





The Arctic in World Affairs



Executive Summaries
North Pacific Arctic Conferences 2011-2016



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 KOREA MARITIME INSTITUTE


EAST-WEST
CENTER

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Preface

The Arctic is an area of growing complexity in which numerous forces interact to produce changes that are often nonlinear and sometimes abrupt. We have known for some time that the impacts of climate change are more pronounced in the Arctic than anywhere else. But the collapse of sea ice in the Arctic Basin starting in 2007 and the sharp acceleration of the rate of melting of the Greenland ice sheet took the world by surprise. Ironically, the increased accessibility of the Arctic generated great expectations regarding the extraction of the region's energy resources and the growth of commercial shipping using the Northern Sea Route. Yet these expectations failed to anticipate the dramatic decline in world market prices for oil and gas as well as the global recession in commercial shipping.

As a result, the Arctic has become a region of intense interest on a worldwide basis, but it is also an area characterized by great uncertainty. We cannot forecast precisely the likely trajectory of developments in the region, even over the next 5-10 years. More and better analysis will not alter this feature of the region. But we can take steps to monitor the major drivers of change in the Arctic more intensively, to engage in simulation and visioning exercises aimed at broadening our awareness of the range of plausible trajectories of Arctic developments, and to enhance the responsiveness of institutional arrangements dealing with needs for governance in the Arctic. The Arctic Council provides a helpful venue for dialogue among its eight member states, six Permanent Participants, and thirteen observer states, especially with regard to issues that are regional and international in scope. But other mechanisms are needed to supplement the work of the council.

To address this need, the East-West Center and the Korea Maritime Institute initiated in 2011 an annual North Pacific Arctic Conference (NPAC). Now in its seventh year, NPAC brings together each year a group of 30-40 well-placed practitioners and analysts to engage in intensive off-the-record discussion of Arctic issues of mutual interest to leading North Pacific Arctic states (Canada, Russia, and the United States) and non-Arctic states (China, Japan, and Korea). Specifically, NPAC endeavors to:

- Identify emerging policy-relevant Arctic issues and explore innovative ways to address them,

- Build a network of well-placed people concerned with these issues who know and trust each other and who can communicate easily about these issues,
- Improve the dialogue between practitioners and analysts interested in Arctic issues,
- Develop new strategies for communicating findings about these issues to various audiences,
- Help indigenous peoples to find ways to protect their distinctive cultures and increase the awareness of others regarding the concerns of indigenous peoples, and
- Contribute to the emergence of the next generation of knowledgeable leaders interested in Arctic issues.

Each year, the East-West Center and the Korea Maritime Institute publish a volume of proceedings providing a comprehensive record of the most recent NPAC session. These volumes are available both in print and in digital form for those who wish to follow the discussion in detail. This publication, by contrast, brings together in one place the “Introduction and Overview” chapters from each of the six volumes in the series that have appeared to date. It is intended for readers interested in gaining a general understanding of the contributions of NPAC, without the need to consult all the individual volumes in the series.

The work of NPAC will continue during the coming years. Information regarding the discussions taking place in this increasingly well-known venue will be made available in annual proceedings volumes and in other forms as appropriate.