

India's Arctic Policy

January 18, 2021

India's engagement with the Arctic has been multi-dimensional. It looks forward to increasing its engagement with this vital region and its governing bodies as a responsible partner.

In news: India Releases Draft Arctic Policy for comments from the public

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions:

- Policy highlights
- India and the Arctic
- Role of science
- Global governance and international cooperation
- Development of human resources

Content

Policy Highlights:

- The importance of the Arctic for India is constantly growing, primarily due to the challenges associated with climate change and global warming.
- India regards the Arctic as the common heritage of mankind.
- The **draft policy seeks to establish a roadmap for Sustainable Engagement in the Arctic Region.**
- It also lists a wide range of activities that **India seeks to pursue in the Arctic including economic, diplomatic and scientific activities.**
- The draft policy document further reflects ambitious planning, which is one of the key highlights of India's recent global engagements.
- One aspect of the draft Arctic Policy centers around climate change and it highlights the intricate link

between conditions in the Arctic and the monsoon and Himalayan systems.

Through the draft Arctic Policy India seeks to achieve the following goals:

- To **play a constructive role in the Arctic** by leveraging its vast scientific pool and expertise in Himalayan and Polar research.
- to contribute in **ensuring that as the Arctic becomes more accessible**, the harnessing of its resources is done sustainably and in consonance with best practices formulated by bodies such as the Arctic Council.

India's Arctic policy will rest on five pillars:

1. Science and research
2. Economic and human development cooperation
3. Transportation and connectivity
4. Governance and international cooperation
5. National capacity building



India and the Arctic:

- The Arctic is commonly understood to refer to the region above **the Arctic Circle**, north of latitude 66° 34' N, which includes the Arctic Ocean with the North Pole at

its centre.

- Much of this Ocean falls within the jurisdiction of **five Arctic littoral states**—Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia and the USA (Alaska).
- Three other Arctic nations – Finland, Sweden and Iceland – along with the five littorals form **the Arctic Council**.
- The Arctic is home to almost four million inhabitants, of which approximately one-tenth are considered as indigenous people.
- **India's interests in the Arctic region are scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic.**
- **India became the observer of Arctic Council** in 2013 and its membership as an observer was **renewed in 2018 for another five years.**
- **The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)**, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, is the nodal agency for India's Polar research programme, which includes Arctic studies.
- India's Ministry of External Affairs provides the external interface to the Arctic Council.

Significance For India

- The Arctic **influences atmospheric, oceanographic and biogeochemical cycles** of the earth's ecosystem.
- Moreover, the **Arctic is vulnerable to climate change and global warming**. The effects are manifested by the loss of sea ice, ice caps, and warming of the ocean and atmosphere.
- It will lead to lowering of salinity levels, rising temperature differential between land and oceans in the tropical regions, drying of subtropical areas and increase in precipitation at higher latitudes. **India is particularly impacted due to the likely effect of these changes**

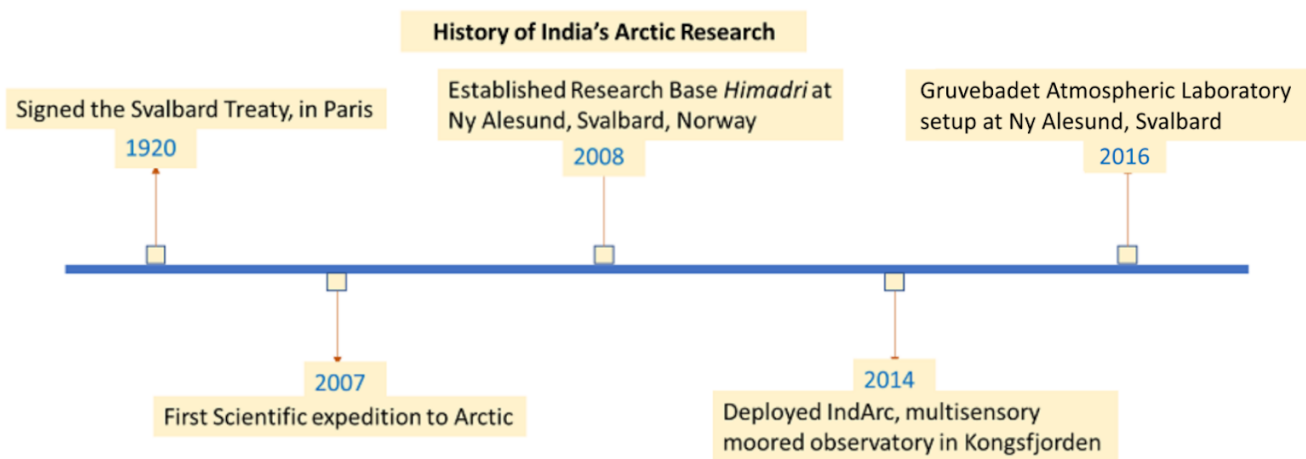
Changes in the Arctic and global ecosystem induced by melting

Arctic ice, can be highly disruptive for India in the following ways:

- Changes to Monsoon patterns caused by the Arctic changes **adversely impact Indian agriculture, food security and wellbeing of the rural sector.**
- Melting ice sheets and sea level rise can **accelerate coastal erosion.**
- The **thawing of permafrost soil** could potentially **release viruses and bacteria that have lain dormant** for thousands of years, thereby **increasing the propensity of pandemics**. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the scale of disruption that can be caused by pathogens.

