, at 29.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Shebonti Ray Dadwal, *Arctic: The Next Great Game in Energy Geopolitics?*, 38(6) STRATEGIC ANALYSIS 812–824 (2014); Vijay Sakhuja, *Why Russia May Find No Asian Support for Arctic Bailout*, NIKKEI ASIA REV. Jan. 23, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> James Henderson Julia Loe, *The Prospects and Challenges for Arctic Oil Development*, 14 OIL, GAS & ENERGY L. J. (2016); Graça Ermida, *Strategic Decisions of International Oil Companies: Arctic Versus Other Regions*, 2(3) ENERGY STRATEGY REV. 265–272 (2014); Kathrin Keil, *The Arctic: A New Region Of Conflict? The Case Of Oil And Gas*, 49 COOPERATION & CONFLICT 162 (2014); Øistein Harsem et al., *Factors Influencing Future Oil and Gas Prospects in the Arctic*, 12 ENERGY POLICY 8037–8045 (2011); Lars Lindholt & Solveig Glomsrød, *The Arctic: No Big Bonanza for the Global Petroleum Industry*, 34 ENERGY ECON. 1465–1474 (2012).

caused the melting in the first place,” Sinha suggests. “It is indeed tempting to seek an energy future in the Arctic but it is equally a responsibility to strongly support the conservation, management and governance of Arctic resources.” Whatever course India chooses, Sinha encourages New Delhi to vigorously promote sustainable development and bring resource management into the global governance debate.<sup>40</sup>

#### **4 Breaching the monopoly? Conceptualizing a common heritage of mankind, a closed club, and/or a legal regime with space for India**

Renowned Arctic expert Oran Young observes that the recent surge of interest in Arctic affairs has raised core questions about the legitimacy and robustness of existing forms of Arctic governance to manage a region in rapid transformation. The first state of change in the region arose from socio-political developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s (particularly the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union) that decoupled the Arctic from global politics and encouraged innovative approaches to regional, circumpolar cooperation. Over the last decade, Young notes that a combination of biophysical dynamics (climate change and melting sea ice) and socio-economic developments associated with globalization are “tighten[ing] the links between the Arctic and planetary systems, ... imposing constraints on efforts to deal with the Arctic as a distinct region.” This, in turn, has generated an expanding “circle of actors who see themselves as Arctic stakeholders and demand a seat at the table in addressing Arctic issues.”<sup>41</sup>

Predictably, Indian commentators, like other Asian observers, tend to view the Arctic through a global lens rather than the national or regional perspective that dominates most commentaries emanating from the Arctic states.<sup>42</sup> Arvind Gupta, the Lal Bahadur Shastri Chair at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi, introduced Indian readers to Arctic governance issues in his role as managing editor of *Strategic Analysis* in 2009. Given the growing rivalries and competition for resources in the region (according to the dominant narrative, at least), Gupta questioned whether India “should support an Antarctica-like treaty for the Arctic so as to prevent the Arctic region from becoming a preserve of the few coastal countries and to prevent its militarization”? The Antarctic Treaty, regulating international activity on the southern continent, guarantees the freedom of scientific investigation, puts aside terrestrial sovereignty claims, and declares that the region will be used for peaceful purposes. Although Gupta acknowledged clear distinctions

<sup>40</sup> SINHA, *supra* note 6, at 38–39.

<sup>41</sup> Oran R. Young, *The Arctic in Play: Governance in a Time of Rapid Change*, 24(2) INT’L J. MARINE & COASTAL L. 426–28 (2009).

<sup>42</sup> Amit Narang, *IDSAs-PRIO Roundtable on “Governance and Resource Use: The Case of the Arctic*, Nov. 19, 2012, [www.prio.no/utility/Download.ashx?x=313](http://www.prio.no/utility/Download.ashx?x=313). James Manicom & P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *East Asian States and the Pursuit of Arctic Council Membership*, in EAST-ASIA-ARCTIC RELATIONS: BOUNDARY, SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS 199–216 (Ken Coates & Kimie Hara eds., 2014); Manicom & Lackenbauer, *Asian States and the Arctic: National Perspectives on Regional Governance*, in THE HANDBOOK OF THE POLITICS OF THE ARCTIC 517–532 (Leif Christian Jensen & Geir Hønnelán. Cheltenham, 2015).

between the two poles, he held up the Antarctic Treaty as a potential model to govern behaviour in the circumpolar north:

Antarctica differs from the Arctic in that it does not have any settled human population, while the Arctic has an indigenous population. The Arctic was also the scene of intense military rivalry during the Cold War years. The question that needs to be examined is whether the Arctic, like Antarctica, should be made accessible to the whole of humankind for peaceful purposes. The exploitation of the region for hydrocarbons will only make the existing rivalries acute. Ironically, the exploitation of the region for hydrocarbons will make the problem of global warming even worse. Non-Arctic countries should join hands to push for an Arctic region which is accessible to all countries for peaceful and mostly scientific purposes. Thus, serious consideration should be given to charting an international regime which is similar to the Antarctic Treaty.<sup>43</sup>

Indians are familiar with this governance frame. When engaging the “Antarctica Question” during the Cold War, India repeatedly proposed an international trusteeship to oversee the southern continent.<sup>44</sup> In the end, the Antarctic Treaty System rendered moot India’s “post-colonial” aspirations for the South Pole.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, given its interest in the southern continent’s mineral resources and its leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, India played the leading role in ensuring that the plans of “a select group of developed nations” to exploit Antarctica’s resources did not cut out the Third World.<sup>46</sup> India’s attempts failed to include Antarctica as part of the “common heritage of mankind” during the negotiations related to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III, 1973–1982), India decided that if it “wish to influence the treaty nations ... it needed to join them.”<sup>47</sup> The country officially acceded to the ATS in 1983 and was accorded consultative status—the first developing, Asian state to do so, and the second Asian country to complete a scientific expedition in Antarctica. This membership “changed the character of the treaty from one that has to do with an apparently ‘exclusive’ club of rich nations to one that has much wider representation of the poorer nations.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Arvind Gupta, *Commentary: Geopolitical Implications of Arctic Meltdown*, 33 (2) STRATEGIC ANALYSIS 177 (2009). For a comparative legal overview of the polar regions, see DONALD ROTHWELL, *THE POLAR REGIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW* (1996).

<sup>44</sup> This provoked an uneasy alliance between the British Commonwealth and Latin America which shared common concerns that a UN resolution would undermine their claims and could set a dangerous precedent for UN control over sovereignty territory. Adrian Howkins, *Defending polar empire: opposition to India’s proposal to raise the ‘Antarctic Question’ at the United Nations in 1956*, 44 POLAR RECORD 35–44 (2008).

<sup>45</sup> Klaus Dodds, *Post-colonial Antarctica: An Emerging Engagement*,” 42 POLAR RECORD 59–70 42 (2006).

<sup>46</sup> KLAUSS DODDS, *GEOPOLITICS OF ANTARCTICA: VIEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN OCEANIC RIM* 143 (1997).

<sup>47</sup> Anita Dey, *India in Antarctica: Perspectives, Programmes, and Achievements*, 29 (2) INTERNATIONAL STUDIES 176 (1992). See also Peter J. Beck, *India In Antarctica: Science—and Politics—On Ice*, 306 NATURE 106–107, (Nov. 10, 1983).

<sup>48</sup> Dey, *supra* note 47, at 173.

Shyam Saran, former Indian foreign secretary and now Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board and a Senior Fellow with the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, applies a similar logic in advocating why India and other non-Arctic countries had to assert their right to manage the Arctic as a “global commons” vital to the earth’s ecosystem. He insists that the Arctic coastal states could not claim “exclusive privilege,” asserting that the Arctic Ocean is “as much a ‘global commons’ as is the Antarctica” and urging India to “mobilise international public opinion in favour of declaring the Arctic a common heritage of mankind and sponsoring an international legal regime on the lines of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty.”<sup>49</sup> Although the five Arctic coastal states (Arctic-5) could not settle their own territorial disputes, Saran asserted, they were “united in rejecting the view that Arctic Ocean constitutes a common heritage of mankind” and in rejecting “the role of any international agency in the management of a very fragile ecology.”<sup>50</sup> The Arctic-5 had explicitly rejected an Antarctic-style trusteeship model in their 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, arguing that international law conferred them primary responsibility for “managing activities in the region, including both development and environmental protection.” Saran, by contrast, ignores or rejects the UN Law of the Sea and other international frameworks and instead constructs a governance vacuum that non-Arctic states must fill as responsible global stewards. In his view, the greedy Arctic states, “keen to monopolise the resources of the region,” created an environment of “sharpening tensions” in their “scramble” for economic and strategic benefits.<sup>51</sup> In envisaging a revisionist role for India to spearhead a movement in the United Nations to set up a new “Arctic body” to protect an ecologically “pristine” zone,<sup>52</sup> Saran’s assertions represent a clear expression of the *Polar Preserve* mindset.

