

ARCTIC COUNCIL: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

NEWS: Denmark Assumes Arctic Council Chairmanship Amid Rising Geopolitical Tensions

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Denmark has taken over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council amid rising geopolitical tensions, as melting Arctic ice opens new trade routes and resource frontiers. India, an Observer since 2013, sees strategic, scientific, and energy interests in the region.

Context:

- Denmark has assumed the rotating chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Norway in 2025.
- The transition comes amid growing geopolitical tensions, including renewed U.S. interest in acquiring Greenland and strained ties with Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

About the Arctic Council:

1. Formation and Nature:

- Established in 1996 through the Ottawa Declaration.
- Functions as a high-level intergovernmental forum, not a treaty-based body.
- Does not address military or security issues.

2. Mandate:

- Promotes cooperation, coordination, and interaction among Arctic states.
- Focuses on:
 - Environmental protection
 - Sustainable development
 - Preservation of Indigenous rights and cultures

3. Membership Structure:

- 8 Member Countries:
- Russia, United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
- 6 Permanent Participants:
- Indigenous organizations (e.g., Inuit Circumpolar Council, Saami Council)
- 38 Observers:
- Includes countries (e.g., India, China, Germany), NGOs, and intergovernmental bodies.
- India became an Observer in 2013.

Recent Tensions and Strategic Shifts:

1. Post-Ukraine War Realignment:

- In 2022, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the other 7 members paused cooperation with Russia.
- Russia had previously chaired the Council and remains a key Arctic stakeholder.

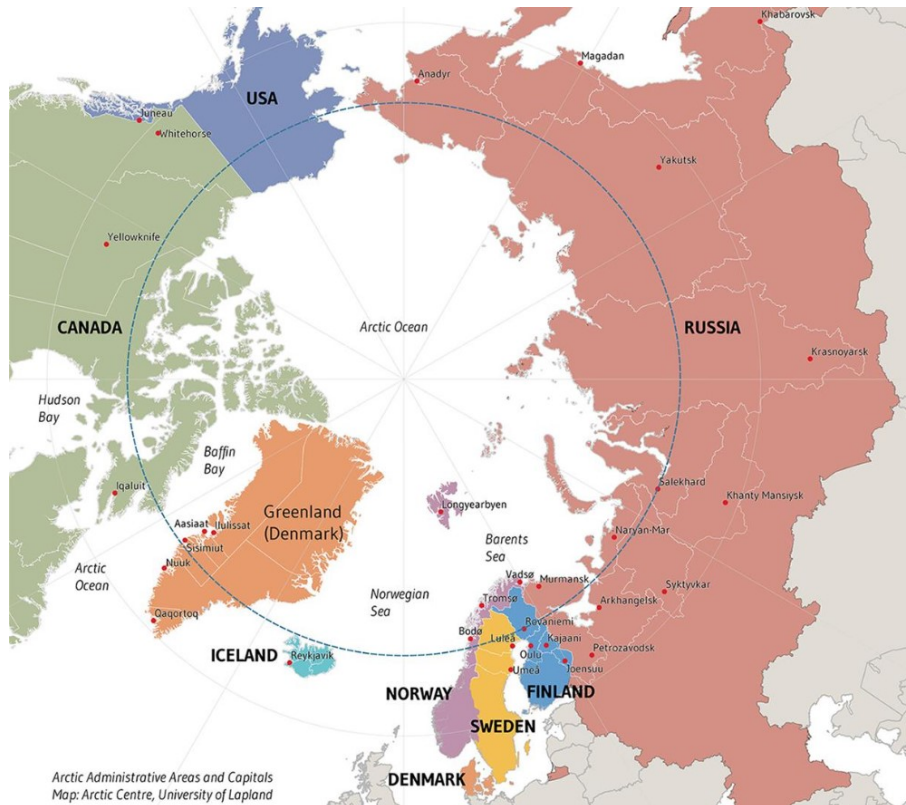
2. U.S. Geostrategic Focus:

- The revival of U.S. interest in Greenland (especially under President Trump) reflects its military and economic significance.
- Greenland offers control over North Atlantic maritime routes and access to Arctic resources

Why the Arctic is Strategically Important Globally:

1. Climate Change and Ice Melt:

- The melting of Arctic ice due to global warming is opening up new shipping



lanes (e.g., Northern Sea Route).

- Previously inaccessible oil, gas, and mineral resources are now being explored.

2. New Trade Routes:

- Arctic routes can reduce shipping time by up to 40% between Europe and Asia.
- This challenges traditional routes like the Suez Canal and Strait of Malacca.

3. Energy and Resource Wealth:

- The Arctic may hold:
 - 13% of the world's undiscovered oil
 - 30% of the world's undiscovered gas
 - Large deposits of rare earth metals
- Resource access is becoming feasible due to improved technologies and melting ice.

4. Geopolitical Competition:

- Russia has expanded its military presence and infrastructure in the Arctic.
- China calls itself a “near-Arctic state” and is investing in Arctic science, shipping, and infrastructure.
- The U.S. and NATO allies are increasing surveillance and scientific collaboration in the region.

5. Environmental Governance:

- The Arctic Council plays a key role in:
- Climate research
- Pollution control
- Marine biodiversity and ice-monitoring projects
- Arctic changes significantly impact global climate patterns.

6. Indigenous Rights and Role:

- Indigenous communities are given a central voice in decision-making.
- This model promotes inclusive governance and traditional ecological knowledge in environmental protection.

Significance of the Arctic for India:

1. Observer Role in Arctic Council:

- India has held Observer status since 2013.
- Participates in working groups and ministerial meetings to influence policy and collaborate on science.

2. Strategic Shipping and Trade Interests:

- New Arctic shipping lanes provide alternative energy transport routes.
- This can reduce dependency on traditional chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz and Malacca Strait.

3. Climate and Polar Research Leadership:

- India has an Arctic research station called ‘Himadri’ located in Svalbard, Norway.
- India conducts studies on:

- Glacial retreat
- Climate change
- Atmospheric sciences

4. Energy Security:

- India is exploring Arctic oil and gas fields in partnership with Russia.
- Arctic energy can diversify India's import basket and reduce vulnerability to West Asian disruptions.

5. Diplomatic Leverage and Multilateralism:

- Engagement enhances India's image as a responsible stakeholder in global climate governance.
- Positions India in the global power matrix alongside other Observer nations.

6. Countering China:

- China's aggressive Arctic engagement is being monitored.
- India's calibrated Arctic presence offers a counterweight to China's "Polar Silk Road" ambitions.

The Arctic Ocean – PWOnlyIAS Extra Edge

- Smallest and shallowest among the world's oceans.
- Located around the North Pole, bordered by 8 Arctic states.
- Key marginal seas:
 - Barents Sea, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea, Chukchi Sea, Beaufort Sea
- Plays a crucial role in regulating global climate, especially in the Northern Hemisphere.
- Covered with multi-year and seasonal sea ice, which is rapidly declining due to global warming.

Conclusion:

- The Arctic is no longer just a remote frozen expanse—it is now a hotspot of climate change, strategic contest, and energy diplomacy.

- Denmark's chairmanship of the Arctic Council comes at a pivotal moment, with growing tensions and overlapping interests.
- For India, the Arctic is not just about science, but about strategic engagement, climate leadership, and multilateral balance.

Source: <https://scandasia.com/denmark-assumes-arctic-council-chairmanship-amid-rising-geopolitical-tensions/>