

As US assumes Arctic Council chairmanship, new report emphasizes cooperation over conflict

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A group of international Arctic experts co-chaired by Dartmouth released recommendations aimed at preserving the polar north.

Although the media often portray the Arctic as a new ["Great Game"](#) ripe for conflict, a group of international Arctic experts co-chaired by Dartmouth College released recommendations today aimed at preserving

the polar north as an area for political and military cooperation, sustainable development and scientific research.

The report, which addresses the priorities of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum of the eight nations that border the polar region, resulted from meetings at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., in 2014 and 2015 under the auspices of the Institute for Arctic Policy (IAP), co-chaired by Dartmouth and the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The report, titled "Arctic Council Initiatives to Sustain Arctic Cooperation," coincides with a change of leadership at the Council. Canada hands the two-year rotating chairmanship to the United States at a meeting in the Canadian territory of Nunavut on April 24. The Council's other member states are Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. It also includes six indigenous organizations with permanent status and nations and interested organizations holding observer status.

The report encourages United States leadership in issues related to climate change, environmental dangers, shipping, commercial fishing, energy development, maritime infrastructure and indigenous rights, all of which are dependent on continued political cooperation in the Arctic. The report stresses that improving current geo-political conditions, including tense relations between Russia and the West inside and outside the polar region, is essential.

"According to our report, cooperation can be maintained providing all Arctic countries continue to address Arctic issues on their own merits and manage competing national interests within a framework of international cooperation that has shielded this region since the end of the Cold War," says Virginia, report co-author and co-leader of the U.S. State Department's recently established [Fulbright Arctic Initiative](#), which

funds interdisciplinary work for scholars from Arctic Council nations. "The task of the United States will be to provide the leadership and political vision to keep the Arctic Council and the Arctic on a positive path. The United States must make clear that it is prepared to continue Arctic cooperation and welcomes constructive Russian activity in the region." Report co-author [Kenneth Yalowitz](#), a Wilson Center global fellow and a former U.S. ambassador to Belarus and Georgia, adds: "Only time will tell, but the Arctic remains one of the few promising pathways despite the major downturn in Western relations with Russia."

Virginia is the Dartmouth co-director of IAP, an institute of the [University of the Arctic](#) that has convened meetings since 2008 of international experts to report on critical Arctic issues. Dartmouth and the University of Alaska Fairbanks have partnered with the Carnegie Endowment on meetings addressing Arctic security.

Experts who met at the Carnegie Endowment agreed that the Arctic Council and the [U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) (UNCLOS) continue to be the primary mechanisms to ensure cooperation, engagement and transparency in the Arctic. The U.S. chairmanship program has set priorities in the following areas: Arctic Ocean safety, security and stewardship; economic and living conditions; and the impacts of climate change. The report supports these goals and the need to address climate change challenges resulting from loss of sea ice, sea level rise and thawing permafrost. Equally important are limiting black carbon pollution and improving air quality, continuing research and programs to ensure ecosystem health as energy development increases and improving the safety of Arctic navigation.

Additional report recommendations include:

- The United States should ratify UNCLOS to enhance U.S. authority on Arctic issues.

- Develop improved communications, standardized procedures and multilateral training for search and rescue, military movements, natural disasters, maritime awareness, oil spill management, shipping infrastructure and oil, gas and mineral development.
- The Arctic Council should lead in identifying priorities for scientific study.
- Develop more small-scale and renewable energy projects to improve the economic future of small communities.
- Improve individual and community health and food security.
- Improve early warning systems for environmental change.
- Adopt an international ban on commercial fishing in the offshore Arctic Ocean until an appropriate management plan is in place.
- Increase indigenous people's participation in and benefits from Arctic policies.

More information: [dickey.dartmouth.edu/sites/dic ...
initiatives_2015.pdf](https://dickey.dartmouth.edu/sites/dickey/files/2015-04/Arctic_Council_Chairmanship_Report_2015.pdf)

Provided by Dartmouth College

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