Saran also warned India to reconsider applying for observer status at the Arctic Council, given that this entailed accepting Arctic coastal states’ sovereign rights in the Arctic Ocean. The Council was created in 1996 to serve as a high-level intergovernmental forum to promote “co-operation, co-ordination and interaction” among the Arctic states (the member states) and representatives of the indigenous peoples of the region (the permanent participants). A third category, accredited *observer* status, is open to non-Arctic states, governmental organizations (e.g.,

<sup>49</sup> Saran, *supra* note 30. Although Saran acknowledges the basic differences between Antarctica (a continent) and the Arctic (an ocean), he quickly notes that both are covered in a thick layer of ice, hold vast hydrocarbon and mineral reserves, and are threatened by global warming. Given these similarities, Saran suggested that “what happens in the Arctic may well trigger a negative change in the Antarctic”—a disconcerting prospect to India given its longstanding interest in the southern continent.

<sup>50</sup> The language of the “common heritage of mankind,” a principle of international law suggesting that certain territorial areas should be held in trust for all humanity and protected from national or corporate exploitation, is deeply engrained in India’s approach to Antarctic governance. For example, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee proclaimed in 2007 that the southern continent “being a common heritage of mankind and the foremost symbol of peaceful use and cooperation needs to be protected for posterity.” As Sanjay Chaturvedi observes, this concept finds favour with Indians who believe that their country should “act as a major catalyst for critical post-colonial engagement with the southern polar region” and democratization of the Antarctic Treaty System “in the best interests of entire humankind.” See Sanjay Chaturvedi, *India and Antarctica: Towards Post-Colonial Engagement?* in *THE EMERGING POLITICS OF ANTARCTICA* 50 (Anne-Marie Brady, ed., 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Saran, *supra* note 30.

<sup>52</sup> Saran, *supra* note 4; Saran, *supra* note 30.



parliamentary) and NGOs. Observers have no decision-making role, and may speak only at the invitation of the Chair and according to strict procedural rules during ministerial, senior Arctic official, and working group meetings. Furthermore, if they engage in activity that is at odds with the Arctic Council Declaration, they can be suspended. The Nuuk Declaration, reached at the Seventh Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council on 12 May 2011, set out criteria stipulating that observers must:

- Accept and support the objectives of the Arctic Council defined in the Ottawa declaration;
- Recognize Arctic states' sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic;
- Recognize that an extensive legal framework applies to the Arctic Ocean, including the Law of the Sea, and that this framework provides a solid foundation for responsible management of this ocean;
- Respect the values, interests, culture and traditions of Arctic indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants;
- Have demonstrated a political willingness, as well as financial ability, to contribute to the work of the PPs and other Arctic indigenous peoples;
- Have demonstrated their Arctic interests and expertise relevant to the work of the Arctic Council; and
- Have demonstrated a concrete interest and ability to support the work of the Arctic Council, including through partnerships with member states and PPs bringing Arctic concerns to global decision-making bodies.<sup>53</sup>

The Council's deliberations are consensus-based and non-binding: it is a policy-shaping rather than policy-making body. Accordingly, critics of the Council in its existing form question the capacity of a non-binding, "soft law" form to manage substantive issues in an increasingly complex and globalized region, while supporters applaud its flexibility, adaptability, and avoidance of the usual friction associated with regulatory politics.<sup>54</sup> The Council's perceived limitations led the European Union and various scholars in the late 2000s to recommend a new regime

<sup>53</sup> Nuuk Declaration on the occasion of the Seventh Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council, 12 May 2011, Nuuk, Greenland, available at <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/document-archive/category/5-declarations>. Observers are expected to contribute to the working groups and may, at the discretion of the respective chair, make statements and submit documents. At ministerial meetings, observers can submit written statements but can only propose projects through an Arctic state or PP. Furthermore, the level of financial contribution provided by the observer to a working group or project may not exceed that provided by the Arctic states, unless permitted by the Senior Arctic Officials. Furthermore, observer status is subject to review every four years, at which time observer states are expected to reiterate their interest in retaining this status and to share information about their activities in and contributions to the Council. For a critical look at these criteria from a Chinese perspective, see Peiqing Guo, *An Analysis of New Criteria for Permanent Observer Status on the Arctic Council and the Road of Non-Arctic States to Arctic*, 4(2) KMI INTER'L. J. MARITIME AFFAIRS & FISHERIES 21–38 (2012).

<sup>54</sup> For introductions to the Arctic Council, see Timo Koivurova & David Vander Zwaag, *The Arctic Council at 10 Years: Retrospect and Prospects*, 40(1) UBC L. REV. 121–194 (2007); Koivurova, *Limits and Possibilities of the Arctic Council in a Rapidly Changing Scene of Arctic Governance*, 46 POLAR RECORD 146–156 (2009); Paula Kankaanpää & Oran R. Young, *The Effectiveness of the Arctic Council*, 31 POLAR RESEARCH 1–14 (2012).

for the Arctic Ocean or a legally-binding convention or Antarctic-like treaty for the whole Arctic region.<sup>55</sup>

Although the Arctic states and most Western commentators have moved away from ambitious proposals for a comprehensive Arctic treaty, various Indian commentators have assumed the mantle of advocating for an international treaty system to govern the region. Saran, for example, is tireless in asserting that India can make a “historic contribution... in its role as a responsible global power” by pressing to apply “the Antarctic Treaty template” and forcing Arctic states to shelve their territorial claims.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, consultant Kishore Kumar of the Centre for Ocean and Environmental Studies in New Delhi insists that accepting observer status would “imply India accepting the exclusive club of the Arctic and conceding their right to rampant economic greed and consequent degradation of the region, with long-term impacts.” Instead, he urges India to assert “its growing international economic and technological status to push for the global commons theory” which would supposedly enjoy “widespread international support and acclaim.”<sup>57</sup> This idealistic approach, clearly derived from Antarctica, is unlikely to gain traction amongst the Arctic states.

Other Indian pundits see the Arctic Council as a stepping stone to global governance and advocate a pragmatic approach to secure a foothold in regional discussions that can lead to more fundamental reform. Along these lines, Sakhuja highlights opportunities for India and other non-Arctic states to “challenge exclusivity” and “breach the monopoly” on Arctic governance<sup>58</sup>—a message that resonates with India’s historical criticisms of the exclusivity of the Antarctic Treaty System. Colonel (retired) P.K. Gautam—who shares many of Saran’s general views on the Arctic as a global commons and criticizes the greed of the Arctic states—sees observer status as a “first step” towards India playing a leadership role in transforming Arctic governance.<sup>59</sup> Commander (retired) Neil Gadihoke, a strategic analyst and former research fellow at the National Maritime Foundation, considers the Arctic Council “the crucial cog in the wheel” to reform Arctic governance within the region and to manage the influence of “external actors” on the Arctic system. To secure India’s interests, he urges New Delhi “to broaden cooperation with the Arctic nations and establish bilateral dialogues and discussions to

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Hans Corell, *Reflections on the Possibilities and Limitations of a Binding Legal Regime for the Arctic*, 37 ENVTL. POL’Y & L. 321–324, (2007); Rob Huebert & Brooks Yeager, *A New Sea: The Need for a Regional Agreement on Management and Conservation of the Arctic Marine Environment*, PANDA.ORG (2008), <http://wwf.panda.org/?122260/A-New-Sea-The-Need-for-a-Regional-Agreement-on-Management-and-Conservation-of-the-Arctic-Marine-Environment>; European Parliament Resolution on Arctic Governance, P6\_TA(2008)04749, Oct. 2008; Young, *supra* note 43, at 434–441. These recommendations led the five coastal states to issue the Illulissat Declaration in 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Saran, *supra* note 30.

