

WikiLeaks documents hint of slick plans for arctic oil

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A changing climate and melting ice in the Arctic have revealed previously unavailable business opportunities that were once hidden under large amounts of ice and frozen seas, including a stake in what could be as much as one-quarter of the planet's unexplored oil and gas reserves. Credit: cjn | ISNS & WikiLeaks

With Arctic ice receding at an unprecedented pace due to global warming, many nations seem far more interested in carving up the newly exposed resources than doing something to slow climate change, according to documents released by [WikiLeaks](#).

According to the leaked State Department papers, even characteristically calm countries are staking claims and warning others to stay out of their way. Unlikely allies like the U.S. and China have joined to fight against any environmental agreement not suitable to their self-interest.

The [changing climate](#) is creating business opportunities never dreamed of before. At stake could be as much as one quarter of the world's gas and oil reserves, once hidden under huge masses of ice and inaccessible through frozen seas. Greenland's fossil fuel reserves alone may equal those of the North Sea.

That the Arctic is melting is beyond debate. The ice is melting faster than conservative computer models predicted.

According to the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program, an international scientific group, temperatures in the past six years were the highest since measurements began in 1880. Summer ice has been at or near record lows since 2001 and the Arctic Ocean may be free of summer ice within 30-40 years.

A combination of low winter snow accumulation and warm spring temperatures produced a record low for snow coverage in 2010, the lowest since [satellite observation](#) began in 1966. Glaciers and ice caps are also receding at record paces. Summers are longer as are melt seasons.

Permafrost is melting all over the Arctic. Melting permafrost makes for easier digging and releases the greenhouse gas [methane](#). Glaciers also are

receding, exposing valleys hidden under ice for 10,000 years. The legendary [Northwest Passage](#), from Europe over North America to Asia is now a reality. The passage may now be just another [shipping lane](#).

Obstruction by the U.S. to international climate treaties with clear, stated obligations to reduce emissions began under the administration of President George W. Bush and has continued under the Obama administration, the documents show.

The documents show the climate meeting in Copenhagen in 2009 was a good example of these policies in action.

According to the leaked cables, the U.S. and China -- the world's two largest producers of greenhouse gasses -- conspired to sabotage any efforts made by European countries to get a meaningful, enforceable agreement. Sen. John Kerry, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, told China's Vice Prime Minister Li Keqiang that the U.S. understood "China's resistance to accepting mandatory targets" at Copenhagen.

The two countries agreed to cooperate and communicate, undermining efforts by European countries to get an environmentally-focused agreement that obligated nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Europeans and Australians were well aware of the collaboration. One diplomat noted the "visibly more comfortable" relations between the countries.

Then Brazil, South Africa, China and India met behind closed doors in Copenhagen and removed any binding environmental obligations from the prospective treaty, the documents reveal.

The Obama administration then pitched in to make sure that the closed-door agreement passed as it was, offering millions of dollars in aid to

developing countries to make sure they bought into it, the documents said. The European diplomatic teams kept quiet throughout.

American diplomats in Europe were then ordered to begin a public relations campaign aimed at both European governments and the public to convince them that the Obama Administration was taking the U.S. "in a new direction" and that the U.S. really wanted a substantial cut in greenhouse gas emissions. The Europeans didn't buy it, claiming the U.S. was fudging the numbers.

The leaked documents revealed several other findings, notably one American diplomat warning that "while in the Arctic there is peace and stability, however, one cannot exclude that in the future there will be a redistribution of power, up to armed intervention."

The documents also show substantial jockeying for access to Arctic resources. One shows that the U.S. believes that Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark, will be independent soon and is wooing Greenlanders to make it easy for American companies to explore there.

Another showed that Canada has warned other NATO countries to stay away from Arctic exploration. "They don't belong," the documents quote Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper as saying. Harper made the Arctic a signature campaign issue.

According to the documents, the Bush administration set up a dialog with the Chinese, a 10-year framework to discuss energy and the environment. The two countries also agreed to hold a "Strategic and Economic Dialogue" -- secret backroom talks to coordinate efforts.

When the Obama administration came to power, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton went to China, and, according to the documents,

agreed to form a new partnership to guarantee that the Copenhagen accords met the demands of the two countries.

"On a day-to-day basis, there is not a whole lot of difference between the Bush and the Obama administrations," said Kyle Ash, senior legislative representative to Greenpeace. "The Obama administration is clearly not in climate denial or in denial about the U.S. role. They don't feel they have the political backing at home or internationally, so what they are doing is stalling."

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