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# How a President Biden could meet the challenges of the new Arctic

BY MIKE SFRAGA, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 04/18/20 11:00 AM ET



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scope, but fails to mention what is perhaps the world's most dynamic and rapidly changing region, the Arctic.

The Arctic Ocean covers an area greater than the United States and over half the size of Africa. It is inextricably linked to the global political, social, economic, environmental and security landscapes. The Arctic is not an “emerging” region. It has emerged.

Biden's plan would benefit from a science-driven, fact-based national strategy for the Arctic that informs and complements his broader foreign policy vision. We need a cogent, whole-of-government approach for the Arctic, in which all federal agencies must participate and contribute. That approach must also incorporate partnerships with the state of Alaska and Alaska's Native peoples, as well as with relevant industries, civil society groups and other stakeholders.

With that in mind, here are seven key drivers shaping the Arctic region: climate; commodities; commerce; connectivity; communities; cooperation; and competition. Any forward-leaning U.S. foreign policy must include the Arctic and a framework for navigating the Arctic's “7 Cs.”

Climate change is real, rapid and relentless. The Arctic is warming at a rate more than twice as fast as the planet's average, with profound and long-term implications; as the Arctic goes, so goes planet Earth. Indeed, the Arctic ice cap has receded so much over the past three decades that we are witnessing the birth of a new ocean. Coupled with equally dramatic reductions in the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, the repercussions of sea level rise are spreading across the globe. The impact of sea level rise will include greater storm surge during hurricanes and larger-scale coastal erosion. From Norfolk, Va. to Nome, Alaska, the effects of climate change are redefining the nation's landscape and how we live on it, work in it and defend it.

Commodities abound in the Arctic and a rapidly changing landscape makes natural resources more accessible. With vast stores of oil and gas, strategic minerals and potential new fisheries, the new Arctic has drawn the attention of nations and companies seeking to meet an insatiable global demand for energy, food and technology that requires scarce rare earth minerals.

The melting of the Arctic sea ice that has produced more access to the Arctic's natural resources has also led to an increase in commerce — most notably shipping. Nowhere

the Russian Arctic is a window into the future global Arctic.

The United States lacks the reliable and redundant Internet connectivity and infrastructure necessary to support Arctic communities and advance national and homeland security needs. In stark contrast to Russia's economic and military development in the region, the United States does not have a single deep-water port in Alaska capable of supporting commerce or any number of national security requirements.

Communities throughout Alaska, most notably Indigenous communities, are on the frontline of climate change. Dozens of these communities are threatened by thawing permafrost, coastal erosion and storm surge. According to the Army Corp of Engineers and other experts, many of these communities will need to be relocated. Although Indigenous peoples have adapted and thrived in the Arctic for thousands of years, changes are happening too fast, too dramatically and are too unpredictable, to be navigated with any certainty. Alaska, like other parts of the Arctic, is facing costly climate-induced community relocation.

In spite of the acidic relationship between the United States and Russian Federation marked by tension points that include Syria, Ukraine, Crimea and ever-more prevalent cyber-attacks, there exists a surprisingly high level of cooperation in the Arctic between the two rivals. In fact, all eight Arctic nations engage regularly and constructively through the Arctic Council, a consensus-based international body that has facilitated several binding international agreements.

Competition in the Arctic is real but not unmanageable — yet. Covering nearly half of the Arctic's geography, Russia is a dominant actor in the region. Sino-Russian relations have warmed through multi-billion dollar investments in LNG facilities on the Yamal Peninsula and the newly opened Power of Siberia LNG Pipeline delivering energy directly to Chinese markets. In this regard, China is filling a void resulting from Western economic sanctions that have remained in place since Russia's invasion of Crimea. Moreover, refurbished Soviet-era military installations and an expansive portfolio of new military assets along the Northern Sea Route create defensive and offensive capabilities that protect Russia's key military and economic assets in the Arctic from the Kola Peninsula and Northern Fleet in the west to the Bering Strait in the east.

Navigate the Arctic's 7Cs.

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