<sup>57</sup> Kumar, *supra* note 25, at 14–22.

<sup>58</sup> Sakhuja, *Arctic Circle: Challenging Exclusivity*, 29 INST. PEACE & CONFLICT STUD., Apr. 2013, [http://ssponline.org/opinion/ArcticCircle\\_ChallengingExclusivity\\_29042013](http://ssponline.org/opinion/ArcticCircle_ChallengingExclusivity_29042013); Sakhuja, *India and China in the Arctic: Breaching the Monopoly*, 18 INST. PEACE & CONFLICT STUD., May 2013, <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/india-and-china-in-the-arctic-breaching-the-monopoly-3936.html>.

<sup>59</sup> P.K. Gautam, *The Arctic as a Global Common*,” *IDSA Issue Brief*, INST. DEFENCE STUD. & ANALYSES, Sept. 2, 2011, [http://idsa.in/system/files/IB\\_TheArcticasaGlobalCommon.pdf](http://idsa.in/system/files/IB_TheArcticasaGlobalCommon.pdf).

understand the evolving politico-strategic developments in the Arctic region, including participation in Arctic resource assessment and exploitation studies.”<sup>60</sup> The desired end state, however, is not the *status quo* but a substantively revised system of governance that better accommodates the interests of global stakeholders.

While revisionist currents are strong in the India media and think tank discourse, official positions tend to adhere more closely to the existing system. H.P. Rajan, the former deputy director of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea at the United Nations and advisor to the Indian Department of Ocean Development, articulates a stance that is generally aligned with that of the Arctic coastal states. He finds it “inconceivable that [the Arctic] states will engage in conflicts,” anticipating instead that they will closely cooperate to manage emerging sea routes and Arctic resources in conformity with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which “does not envisage any special regime for the Arctic.” Accordingly, Rajan sees no need for a new international regime to cover the Arctic Ocean, but instead encourages India to focus on freedoms of the high seas and rights to seabed resources in “the Area” beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. “It is important, where decisions concerning the Arctic are made, to ensure that the integrity of the Convention is maintained,” he insists. This stance echoes the basic principle behind the Ilulissat Declaration, but does not share its implicit message (interpreted by some commentators) that Arctic affairs are best left to the coastal states. Instead, Rajan sees an opportunity for India, given its experience in Law of the Sea negotiations and in deep-sea exploration, to share its unique expertise and “take a lead role in the Arctic governance issues within the overall framework of the existing legal regime.”<sup>61</sup>

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also accepts the Arctic states’ view that an Antarctic vision cannot be projected onto the Arctic. Officials have indicated that they considered applying a southern polar template to the northern circumpolar region, but decided that it would be inappropriate given the inherent difference in an uninhabited, continental land mass and an ocean surrounded by nation states.<sup>62</sup> “India has already been working closely with the Arctic Council members,” Navtej Sarna, additional secretary with the Ministry of External Affairs, stated in May 2013. “We will be putting a lot of stress on our scientific work in the region. We have been asked to send more people to the Arctic, and we plan to do so.” He also notes that India also plans to “fruitfully engage with the indigenous people of the region and work with them on environmental issues.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Neil Gadihoke, *The Arctic Council: Emerging Contours*, NATIONAL MARITIME FOUNDATION, Jul. 13, 2012, <http://www.maritimeindia.org/article/arctic-council-emerging-contours.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Rajan, *supra* note 19, at 32–39. See also Rajan, *The Legal Regime of the Arctic and India’s Role and Options*, 38 (6) STRATEGIC ANALYSIS 904–912 (2014).

<sup>62</sup> Devirupa Mitra, *Taking Cue from China, India Eyeing Arctic Region*, THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS, Oct. 2 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Kabir Taneja, *Indian Arrives at the Arctic*, N. Y. T. May 20, 2013, reproduced on the Ministry of External Affairs website.

## 5 Overlapping claims and opening arctic sea lanes: geostrategic implications of arctic melt

Most Indian commentators seem to rely heavily on the *Polar Race* narrative—anticipating regional competition, tension and even conflict generated by boundary and resource disputes, coupled with the opening of new sea routes<sup>64</sup>—rather than expectations of a *Polar Saga* now touted by most Western commentators.<sup>65</sup> By setting up a straw man argument of Arctic state-generated securitization, militarization, and exclusionary politics, Indian commentators insist on the need for non-Arctic intervention to arrest the coastal states’ “rampant economic [and territorial] greed and consequent degradation of the region.” Furthermore, Indian interest in the Arctic is framed in the context of regional Asian rivalries, particularly the perceived interests and activities of China. An oft-cited statement by Shyam Saran that “developments in the Arctic Ocean will redraw the geopolitical map of the world” has incited fear that China will aggressively seek advantages of the Northern Sea Route (the Arctic transit route north of Russia) and Arctic resources. Accordingly, some commentators encourage India to anticipate and prepare for strategic impacts of the melting Arctic ice not out of global concern but because of its indirect impacts on South Asian regional security.

Pro-Arctic development commentators tend to focus on India’s opportunities with Russia, highlighting opportunities associated with the Northern Sea Route and concomitant resource development.<sup>66</sup> This is logical, given the central role that Russian resources play in India’s energy security vision.<sup>67</sup> Given the geographical proximity of the two countries (compared to the other Arctic states), as well as their “special and privileged” strategic partnership (enshrined in a formal declaration in 2000), they are held up as natural partners. Furthermore, Russian policymakers are keen to develop Arctic resources—and India has already invested heavily in Russia’s energy sector. The Arctic produces nearly ten percent of the world’s crude oil (with 80 % of this production in the Russian North) and a quarter of its gas (with

<sup>64</sup> For Western examples, see ROB HUEBERT, ET. AL., *CLIMATE CHANGE & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY: THE ARCTIC AS A BELLWEATHER* (2012); ROGER HOWARD, *ARCTIC GOLD RUSH: THE NEW RACE FOR TOMORROW’S NATURAL RESOURCES* (2010); Richard Sale & Evgenii Potapov, *THE SCRAMBLE FOR THE ARCTIC: OWNERSHIP, EXPLOITATION AND CONFLICT IN THE FAR NORTH* (2010); Scott Borgerson, *Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS 63–77 (March/April 2008).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Ian G. Brosnan, et al., *Cooperation or conflict in a changing Arctic?* 42/1–2 OCEAN DEV. & INT’L. L. 173–210 (2011); Frédéric Lasserre, et al., *Is There an Arms Race in the Arctic?* J. MILITARY & 14 (3&4) STRATEGIC STUD. 1–56 (2012); CHRISTIAN LE MIÈRE & JEFFREY MAZO, *ARCTIC OPENING: INSECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY* (2013); ROLF TAMNES & KRISTINE OFFERDAL, *GEOPOLITICS AND SECURITY IN THE ARCTIC: REGIONAL DYNAMICS IN A GLOBAL WORLD* (2014); Annika Nilsson & Timo Koivurova, *Transformational Change and Regime Shifts in the Circumpolar Arctic*, 7(2) ARCTIC REV. L. & POL. 179–195, (2016).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Vijay Sakhujia, *Northern Sea Route and Russia’s Resource Exploitation Strategy*, ICWA ISSUE BRIEF, Jul. 29, 2010; Sinha & Gupta, *supra* note 16, at 880–881; Dadwal, *supra* note 38, at 814–815; Sinha, *supra* note 32.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Ambrish Dhaka, *The Geopolitics of Energy Security and the Responses to its Challenges by India and Germany*, 14(2) GEOPOLITICS 278–299, (2009).

the vast majority of this Arctic production coming from Russia).<sup>68</sup> In this sense, “for India, Russia provides the most convenient door way to the Arctic.”<sup>69</sup>

