

Arctic Meltdown

Maaïke Knol, April 2012

1. Project / publication	Borgerson, S. 2008. Arctic meltdown. The economic and security implications of global warming. <i>Foreign Affairs</i> . Volume 87, No 2, pp. 63-77.
2. Initiator	Scott G. Borgerson is International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Coast Guard.
3. Objective	The aim of the article is to provide direction in an early phase of the debate about Arctic developments, and to convince the audience of the dramatic transformations in the Arctic and the lack of well-functioning governance arrangements in order to steer these developments.
4. Geographical delimitation	The entire circumpolar Arctic area, with a strong focus on US issues.
5. Time horizon	The article does not present any scenarios within a given time frame. Strikingly however, the author uses a relatively short-term perspective in his predictions. He argues, for example that by 2015, Arctic “offshore oil production will account for roughly 40 percent of the world’s total”. With reference to shipping, he foresees “a marine highway directly over the North Pole” likely <i>within this decade</i> .
6. Thematic focus	<p>It is the author’s aim to give an overall perspective of transformations in the Arctic. However, main emphasis is on delimitation issues, shipping, oil and gas, and strategic/security issues. Climate change as a driver for change is an important theme in the article.</p> <p>Borgerson foresees dramatic changes, and provides ideas of how to solve governance issues in the final pages, which are mainly US centered. He proposes that a multilateral Arctic treaty should be made and signed by the Arctic countries; that the US should ratify UNCLOS (though he argues that UNCLOS will not be able to solve all issues). A bilateral shipping management regime should solve issues between Canada and the US, and general codes for shipping and ship design in the Arctic should be developed.</p>
7. Images of the future	<p>By 2015, Arctic “offshore oil production will account for roughly 40 percent of the world’s total”. With reference to shipping, the author foresees “a marine highway directly over the North Pole” likely <i>within this decade</i>.</p> <p>The following summarizes the author’s future image of the Arctic: “The combination of new shipping routes, trillions of dollars in possible oil and gas resources, and a poorly defined picture of state ownership makes for a toxic brew. The situation is especially dangerous because there are currently no overarching political or legal structures that can provide for the orderly development of the region or mediate political disagreements over Arctic resources or sea-lanes. The Arctic has always been frozen; as ice turns to water, it is not clear which rules should apply.”</p>
8. Key driving forces	Climate change and a race for resources are considered to be the key driving forces to transformations in the Arctic.
9. Uncertainties / wildcards	No specific uncertainties or wildcards are discussed.
10. Accomplishment and collaboration	Not relevant.
11. Method	The article provides qualitative analyses that build partly upon earlier analyses, including climate models and other quantitative work.

<p>12. Sources of information</p>	<p>Most of the article builds upon the author's own viewpoints and analyses; however, these analyses build upon data from a variety of sources in order to strengthen statements. These sources are only referred to sporadically. It remains to some extent unclear what background sources of information were used.</p>
<p>13. Strengths</p>	<p>This article has functioned as an important wake-up call. Both its strength and weakness lies in its convincing tone and analysis. Borgerson's style is convincing and leaves the reader to believe that dramatic transformations will be reality in the near future. Its call for action is urgent.</p> <p>Having in mind that this is quite an early text (2008) in the pile of studies about the future of the Arctic, it is a brave attempt to sketch potential developments. This article came prior to the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment, for example. When reading Borgerson's considerations about shipping, one should have this in mind.</p>
<p>14. Weaknesses</p>	<p>The article is written in a dramatic style, with use of many superlatives. Many of the prospected transformations lack nuance and are the result of one-sided analyses that are based on single and fragmented claims. This article reads more as a wake-up call than as a nuanced analysis that builds on well-founded statements.</p>
<p>15. Attention and significance</p>	<p>This article is meant to provide direction to an ongoing debate. It is an important text in the literature about the future of the Arctic. The article is cited very often (139 times following Google Scholar in April 2012), but has also gained considerable critique (see for example Brigham 2010).</p>
<p>16. Relevance for the Fram Centre</p>	<p>It is a relevant text that has provided direction to a debate that was in its early phase when it was published (2008), but it is not of any special relevance (for example through use of methods) for the Fram Centre.</p>