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Geopolitical Dynamics of the Arctic: Emerging Actors and Their Strategies for
the Region

по работе в рамках научно-учебной группы

*БРИКС+ как площадка для сотрудничества в Арктике: проблемы,
перспективы и сценарии развития /*

*BRICS+ as a Platform for Cooperation in the Arctic: Challenges, Prospects,
and Development Scenarios*

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1. Introduction:

On **June 21, 2024**, the seminar titled "**Geopolitical Dynamics of the Arctic: Emerging Actors and Their Strategies for the Region**" was held, focusing on the growing involvement of **China, India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK)** in the Arctic. This seminar was organized within the framework of Project No. 24-00-020, "BRICS+ as a Platform for Cooperation in the Arctic: Challenges, Prospects, and Development Scenarios." The project aims to explore the factors limiting multilateral cooperation among BRICS+ countries in the Arctic, a region of significant interest to the participants of the BRICS+ forum.

The objective of the seminar, within the individual work in this project, was to assess the strategies of the new actors in the Arctic arena—that is, China, India, Japan, and South Korea—and the consequences they bring about for Arctic governance and geopolitics. These non-Arctic states increasingly assert their presence as the region undergoes rapid transformation due to climate changes, opening up new opportunities for economic use, strategic positioning, and scientific research. The increasing geopolitical importance of the Arctic is underpinned by a potential for economic development, strategic advantage, and environmental study with new accessibility because of melting ice. The seminar considered how new actors position and shape the future of the Arctic.

2. Key Points from the Seminar:

The seminar highlighted several key points:

- *Traditional Arctic Governance:* Conventional governance over the Arctic has been exercised by the eight Arctic states, including Russia, the United States, Canada, Denmark through Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Traditionally, these countries have retained all decision-making powers in the region. The Arctic Council was established through the Declaration of Ottawa in 1996. Thereafter, this organization has been the

primary multilateral setting for promoting cooperation on such issues as sustainable development and environmental protection. However, recent geopolitical tension—amplified by the isolation of Russia—has come into question the relevance of such governance structures. Concomitantly, Arctic governance is increasingly being complicated by the interest of non-Arctic states to be involved in it.

- *Emergence of Non-Arctic States:* Non-Arctic states like China, India, Japan, and South Korea have engaged in active play in Arctic affairs over the last decade. Their interests range from mere economic interests in unexploited resources like oil, gas, and various minerals to new opportunities provided by sea routes, for example, the Northern Sea Route, connecting Europe and Asia with considerably reduced transportation distance.

Besides the economic reasons, these states also adhere to strategic interests and the need to study climate change. The Arctic is a very important area for global environmental change studies, and non-Arctic states have shown readiness to take part in research and policy discussions that have implications for the entire planet.

- *Timeline of Engagement:* The seminar has discussed in detail a timeline of how non-Arctic states have formalized their Arctic policies—a reflection of growing awareness of the importance of the Arctic globally. Germany, one of the first non-Arctic states to formalize its Arctic strategy in March 2013, focused on scientific research and environmental protection. In October 2013, the United Kingdom followed suit, basing its Arctic strategy on two key principles: sustainable development and international cooperation.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) has moved dynamically since publishing its first Arctic strategy in December 2013, updating it in 2018 and 2023. The Third

Arctic Policy Master Plan outlines South Korea's evolving approach to Arctic research, economic opportunities, and international collaboration.

In October 2015, Japan formalized its Arctic strategy, which includes scientific research, environmental cooperation, and utilizing the Northern Sea Route for economic benefit.

Italy joined in 2015, adopting an Arctic policy that emphasized both scientific research and economic interests.

France and the European Union published their respective policies in June 2016, each emphasizing environmental protection and sustainable development.

In January 2018, China released an Arctic policy positioning itself as a major player, with an emphasis on resource utilization, scientific research, and the development of the Northern Sea Route as part of its Polar Silk Road initiative. Similarly, India followed with the release of its Arctic strategy in March 2022, pledging a commitment to scientific research, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development.

This timeline provides a clear indication of the increasing number of non-Arctic states adopting formal Arctic strategies, marking the region as a focal point of geopolitical and environmental interest. It sets the background for further discussion on the specific strategies employed by China, India, Japan, and South Korea in Arctic affairs.

3. Analysis:

The analysis of the seminar provided a thorough look into the different approaches adopted by China, India, Japan, and South Korea in engaging with the Arctic region:

China's Arctic Strategy: Chinese involvement in the Arctic is integral to its larger Polar Silk Road initiative, highlighting its interest in both the region's strategic

and economic value. China's investments in icebreakers, such as the Xue Long vessels, and research stations, like the Yellow River Station in Svalbard, demonstrate its long-term commitment to resource utilization and scientific research. The Northern Sea Route, which significantly reduces shipping times between Europe and Asia, further enhances China's trade dominance.

India's Arctic Strategy: India's approach focuses on scientific research and environmental sustainability. The country acknowledges the Arctic's crucial role in global climate systems and has established the Himadri research station to conduct studies on climate patterns, biodiversity, and atmospheric phenomena. India's emphasis on sustainable development aligns with its broader international commitments, positioning the country as a responsible player in Arctic affairs.

Japan's Arctic Strategy: Japan's approach is mostly financial in nature, emphasizing the Northern Sea Route as a vital resource for the nation's marine sector. Japan's investment in Arctic research and ice-breaking technologies is indicative of its forward-thinking strategy for taking advantage of the prospects the region offers. By utilizing the Arctic's resource potential, Japan hopes to improve its energy security and make a contribution to international scientific research.

The Republic of Korea's Arctic Strategy: The country has created a clear plan that is focused on boosting economic cooperation and scientific research. Important papers like the Third Arctic Policy Master Plan (2023), which highlights ongoing investment in scientific research and infrastructure to capitalize on the Arctic's economic potential, provide an overview of its Arctic policy. South Korea wants to establish itself as a major player in Arctic trade and logistics, as seen by its focus on icebreaking research vessels and shipping routes.

Despite having similar objectives in the Arctic, these nations' approaches vary because of their distinct geopolitical environments. India places more emphasis on environmental preservation and scientific research than China does on navigation

and infrastructure. South Korea combines scientific and economic priorities, while Japan concentrates on economic opportunities.

4. Conclusions:

The seminar determined that the growing involvement of non-Arctic states in the region had significant consequences for economic development, geopolitical, and environmental sustainability. These states perceive the Arctic as a novel frontier for resource extraction, strategic posture, and scientific exploration. Nonetheless, their increasing effect presents obstacles to the current governance frameworks, prompting inquiries regarding the balance between economic advancement and environmental conservation.

Two potential possibilities for the future were examined:

- *Collaborative Governance:* This scenario anticipates improved international cooperation, wherein Arctic and non-Arctic nations collaborate to foster sustainable development and ensure peaceful navigation.
- *Competitive Geopolitical Dynamics:* Conversely, increasing competition for resources and strategic dominance may escalate tensions, especially among major nations. This situation presents threats to global security and may intensify environmental degradation in a vulnerable ecosystem.

The event emphasized the necessity for strong governance and international collaboration to maintain the Arctic as a zone of peace and sustainability. As non-Arctic nations augment their presence, global collaboration will be essential for governing the region's future.