The opening of new Arctic shipping routes, however, may not work in India’s favour. Indian commentators typically reproduce narratives of increasingly navigable transit routes connecting the Pacific to the Atlantic in the near future, with the potential to reshape global shipping patterns and heighten tensions between coastal states claiming “internal waters” (particularly Canada and Russia) and maritime states (including the United States and India). As Chaturvedi notes, these routes, as a “very sensational aspect of climate change geopolitics,” have received understandable hype—but that there is a strong tendency for commentators to “underplay uncertainties and risks associated with the opening of these trade routes.”<sup>70</sup> Uncertain and extreme environmental conditions, limited hydrographic knowledge, shipping economics and insurance, limited infrastructure, and safety issues all pose serious constraints on the viability of large-scale navigation through the region by open-water (non-icebreaking) ships in the short- to medium-term.<sup>71</sup> Equally significantly, some Indian commentators note that these new Arctic routes—however exciting in global terms—do not favour India. “Shipping through the NSR vis-à-vis the Suez Canal route is calculated to cut down the distance by almost 2800 nautical miles or 22% between Rotterdam and Shanghai, a cost saving of 30–40%,” Sinha notes. “This is of interest to China, South Korea and Japan, but not for India,” given its southern location. “The sea routes shift through the Arctic will not greatly diminish the traditional Europe-Asia route,” he concludes. As a result, he recommends that “India’s naval strategy should be anchored in the Indian Ocean Region, to establish itself as the resident maritime power and to thwart strategies that polarise” the region, rather than brashly shifting its attention and resources to the far north.<sup>72</sup>

Other Indian defence analysts, often echoing Western commentators who suggest that the Arctic coastal states have “militarized” the Arctic, have contemplated the strategic implications of the melting sea ice for Asian security. Their narratives intersect with broader critiques about governance, resources, and the Arctic states’ perceived inadequacies in defending the environment while “militarising the Arctic in pursuit of their narrow national interests.”<sup>73</sup> Commander Sarabjeet Singh Parmar

<sup>68</sup> Elana Wilson Rowe & Helge Blakkisrud, *A New Kind of Arctic Power? Russia’s Policy Discourses and Diplomatic Practices in the Circumpolar North*, 19(1) *GEOPOLITICS* 69 (2014).

<sup>69</sup> Taneja, *supra* note 32. See also Tatyana Shaumyan & Valeriy Zhuravel, *India and the Arctic: Environment, Economy and Politics*, 24 *ARCTIC & NORTH* 153–161, (2016).

<sup>70</sup> Chaturvedi, *supra* note 18.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the landmark *Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment* produced by the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment working group of the Arctic Council. For a sophisticated study on scenarios for navigability, see Laurence C. Smith & Scott R. Stephenson, *New Trans-Arctic Shipping Routes Navigable by Midcentury*, 110 (13) *PROC. NAT’L ACAD. SCI.* 4871–4872 (2013).

<sup>72</sup> Sinha, *supra* note 18, at 29.

<sup>73</sup> Gautam, *supra* note 59, at 1. Colonel (retired) P.K. Gautam’s discussion of global warming, sovereignty claims, and potential new sea routes draws largely upon general American sources that emphasize geopolitical and security considerations. Accordingly, he produces a highly alarmist portrait of a region on the precipice of conflict. For a critique of his views, see Lackenbauer, *supra* note 13, at 10–11.

discerns the “potential for conflict amidst cooperation” in the region, noting “underlying stress points that cannot be ignored.” His list includes overlapping maritime claims, differing interpretation of the laws involved (specifically UNCLOS), “a growing dependency on the region to fuel national energy,” and “a slow militarisation of the region” as Arctic states focusing military capabilities and capacities on the region. He suggests that “the dual track of ‘talking cooperation’ and ‘slow militarisation’ does raise questions about the intent behind the militarisation especially when there are existing disputes, pending decisions on claims for maritime zones and extensive natural resources therein.”<sup>74</sup> This tendency to equate boundary disputes with potential conflict elevates the circumpolar north from a theatre that can be managed by the Arctic states to an international zone warranting the attention and confidence-building efforts of all global powers. Accordingly, some Indian commentators advocate for India to play a leading role in promoting the idea of a military-free or nuclear-free Arctic,<sup>75</sup> which fits with Antarctic models and would allow India to play a prestige-building role as global mediator.

Senior Indian defence officials also consider the transnational and transoceanic implications of Arctic change. A.K. Antony, the Indian Minister of Defence, stated in February 2012 that the “possible melting of the polar ice caps will have tectonic consequences to our understanding of what maritime domains constitute ‘navigable’ oceans of the world. Specific to Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, there may be a need to reassess concepts like chokepoints and critical sea lines of communication (SLOCs).”<sup>76</sup> Indian strategy assumed that, if China threatens aggression across the Himalayas, the Indian Navy could block the Malacca Straits and choke Chinese energy supplies. The Northern Sea Route could allow China to access oil from the

<sup>74</sup> Sarabjeet Singh Parmar, *The Arctic: Potential for Conflict Amidst Cooperation*, 34 (4) STRATEGIC ANALYSIS 480, 485 (2013).

<sup>75</sup> For example, Sakhujia asserts that “India is a strong advocate of global nuclear disarmament and can play a vital role in promoting the idea of a nuclear free Arctic.” This position flows from India’s support for global nuclear disarmament and for the use of Antarctica for “peaceful purposes only,” where military personnel and equipment are only permissible for scientific research and other peaceful activities. Sakhujia, *The Arctic Council: Is There a Case for India*, ICWA POLICY BRIEFS, Jul. 13, 2012. See also SINHA, *supra* note 6, at 77. While the idea of a nuclear-free Arctic deviates from the official positions of Arctic states (several of which rely on strategic deterrent capabilities deployed in the region), it does resonate with some Western disarmament groups and commentators. See, for example, MICHAEL WALLACE & STEVEN STAPLES, *RIDDING THE ARCTIC OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: A TASK LONG OVERDUE* (2010). Sakhujia’s recommendation that the Indian Navy should develop Arctic “sea legs” through training and “ice condition operations,” and his trumpeting of India as “the first Asian country to have obtained some kind of Arctic naval experience” through the Talwar-class frigate *INS Teg’s* sea trials in “Arctic-like sea conditions” indicates that he is not opposed to non-nuclear military operations in the region. Sakhujia, *Indian Navy: Developing ‘Arctic Sea Legs*, SOC. STUDY. PEACE & CONFLICT, Oct. 15, 2012, [http://www.sspconline.org/opinion/IndianNavyDevelopingArcticSeaLegs\\_15102012](http://www.sspconline.org/opinion/IndianNavyDevelopingArcticSeaLegs_15102012), Sakhujia, *supra* note 13, 12–13. On the idea of military “spillovers” into an otherwise peaceful region, see K. Narula, *Asia and the Arctic: Summary and Takeaways*, in *ASIA AND THE ARCTIC: NARRATIVES, PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES* 126 (Vijay Sakhujia & Kapil Narula eds., 2016).

<sup>76</sup> Ajai Shukla, *Antony Sees Chinese Shipping Bypassing Indian Blockade*, BUS. STD., Feb. 28, 2012, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/antony-sees-chinese-shipping-bypassing-indian-blockade-112022800029\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/antony-sees-chinese-shipping-bypassing-indian-blockade-112022800029_1.html).



north rather than through the Indian Ocean.<sup>77</sup> Expanding on this “new great game” narrative, retired Indian naval commander Neil Gadihoke raises a series of questions that he hopes will encourage the Indian Navy to factor regional developments into its long-term planning. For example, what if Arctic militarization diverted the US Navy from the Indian Ocean, leaving a regional power vacuum? China’s dependence on sea lanes to carry energy imports from the Middle East and Africa represented a vulnerability that India could exploit in a conflict. “Were the Chinese vulnerability to lessen due to the Arctic route,” he argues, “then China may get more assertive not only with India, but with other countries in the region,” with concomitant impacts on regional security and broader geopolitics. On the other hand, the Malacca dilemma could be supplanted by a “‘Bering Straits’ dilemma subject to more focused strategic leverage by the Arctic rim states.”<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, strategists conclude that maintaining positive relations with Arctic partners will be key to protecting Indian interests, particularly when it comes to balancing the growing global and regional influence of China.

