The Arctic region has emerged as a pivotal arena for geopolitical competition among great powers, primarily the United States, China, and Russia. As the effects of climate change continue to reshape the region, new opportunities and challenges arise, requiring careful consideration of US foreign policy approaches to navigate this evolving landscape. As these nations vie for influence in the Arctic, the question of how the US should approach this region in the context of Great Power Competition (GPC) becomes crucial.

**Topics and Questions for Discussion:** (included in rank order)

**Topic 1: Balancing National Security and International Cooperation**: The Arctic has become an arena for competition and cooperation among the United States, China, and Russia. Balancing engagement and competition with these powers is a central challenge for US foreign policy.

- How can the US ensure its national security interests in the Arctic without escalating tensions with China and Russia?
- How does China's growing economic and scientific presence in the Arctic impact the balance of power in the region? How does China’s cooperation with Russia change Arctic power dynamics in the Arctic? How should the Arctic Nations respond?
- What are the implications of the Arctic's militarization on global security dynamics, for example, with Russia's militarization of the Arctic and its reinvigorated Northern Fleet?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to the U.S. adapting its Unified Command Plan (UCP) to account for the Arctic as a cohesive region (as opposed to the Arctic’s current geographic division between NORTHCOM, INDOPACOM, and EUCOM)?
- Does the U.S. have clear political and military objectives for the Arctic Region? If so, what are they? If not, why not – and how should the U.S. move forward with establishing objectives?

**Sources for Background:**


SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: The Arctic: Managing the Scramble for Influence

**Topic 2: Economic Interests and Resource Extraction:** The melting Arctic ice has brought attention to the region's vast natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and new shipping routes. The US foreign policy approach to the Arctic must consider the evolving dynamics of Arctic geopolitics.

- How can the United States balance its economic interests in resource extraction with environmental sustainability in the Arctic region, while competing against China and Russia?
- How does the changing climate impact the geopolitical significance of the Arctic?
- To maintain a competitive edge in the Arctic, the U.S. needs to invest in critical infrastructure and scientific research. How can the U.S. enhance its capabilities in the region to advance its interests?
- Specifically, how should the U.S. plan and invest in potential Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) in the Arctic? What ports, infrastructure and transportation networks are required for the U.S. to remain competitive?

*Sources for Background:*


**Topic 3 – Sustainable Strategies for US Engagement: Environmental Conservation and Indigenous Rights:** In an era of increasing international competition, the United States must formulate sustainable strategies for its engagement in the Arctic that uphold its values and interests. How can the United States promote environmental conservation and respect for Indigenous rights in its Arctic policy, amid competition with China and Russia?

- How can the US prioritize the rights and interests of Indigenous communities in its Arctic foreign policy?
- What role does international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), play in shaping the Arctic policies of the US, China, and Russia? How does the current U.S. stance toward UNCLOS affect its Arctic Policy, and how might it need to be adapted to be successful in this region?
- What are the implications of a potential arms race in the Arctic, and how can the US mitigate these risks?
- How can the U.S. military leverage relationships with Indigenous Groups to further national interests and cooperation in the Arctic?
SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: The Arctic: Managing the Scramble for Influence

Sources for Background:


Topic 4: Diplomacy, Multilateral Cooperation & Strengthening Regional Alliances: With Russia and China increasing their presence in the Arctic, the U.S. must navigate complex geopolitical tensions. How can the U.S. engage in diplomatic dialogue to prevent conflicts and promote stability in the region?

- What diplomatic strategies should the United States employ to foster multilateral cooperation in the Arctic, while managing the competition with China and Russia?
- What role should international organizations play in managing Arctic affairs?
- How can the U.S lead multilateral efforts to ensure a peaceful and cooperative Arctic environment?
- To counterbalance the influence of Russia and China, the U.S. must strengthen its alliances with Arctic nations. How can the U.S. foster collaboration with Canada, Norway, and other Arctic states to ensure a united front in the face of increasing external pressures?
- How is the ‘scramble’ for the Arctic similar or different from the South China Sea and what lessons can be applied to both?

Sources for Background


SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: The Arctic: Managing the Scramble for Influence


In conclusion, as the United States navigates the complex arena of the Arctic within the context of Great Power Competition, these topics present crucial considerations for its foreign policy. Striking a balance between security concerns, economic interests, environmental conservation, Indigenous rights, and diplomatic cooperation will be essential for managing the scramble for influence while upholding American values and interests in the region.

*The readings have links but you may encounter a pay wall. If so, access the readings through your institution’s library.
SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: The Arctic: Managing the Scramble for Influence

Links to additional readings of interest:

Recommended overall background reading: The Arctic Institute Conflict Series 2021
- The History and Future of Arctic State Conflict: The Arctic Institute Conflict Series
- Fisheries Disputes: The Real Potential for Arctic Conflict
- Environmental Détente: What can we learn from the Cold War to manage today’s Arctic Tensions and Climate Crisis?
- Knowledge is Power: Greenland, Great Powers, and Lessons from the Second World War
- The Impact of the Post-Arms Control Context and Great Power Competition in the Arctic
- The Arctic Institute Conflict Series: Conclusion

**Topic 1: Balancing National Security and International Cooperation**


https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-polar-research-facility/

**Topic 2: Economic Interests and Resource Extraction**

SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: The Arctic: Managing the Scramble for Influence


Topics 3 and 4: Sustainable Strategies for US Engagement: Environmental Conservation and Indigenous Rights; Diplomacy, Multilateral Cooperation & Strengthening Regional Alliances


SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: The Arctic: Managing the Scramble for Influence