Thus, the Arctic is important for India's national development, economic security, water security and sustainability.

Role of science:



- India's engagement with the Arctic began in February 1920, when it signed the **Svalbard Treaty** in Paris.
- **In 2007, India's first scientific expedition to the Arctic was launched** with the objective of initiating a series of baseline measurements in biological sciences, ocean and atmospheric sciences and glaciology.
- In 2008, the Indian research station '**Himadri**' was established in the international Arctic research base at Ny-Ålesund in Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- **IndArc**, the country's first **multi-sensor moored observatory** was deployed in Kongsfjorden in 2014.
- In 2016, India's northernmost atmospheric laboratory was established at Gruvebadet. The laboratory is equipped with several instruments that can study clouds, precipitation, long-range pollutants, and other background atmospheric parameters.

The major objectives of the Indian Research in Arctic Region are as follows:

- To **study the hypothesized tele-connections between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon** by analyzing the sediment and ice core records from the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic Ocean.
- To **characterize sea ice in the Arctic** using satellite data to estimate the effect of global warming in the northern polar region.

- To conduct research on **the dynamics and mass budget of Arctic glaciers** focusing on the effect of glaciers on sea-level change.
- To carry out a **comprehensive assessment of the flora and fauna** of the Arctic and their response to anthropogenic activities. In addition, it is proposed to undertake a comparative study of the life forms from both the Polar Regions

Global governance and international cooperation

Arctic is important from a **geopolitical point of view** because:

- The Arctic region is **very rich in minerals, and oil and gas**.
- The Arctic Council does not prohibit the commercial exploitation of resources in the Arctic. It only seeks to ensure that it is done in a sustainable manner
- With some parts of the Arctic melting due to global warming, the region also opens up the **possibility of new shipping routes** that can reduce existing distances.

For Governance and International Cooperation, India's draft policy aims to :

- Pursue international cooperation and partnerships with all stakeholders in the region;
- **Uphold international law and in particular UNCLOS**, including the rights and freedoms contained therein, and support common heritage of humankind in the deep seabed area in the Arctic;
- Actively **participate in international climate change and environmental treaty frameworks** relating to the Arctic;
- Enhance participation in organizations relevant to the region of which India is a member such as the **International Maritime Organisation and the International Hydrographic Organisation**;
- Participate in **economic activities in the region in**

accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 framework.

Geopolitics in the Arctic Region

The Arctic Council

- The Arctic Council is the leading **intergovernmental forum** promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction **among the Arctic States, Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants** on common Arctic issues.
- The Council has the **eight circumpolar countries as member states**
- It is mandated to **protect the Arctic environment and promote the economies and social and cultural well-being** of the indigenous people whose organizations are permanent participants in the council.
- The **Arctic Economic Council (AEC)** was created by the Arctic Council during the 2013-2015 Canadian chairmanship. It is an independent organization that facilitates Arctic business-to-business activities and responsible economic development through the sharing of best practices.

UNCLOS

- Being an ocean , **the Arctic Ocean is also governed by the UNCLOS** – the United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Sea.
- Among these are the arctic coastal states of Canada, Denmark, Norway and the Russian Federation.
- However, **USA has not ratified this convention.**
- This **complicates the demarcation of maritime zones and the determination of extended continental shelf claims**
- This has raised several conflicts over how Arctic shipping and resource management activities will be governed in the future.

Chinese Interests

- China—which has linked its interest in the Arctic area with the Maritime Silk route.
- In January 2018, China declared itself a **“Near Arctic State”** and put out a white paper.
- According to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo China has invested nearly \$90 billion in the Arctic between 2012-2017.
- In its policy, **China states that the Arctic has “global implications and international impacts.”**
- **Thus geopolitics of the Arctic have gone beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature.**

Development of human resources

As new opportunities open up in the Arctic, **India needs to enhance its human resource capabilities**. Skilled workforce would be needed in sectors ranging from science and exploration, to seafaring and economic cooperation.

To achieve these goals the policy has made the following provisions:

- Expand capability, capacity and awareness for Arctic-related scientific research by **strengthening the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)**, involving academic and scientific institutions in India and identifying nodal institutes;
- Promote **domestic scientific research capacities** by expanding earth sciences, biological sciences, geosciences, climate change and space related programmes, dove-tailed with Arctic imperatives in Indian Universities;
- **Strengthen indigenous research capacity in global climate modelling** with special focus on South Asia, especially impact of Arctic warming on the variability of the monsoon;
- Put in place **Arctic related programmes for mineral/oil**

- **and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes;**
- **Encourage tourism and hospitality sectors** in building specialised capacities and awareness to engage with Arctic enterprises;
- Expand student programmes on the blue-bio economy of the Arctic through a gamut of institutions working on living and non-living marine resources;
- Strengthen **nautical training institutions** for training seafarers in Polar/ice navigation and build region specific hydrography capacity and skills necessary to undertake Arctic transits;
- Expand India's trained manpower in the services sector backed by **English-speaking skills in maritime insurance, chartering, arbitration and brokerage;**
- Build a wide-ranging institutional base on Arctic maritime, legal, environmental and governance issues.

Mould your thought: India's draft Arctic Policy is an assertion of India's global ambitions. Elaborate.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Write about India's Arctic interests
- Write about the provisions in the policy to addresses geopolitical, scientific and environmental concerns of India
- Write about how these provisions show India's ambitions
- Conclusion