Indian commentary is acutely attentive to China’s interests in Arctic resources, noting that China has “taken the lead”<sup>79</sup> in engaging Arctic stakeholders. For example, Sakhujia observes that “the Chinese government has allocated significant scientific, technological and financial resources for conducting Arctic research, assess untapped energy resources, explore the possibility of transit through the NSR and formulate policies for its engagement in the dynamics concerning the Arctic region.”<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, he warns that China’s interests in Arctic resources, shipping, and military developments make it a direct competitor with India for energy, fish, and bilateral relationships with Arctic states.<sup>81</sup> Media commentators have adopted this rivalry frame as a dominant element in their narratives, envisaging Arctic affairs as another domain in which India must balance China’s aggressive and growing geopolitical influence.<sup>82</sup> Situated within the “new great game” narrative, commentators are able to tap into broader Indian concerns about the “rise

<sup>77</sup> Suvi Dogra, *India’s Quest for Arctic Ice*, INDIAN EXPRESS, May 21, 2013, reproduced in IISS Voices.

<sup>78</sup> Neil Gadihoke, *Arctic Melt: The Outlook for India*, 8(1) MARITIME AFFAIRS 5–9 (2012). With 80% of China’s imported oil travelling through the Straits of Malacca, a blockade or closure of that route during a conflict could prove both economically and strategically disastrous. Marc Lanteigne, *China’s Maritime Security and the “Malacca Dilemma*, 4(2) ASIAN SECURITY 143–161 (2008). In November 2003 President Hu Jintao declared that “certain major powers” were bent on controlling the strait, and called for the adoption of new strategies to mitigate the perceived vulnerability. Ian Storey, *China’s Malacca Dilemma*, CHINA BRIEF, May 17, 2006, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=31575&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=196&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31575&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=196&no_cache=1). Under these circumstances, the prospect of an alternate route (or a number of alternate routes) through the Arctic is particularly appealing.

<sup>79</sup> Sakhujia, *The Changing Arctic—Asian Response*, 7(1) INDIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS J. 66 (Jan-Mar 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Sakhujia, *supra* note 13, at 9.

<sup>81</sup> *See*, for example, Sakjuja, *supra* note 34; Sakjuja, *supra* note 17.

<sup>82</sup> *See*, for example, Mitra, *supra* note 62; Associated Press, *China and India’s Rivalry Extends to the Arctic*, NEW DECCAN HERALD, June 20, 2013; Das, *supra* note 32; Sasi, *supra* note 32.



of China” to encourage Indian politicians and bureaucrats to keep a close watch on Arctic developments.

This logic also influences the way Indian commentators, anticipating either an *Arctic Race* or *Arctic Saga*, view relations with Arctic countries. “India has a desire to differentiate itself from its geopolitical rivals and competitors as well as its hopes to further contrast its less threatening emergence with that of China,” commentator Sean Durns suggests. “Moreover, India’s position has the added potential to shore up support and potential partnerships with the littoral states by promising a non-threatening course that will not upset the status quo, while highlighting India’s growing strengths in research and development.”<sup>83</sup> Journalists and academic commentators emphasize Indian relations with Russia given the relationship describe above, the latter’s control of the Northern Sea Route, and Russian efforts to maintain a “balance of power” with the other Arctic states—particularly the other coastal states, all of which are NATO members.<sup>84</sup> More generally, Shastri Ramachandaran asserts that the Arctic states—particularly in Scandinavia—“want India to take a more active role in international affairs,” raise its profile, and counter-balance “China’s sure-footed moves at becoming an Arctic power.” In his view, it is befitting “a country interested in a permanent place in the UN Security Council ... to be seen in the intensive behind-the-scenes exercises to shape the future of the Arctic.”<sup>85</sup>

## 6 A “Diplomatic Victory”: India and the Arctic Council

While the applications by East Asian states to become accredited observers to the Arctic Council have received considerable attention, the process leading to and following the submission of India’s application has received comparatively little.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Sean Durns, *India Moves on Long-Term Plans for Arctic Investment*, GLOBAL RISK INSIGHTS, Dec. 14, 2013, <http://globalriskinsights.com/2013/12/14/india-moves-on-long-term-plans-for-arctic-investment/>.

<sup>84</sup> Sinha, *supra* note 18, at 25. Uttam Kumar Sinha, *India to Use Sea Route Along Arctic*, RUSSIAN RADIO, July 4, 2013, [http://indian.ruvr.ru/news/2013\\_07\\_04/India-to-use-sea-route-along-Arctic-3910/](http://indian.ruvr.ru/news/2013_07_04/India-to-use-sea-route-along-Arctic-3910/); *UPDATE 2-India’s ONGC Interested in Russia’s Arctic Offshore*, REUTERS, Oct.21, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/21/russia-india-energy-idUSL5N0IB2G020131021>; Vladimir Radyuhin, *Russia Revives Naval Presence in Arctic*, THE HINDU, Sept. 17, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/russia-revives-naval-presence-in-arctic/article5138513.ece>; Radyuhin, *Upstaging India, China to Get 20% Stake in Russian LNG Project*, MEOGRAPH: FOUR-DIMENSIONAL STORYTELLING, June 22, 2013, <http://www.meograph.com/online5000/55703/edward-snowden-and-the-nsa-files-story-so-far>; Vijay Sakhuja, *India and the Arctic: Prospects for Collaboration with Russia*, VALDAI CLUB, Jan. 10, 2014. Sanjay Chaturvedi envisages Arctic coastal states’ coast guards “at the forefront of cooperative naval diplomacy to address challenges of common-comprehensive security,” with the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route as possible “sites of cooperation and burden sharing between the Arctic States and Asian stakeholders.” Sanjay Chaturvedi, *Geopolitical Transformations: ‘Rising’ Asia and the Future of the Arctic Council*, in THE ARCTIC COUNCIL AND ITS PLACE IN THE FUTURE OF ARCTIC GOVERNANCE 240 (Thomas Axworthy et al., eds., 2012).

<sup>85</sup> Shastri Ramachandaran, *India at Sea in Arctic Ocean*, DNA INDIA, Nov. 11, 2012, <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-india-at-sea-in-arctic-ocean-1763203>.

<sup>86</sup> Solli et al. assess how Arctic states responded to the applications of China, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea but overlooks India.

This reflects India's emergence as a relative latecomer to the ranks of aspiring observers and its traditional lack of engagement on Arctic governance issues in official or academic circles. Nevertheless, Indian commentators have hailed their country's accession to observer status as "the vindication of a five-year visionary effort," an "Arctic victory" and "a major diplomatic achievement" for foreign minister Salman Khursid<sup>87</sup> that warrants closer scrutiny.

Indian journalist K.P. Nayar suggests that India's move towards a "graduated polar presence acquired urgency after a ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Nuuk, capital of Greenland, decided in mid-2011 to freeze new applications for permanent observer status in the organisation." Until this point, countries could attend Council meetings on an *ad hoc* basis while the member states and PPs considered applications for observer status. According to Nayar's informants, Sweden (the new Council chair) fixed a new deadline of January 2013 for new observer applications. He narrated that:

The decision jolted South Block into a realisation that China, for instance, had applied much before India and although its application was pending, Beijing's envoys were virtually operating as observers, attending ministerial meetings and making robust preparations for a new 'great game' involving Arctic resources... [T]o be cut out of an observer's role would have meant exclusion from everything related to the Arctic from climate change, monsoon prediction and anthropogenic activities.

What followed, therefore, was an intense period of diplomatic hyperactivity under the radar in South Block because there was no point in India applying to be an observer unless it was simultaneously able to drum up wide support for its application. After all, China, Singapore, South Korea and Japan, all of whom are presumed to have bigger economic clout than India, had applied and have been awaiting a decision for years as the council's ministers, as the more powerful ones like Russia, the US and Canada deliberated on what role Asian countries should be allowed to play in the Arctic which they considered to be their extended backyard.<sup>88</sup>

India submitted its application on 6 November 2012. Indian commentator Shastri Ramachandaran suggests that "if the MEA been laid back and assumed that India's entry into the Arctic Council would happen as a matter of course, the outcome at Kiruna could have been different."<sup>89</sup>

Indian media reports suggest that the country was aware of differences in receptiveness to non-Arctic state applications between the supportive Nordic countries and hesitant Russia and Canada. Dominant perceptions held that the latter countries opposed more observers that could complicate and delay consensus,

<sup>87</sup> Shastri Ramachandaran, *supra* note 7; K.P. Nayar, "Fruits of Arctic Success Await Khursid," THE TELEGRAPH, Jun. 11, 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Nayar, *supra* note 87. If India had missed the deadline to apply, Nayar suggested, "it would have lost out on a fight for a new frontier like it did in the 1990s when it missed getting into Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which has become the primary vehicle for trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region."

<sup>89</sup> Ramachandaran, *supra* note 7.

diminish the role of Permanent Participants at the Council, or undermine Arctic states' control over regional issues.<sup>90</sup> Indian commentators noted, however, that Canada and Russia's primary concern was with China's intentions rather than India's.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, Indian diplomacy focused on the Nordic countries which were openly welcoming to new observers. Indian "mandarins" worked the corridors of the November 2012 Asia-Europe Meeting Summit of Heads of State and Government in Laos. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, the President of Iceland, was invited to India for a state visit from 3–5 April 2013, and Iceland agreed to support India's application. New Delhi also lobbied Finland, Sweden (the Council chair from 2011–2013), and Norway—which most Indian commentators held up as a supportive partner.<sup>92</sup> Norwegian foreign minister Espen Barth Eide told an Indian TV reporter that "we recognise the strong interest that India is showing in the Arctic. We are happy to support their application." Eide also said that both India and Norway could mutual benefit from research collaboration and deeper economic ties. "India is playing an important role in climate discussions," he noted. "The climate binds us together, whether you live in the Himalayas or here, the climate binds us and it is changing."<sup>93</sup>

The application process and Nuuk criteria for observers<sup>94</sup> also forced India to acknowledge the unique role of Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council. The chief oversight in much Indian commentary is the absence of any substantive engagement with the interests of Northerners—the indigenous and non-indigenous residents of the Arctic states. Too often, Indian pundits seem determined to inscribe

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Solli et al, *supra* note 2, at 4, 14; Erik Molenaar, *Current and Prospective Roles of the Arctic Council System within the Context of the Law of the Sea*, 27 INT'L J. MARINE & COASTAL L. 580 (2012); P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Canada and the Asian Observers to the Arctic Council: Anxiety and Opportunity*, 18 (1) ASIA POLICY 22–29 (2014); Matthew Willis & Duncan Depledge, *How We Learned to Stop Worrying About China's Arctic Ambitions: Understanding China's Admission to the Arctic Council, 2004–2013*, in HANDBOOK OF THE POLITICS OF THE ARCTIC 759 (Leif Christian Jensen and Geir Hønneland eds., 2015).

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Dinesh C. Sharma, *Frozen Arctic Sea Plays Host to Sino-India Rivalry*, INDIA TODAY, Jan. 17, 2012; Kalyan Ray, *Resource-Hungry India Seeks a Seat at the Arctic Table*, DECCAN HERALD, Jan. 15, 2012, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/219579/resource-hungry-india-seeks-seat.html%20%20>; Nayar, *supra* note 87; and Sakhuja, *supra* note 13, at 10–11. Shastri Ramachandran cited "authoritative sources" confirming that Canada had expressed "bilateral concerns" about India and that Ottawa "proposed to raise these issues" in advance of the Kiruna meeting, but that it did not find Nordic support for its position. Ramachandran, *supra* note 7.

<sup>92</sup> Indrani Bagchi, *India Gets the Nod to Join Arctic Gold Rush*, TIMES OF INDIA, May 16, 2013; Nayar, *supra* note 87; Ramachandran, *supra* note 7; and *China, Korea, EU Woo Arctic Council at Norway Conference*, NUNATSIAQ NEWS ONLINE, Jan. 22, 2013, [www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674china\\_korea\\_eu\\_woo\\_arctic\\_council\\_at\\_norway\\_conference/](http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674china_korea_eu_woo_arctic_council_at_norway_conference/).

<sup>93</sup> Sidharth Pandey, *India to Expand Engagement in the Arctic*, NDTV.COM, Jun. 13, 2013, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/india-to-expand-engagement-in-the-arctic-379182>. In late 2012, Shastri Ramachandran surmised that "of the Arctic Five, India's relations with Denmark are at its worst, and, with friend Russia, disagreements over the aircraft carrier Gorshkov are symptomatic of unresolved issues clouding the atmosphere. India is deeply engaged with the US, but that is unlikely to help its interests in the Arctic. Canada has not been cultivated in this context. That leaves Norway as the one state which can aid and advance the Indian cause, but also help rope in Sweden and Finland. See Ramachandran, *supra* note 85.

<sup>94</sup> See Piotr Graczyk & Timo Koivurova, *A New Era in the Arctic Council's External Relations? Broader Consequences of the Nuuk Observer Rules for Arctic Governance*, 50(3) POLAR RECORD 225–236 (2014).

their own images on a region without acknowledging its human face, fuelling the concerns of indigenous leaders that non-Arctic states do not appreciate sufficiently their unique interests and rights.<sup>95</sup> The Arctic “is a complex space, quite contrary to the popular imagination which looks at Arctic as wide, blank space,” Sanjay Chaturvedi astutely observes. “Sometimes people forget that Arctic geographies are humanized geographies”—homelands for Inuit, Saami, and other indigenous peoples.<sup>96</sup> Seeking an observer chair at the Council “made it imperative for India to lobby with indigenous communities such as the Innuits [*sic*: Inuit],” Nayar reported. “For South Block’s diplomats, who are used to dealing with states, this was a new and unfamiliar exercise.” He noted that Indian ambassadors “drummed up support” in Nordic capitals and “envoys travelled to Copenhagen to meet officials of the Indigenous People’s Secretariat.”<sup>97</sup> There is no indication that Indian officials met with North American or Russia indigenous groups.

The conversation between the representatives of the Arctic states and Permanent Participants that led to the final decision is not public. Based on extensive interviews with insiders, however, Per Erik Solli, Elana Wilson Rowe, and Wrenn Yennie Lindgren reveal that the United States was “catalytic” in securing consensus support for the observer applications at Kiruna. This position reflected the US National Strategy for the Arctic Region, released by the White House immediately before the meeting, which specifically encouraged international cooperation with non-Arctic stakeholders to advance common interests.<sup>98</sup> This American support surprised some Indian commentators. “The Obama Administration did not have a clear stance, even as Secretary of State John Kerry travelled to the meeting at Kiruna,” International Institute for Strategic Studies researcher Suvi Dogra reported. In the end, however, “Kerry was instrumental in brokering a compromise” that led to acceptance of the observer countries. Dogra speculated that India may have benefitted from China’s more assertive position, based on “the view that if China had to be admitted, so too must India.”<sup>99</sup> According to Solli et al., the

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Lisa Gregoire, *Arctic Council Should be Cautious about New Observer Hopefuls: Inuit Org President*, NUNATSIAQ ONLINE, Feb. 1, 2013, [www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674arctic\\_council\\_should\\_be\\_cautious\\_about\\_new\\_observer\\_hopefuls\\_inuit\\_or/](http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674arctic_council_should_be_cautious_about_new_observer_hopefuls_inuit_or/); James Manicom & Whitney Lackenbauer, *East Asian States and the Pursuit of Arctic Council Observer Status*, in EAST-ASIA-ARCTIC RELATIONS: BOUNDARY, SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS 201 (Ken Coates & Kimie Hara eds., 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Chaturvedi, *supra* note 18. In this talk, Chaturvedi indicates a deep Indian connection to the post-colonial aspirations of indigenous people, he quotes a colleague wary of the category of “indigenous peoples” from an Indian perspective, adding that “I think they have a point.” He does not elaborate on this comment, simply adding that “both India and China have to engage with the issue of cultural geography in the Arctic even if the category of indigenous peoples turns out to be somewhat problematic.” On the need to engage with the “*lived in* geographies of the Circumpolar North”; see also Chaturvedi, *China and India in the ‘Receding’ Arctic: Rhetoric, Routes and Resources*, 17 JADAVPUR J. INT’L. RELATIONS 62 (2013).

<sup>97</sup> Nayar, *supra* note 87.

<sup>98</sup> Solli et al, *supra* note 2, at 12.

<sup>99</sup> Dogra, “India’s quest for Arctic ice.” US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Fisheries David Balton dispelled myths about India’s potential Arctic Council membership in 2011 and had indicated that India could best contribute to issues like shipping through the International Maritime Organization. See *India Might Become an Observer of Arctic Council: US*, DECCAN HERALD, May 10, 2011.

American position was simply pragmatic: a way to “put substance on its pivot to Asia,” maintain the preeminent role of the Arctic Council in facilitating regional dialogue, and remind Asian states of their responsibilities to combat climate change.<sup>100</sup>

In the aftermath of the Arctic Council member states’ decision to extended accredited observer status to India, official spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin reiterated New Delhi’s “commitment to contribute our proven scientific expertise, particularly in polar research capabilities, to the work of the Arctic Council and to support its objectives.”<sup>101</sup> Indian commentators had stronger views of what it meant for their country. Nayar described it as “a diplomatic victory for the country of the kind which has become rare amidst the cacophony of Beijing getting the better of New Delhi everywhere or the US allegedly following a policy of benign neglect towards India.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Shastri Ramachandaran characterized it as “a major diplomatic achievement” and “a rare instance of diplomatic alertness and activism paying off, thanks to proactive pursuit of a prospect that could have gone awry had the Ministry of External Affairs taken things for granted.” He suggested that the decision had elevated India into “the same league as China, Italy, South Korea, Japan and Singapore,” and ensured that India “would now be at the same table as China, which enjoys greater global clout, in parleys on the ownership of the North Pole and formulation of Arctic policy.”<sup>103</sup>

Granting Asian states observer status helps to deflect criticism that the Council is nothing more than an exclusive club for Arctic states committed to entrenching narrow, national self-interests. While enhancing the role of the Arctic Council as the premier forum for high-level dialogue on regional issues, observer status also legitimizes the place of non-Arctic states in discussions about the circumpolar north.<sup>104</sup> Sinha suggests that:

because the Council functions as a fact-finding, capacity advancement, and an information clearing house, it gives good reasons for non-Arctic states to become Observers. However, India would need to strategize its role beyond the Observer position. Merely being on the high table should not be the primary goal, or a thoughtless reaction to the fact that China has also applied. In order to be purposeful, India should consider the Council and its Observer Status in it as a platform in which it can articulate—along with the big global players—broader multilateral cooperation, and bring resource use and

<sup>100</sup> Solli et al, *supra* note 2, at 12.

<sup>101</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, *India Welcomes Decision of the Arctic Council Admitting it as an Observer State*, May 15, 2013, <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/21706/India+welcomes+decision+of+the+Arctic+Council+admitting+it+as+an+Observer+State>.

<sup>102</sup> Nayar, *supra* note 87.

<sup>103</sup> Ramachandaran, *supra* note 7. Contrast this with the narrative of China and India “competing” for observer status in articles such as Shubhajit Roy, *It’s India Vs China for ‘Observer Status’ at Arctic Council*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, Apr. 13, 2013.

<sup>104</sup> See Philip Steinberg & Klaus Dodds, *The Arctic Council after Kiruna*, 51(1) POLAR RECORD 108 (2015); Lackenbauer, *supra* note 90; Piotr Graczyk, et al., *Preparing for the Global Rush: The Arctic Council, Institutional Norms, and Socialisation of Observer Behaviour*, in GOVERNING ARCTIC CHANGE: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES 121 (Kathrin Keil & Sebastian Knecht, eds., 2017).

sustainability to the forefront. Global governance issues, especially sustainability and access to resources, will strongly define the future, and will create differing views. India should be actively involved in dealing with them.<sup>105</sup>

Other Indian commentators were more skeptical, pointing to the inherent limitations of adhering to the existing governance model. Shyam Saran, for example, lamented that by agreeing to accept the Nuuk criteria for observers, “India has recognised the territorial jurisdiction and sovereign rights of the Arctic littoral states and hence their pre-eminent and even pre-emptive role over the Arctic zone.” Entrenching national boundaries would lead to a “headlong rush into a potential ecological catastrophe of global dimensions” and could set a dangerous precedent for the Antarctic. In his assessment, “India has succumbed to the temptation of sharing in the emerging opportunities for resource extraction as the Arctic continues to melt because of global warming.” Participation in the Arctic Council would facilitate scientific research into the changing Arctic environment, but “both the members of the Arctic Council and the Observers, including India, have avoided confronting the obvious: the opportunities that they seek to exploit and profit from are the very activities which will exacerbate the climate change impact of a warming Arctic.” In the end, “the lure of profit has already triumphed over the fear of ecological disaster”—evidenced by China’s (unstated) “asset acquisitions in several Arctic states, in particular, Russia and Canada.”<sup>106</sup>

## 7 The road ahead

Saran’s critiques embody the two competing discourses of “geopolitics/political realism” and “ecosystem-based management” that frame debates about the future of Arctic governance. The former discourse, built around the Westphalian model, anticipates an era of “high politics,” resource and military diplomacy, and interstate and corporate competition. The alternative policy discourse, Oran Young explains, operates from the premise that the Arctic is a “complex and dynamic socio-ecological system” requiring deliberate action to “devise cooperative regimes that make it possible to address interrelated Arctic issues in an integrated manner.”<sup>107</sup>

On the surface, Saran clearly fits within the “ecosystem-based management” discourse. His narratives draw linkages between the Arctic and global systems, ravaged by unchecked human greed,<sup>108</sup> and criticizes the short-sightedness of Indian commentators who promote the exploitation of Arctic resources to fuel economic growth.<sup>108</sup> This, in turn, will derail “the shift to renewable and clean sources of energy,” rendering moot broader multilateral negotiations to reverse climate change.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, he laments that the local, national and regional take

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<sup>105</sup> SINHA, *supra* note 6, at 74–75.

<sup>106</sup> Shyam Saran, *supra* note 31.

<sup>107</sup> Young, *supra* note 43, at 432.

<sup>108</sup> Saran, *supra* note 30.

<sup>109</sup> Saran, *supra* note 4.

precedent over the global—the level at which commentators like Saran believe meaningful change must occur. The Arctic Council may espouse ecosystem-based management, but as a forum that institutionalizes the national and regional interests of the Arctic states and privileges the special role of indigenous peoples, non-Arctic stakeholders—and global interests—are inherently marginalized.

Concurrently, Saran promotes Arctic activism as a form of idealistic, prestige politics for India, perpetuating longstanding polar aspirations originally developed for the Antarctic. Yet he also adopts a “geopolitics/political realist” framework to offer pragmatic justification for why *India* should seek to freeze Arctic development and disrupt a *Polar Saga* scenario. First, he suggests regional stability may actually threaten Indian interests. The settlement of Arctic boundary disputes—such as the maritime delimitation agreement between Russia and Norway in 2010—opens the door for resource development “in a resource-constrained world.” With concomitant increases in shipping traffic, he anticipates that “the importance of countries that lie astride these routes will be enhanced.”<sup>110</sup> In this light, Saran depicted the Arctic states as direct threats to Indian and global interests:

Should five countries, which, as an accident of geography, form the Arctic rim, have the right to play with the world’s ecological future in pursuit of their economic interests? If there are significant shifts in the world’s shipping and, therefore, trade patterns, what will this mean for countries like India? Will the exploitation of energy resources in the Arctic improve India’s energy security or complicate it even more than currently is the case? There is currently a shift in the centre of gravity of the global economy from the trans-Atlantic to Asia Pacific. Will there be a reversal of this shift back to the trans-Atlantic via the Northern Tier? Will Russia re-emerge as a major power?

As a relative latecomer to the so-called Arctic “race,” he concedes that “India possesses neither the financial nor technological capabilities to match the countries in the forefront of the current Arctic scramble. The available pickings may prove to be meagre.”<sup>111</sup> Although wrapped in the righteous language of global interest, this logic also demonstrates how the former foreign secretary’s commentaries also reinforce Indian self-interest and realpolitik. Accordingly, the “dangerous climate change” discourse<sup>112</sup> is used to frame both global and national politics of (in)security that suggest the *status quo* will create and reproduce power relations and forms of geopolitical order disadvantageous to India.

Across the spectrum of unofficial commentary, India’s emerging Arctic interests must be situated in India’s broader aspirations for global leadership and influence. The Arctic is clearly part of its “outer rim,” and is certainly a low priority compared to domestic imperatives related to rampant poverty, corruption, insurgencies, and the potential for heightened competition and conflict in the country’s immediate neighbourhood. Accordingly, India’s primary foreign policy focus is likely to

<sup>110</sup> *Id.*

<sup>111</sup> Saran, *supra* note 30.

<sup>112</sup> Kevin J. Grove, *Insuring ‘Our Common Future?’ Dangerous Climate Change and the Biopolitics of Environmental Security*, 15 *GEOPOLITICS* 536–563, (2010).



remain on ensuring regional dominance in South Asia and in the maritime Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, Chaturvedi explains that India's developing geopolitical vision is not rooted in a "strategic culture," thus precluding "institutionalization of the country's foreign policymaking." Without a grand strategy to "provide the nation's multiple policy strands a cohesive form, consistency and orientation," it should come as no surprise that India's emerging Arctic policy discourse seems uncertain, reactive, and cautiously idealistic.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, India's practical efforts to shape governance in the Antarctic have achieved few results, even though the country has much deeper experience in that region, and India's relatively small foreign policy bureaucracy limits the country's leadership potential in specialized areas like Arctic issues.<sup>114</sup> So do budgetary realities. For example, in early 2014 the Indian Cabinet asked the Ministry of Earth Sciences to rework its proposal for a new icebreaker—approved two years before—in light of the plummeting exchange rate. This, coupled with excessive bureaucratic "red tape," led Indian commentators to lament India's capacity for polar influence compared to China's, which had rapid commissioned and built a new icebreaker.<sup>115</sup>

China's perceived assertiveness appears to be the key driver for Indian commentators to advocate that their country should seek a more influential role in Arctic affairs. "What is good for China is not good for India and what suits India is bad for China," professor of atmospheric sciences Govindaswamy Bala summarized in 2011.<sup>116</sup> Much Indian commentary adopts a frame of impending competition between two "Asian giants ... spreading their wings"<sup>117</sup> in the region. "China will be a big game changer in the Arctic," Sinha asserts, "and Beijing's assertive approach in the South China Sea foretells that the Arctic is going to be its core interest, and that it will seek both cooperation and competition with the Arctic states."<sup>118</sup> In competing for access, influence, and partnerships with the Arctic states, India will have to balance its desires as an increasingly visible power "reassessing and rethinking its roles in the new global geopolitical space"<sup>119</sup> to promote innovative solutions and influence regional governance, with opportunities for enhanced multilateral and bilateral cooperation within existing legal and governance regimes.

"India's inclusion in the Arctic Council as an observer country validates India's growing role and influence in the world," Kapil Narula of the National Maritime Foundation in New Delhi suggests in the summary to recent volume on Asian states' Arctic interests. He urges the Indian Government to "leverage" its status and scientific contributions in the region to secure long-term commercial partnerships and, through

<sup>113</sup> Chaturvedi, *supra* note 50 at, 50–51.

<sup>114</sup> Manjari Chatterjee Miller, *India's Feeble Foreign Policy*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, May-June 2013; Brett Ryder, *Can India become a Great Power?* THE ECONOMIST, March 30, 2013.

<sup>115</sup> Richa Sharma, *India Drowns in Red Tape as Chinese Ships Break Ice in Arctic*, NEW INDIAN EXPRESS, Mar. 9, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Hari Pulakkat, *Geopolitical Race Between India and China, and India's Vulnerability*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, Oct. 23, 2011.

<sup>117</sup> Teshu Singh, *China and the Arctic: Evolving Geopolitics*, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES (NAIS) STRATEGIC FORECAST 06 (March 2016).

<sup>118</sup> SINHA, *supra* note 6, at 38, 80.

<sup>119</sup> Sinha & Gupta, *supra* note 16, at 877.

sustained political engagement, to shape Arctic coastal state policies related to the region.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Suvi Dogra of the International Institute for Strategic Studies suggests that Council observer status has secured India a “toehold” in the new “Great Game” afoot in the Circumpolar North, and he urges the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to go beyond supporting the narrow objectives of the Council by actively engaging in discussions “not only on global ecology, but on global political economy and the distribution of political power.”<sup>121</sup> Although these strong statements point to India’s burgeoning interests and confidence as a global player seeking to offer innovative political solutions,<sup>122</sup> they also suggest an over-inflated sense of India’s leverage and influence compared to Arctic states and even some other non-Arctic states. Furthermore, those Indian commentators seeking to revise the regional governance regime and/or making “global commons” arguments<sup>123</sup> to justify the need for Indian leadership in Arctic affairs run the risk of alienating Arctic states and other key stakeholders with whom partnerships are likely essential to advance major geopolitical agendas. Sanjay Chaturvedi notes that as much as India and China aspire to a more prominent role in Arctic governance, “it is equally important that the reactions from the Asian actors, including critique, are dictated and driven by a well-informed understanding and analysis of the complex and fluid contexts in which the discourses and practices of Arctic governance are being debated and shaped at present.”<sup>124</sup>

India will have to decide whether the main driver for its Arctic engagement is the quest for *prestige*, so that it is viewed as a powerful global player on par with other non-Arctic states (mainly China),<sup>125</sup> or for more practical, regional *influence* through scientific research and strategic investments. “India has already been working closely with the Arctic Council members,” Navtej Sarna, additional secretary with the Ministry of External Affairs, explained in May 2013. “We will be putting a lot of stress on our scientific work in the region. We have been asked to send more people to the Arctic, and we plan to do so.” Along these lines, Sarna indicated that India also plans to “fruitfully engage with the indigenous people of the region and work with them on environmental issues.”<sup>126</sup> This language suggests

<sup>120</sup> Narula, *supra* note 75, at 128–129.

<sup>121</sup> Dogra, *supra* note 77.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, Taneja, *supra* note 63; Meena Menon & Sandeep Dikshit, *India Gets Observer Status in Arctic Council*, THE HINDU, May 15, 2013.

<sup>123</sup> While Indian commentators often point to China as a proponent of the “South Pole” governance model for the Arctic, Chinese commentators have scaled back any such rhetoric since 2011, downplaying non-scientific research and avoiding formal articulation of an “Arctic Strategy” to avoid alarming the Arctic states. See, for example, Linda Jakobson & Jingchoa Peng, *China’s Arctic Aspirations*, (SIPRI Policy Paper No. 34, 2012); P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER ET AL., CHINA’S ARCTIC ASPIRATIONS: THE EMERGING INTERESTS OF A “NEAR ARCTIC STATE” AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR CANADA (2017).

<sup>124</sup> Sanjay Chaturvedi, *supra* note 96, at 41–68.

<sup>125</sup> Dadwal, *supra* note 38, at 819.

<sup>126</sup> Taneja, *supra* note 63. Similarly, Admiral R.K. Dhowan, the Chief of the Indian Naval Staff, wrote in April 2016 that “India’s approach to the Arctic is underscored by a quest for cooperation both in pursuing scientific studies and seeking commercial initiatives.” R.K. Dhowan, *Foreword*, in ASIA AND THE ARCTIC: NARRATIVES, PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES (Vijay Sakhuja & Kapil Narula, eds., 2016).

a pragmatic approach to Arctic policy that seeks resonance with the policies of the Arctic states and the official roles and responsibilities of an accredited Observer to the Arctic Council. While diverse academic and media commentaries are important to generate political interest and articulate diverse policy solutions, the pragmatic approach intimated by Sarna may offer the most effective conduit to situate India as a responsible Arctic stakeholder contributing to global and circumpolar knowledge. Even if India agrees that the right international legal mechanisms are in place, it has an important role to play in ensuring that the right international policies are framed to balance a myriad of environmental, economic, and socio-political interests.<sup>127</sup> The stakes are high, with Indians increasingly aware that the implications of a warming Arctic are truly global.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Sinha, *supra* note 6, at 38–39. For a perspective encouraging India to uphold the integrity of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and to work within the existing Arctic governance regime, see Rajan, *supra* note 61, at 911.

<sup>128</sup> For a compelling recent commentary on the implications of Arctic change for India, see Shyam Saran, *Climate Change: Warning Signals from the Ends of the Earth*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, Jan. 12, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/climate-change-warning-signals-from-the-ends-of-the-earth/story-JnVhi6hLi5LyOPKM1xDFkL.html>.