

Think again: The Arctic

Maaïke Knol, April 2012

1. Project / publication	Brigham 2010. Think Again: The Arctic. <i>Foreign Policy</i> Sept/Oct 181, pp. 71-74.
2. Initiator	Lawson Brigham is professor of geography and Arctic policy at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.
3. Objective	It is the author's objective to argue that there is no need to depict the future of the Arctic in dramatized ways, where there is a race for resources and anarchy. He wants to do away with these misinterpretations. It can be read as a commentary on Scott G. Borgerson's often-cited article "the Arctic meltdown", which appeared in 2008, and can be seen as illustrative for the literature that depicts dramatic transformations.
4. Geographical delimitation	The circumpolar Arctic area.
5. Time horizon	No specific time horizon.
6. Thematic focus	Broad thematic focus; e.g. delimitation issues, shipping, security and Arctic governance.
7. Images of the future	<p>The resources of the Arctic will be more closely linked to the world market. As such, the Arctic will play an increasingly important role in the global economy. But countries that will be mostly affected by changes in the Arctic are not in the Arctic at all, but will be countries like China and India, which will be "fueled by exports from the far North".</p> <p>The author nuances the dramatic transformations that are sketched in other studies. With regard to shipping, Brigham does not foresee great changes in commercial shipping in the near future. The real challenge will be to protect the Arctic's peoples and environment from increased traffic (tourism, and increased Arctic destination traffic).</p> <p>The looming Arctic boom will only reinforce the Arctic's political stability and cooperation among the Arctic countries (which can already be seen with reference to scientific assessments, Arctic council, etc.).</p>
8. Key driving forces	Climate change is a strong driving force for Arctic transformations, but definitely not the only one. The author argues that in relation to newly developed oil and gas activities in the Arctic areas of Norway and Russia, global oil and gas prices were more important drivers than climate change - "regional warming has had little effect". Another example of climate change not being the major driver is for tourism: in the development of Arctic cruise tourism the most important driver has been the expansion of tourism to once-remote regions generally. Brigham thus argues that there are many other external driving forces that should be considered in explaining (future) Arctic transformations.
9. Uncertainties / wildcards	No specific uncertainties or wildcards are discussed.
10. Accomplishment and collaboration	Not relevant.
11. Method	This is qualitative work, written largely in the form of a commentary on Borgerson's 2008 article. The latter is illustrative for a range of depictions of a race for Arctic resources and Arctic anarchy.
12. Sources of	The author draws upon several studies, such as the Arctic Marine Shipping

information	Assessment and the US Geological Survey of circumpolar oil and gas resources.
13. Strengths	The author is well integrated in, and has considerable knowledge about Arctic cooperation processes. He has for example been centrally involved in the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment of the Arctic Council. Brigham presents a more moderate image of the future transformations in the Arctic compared to the alarmist writers, and points out that the developments in the Arctic should be understood in a larger context.
14. Weaknesses	The article is relatively short and written in the form of a commentary. As a result, it does not leave much space for Brigham to elaborate on his arguments. It could perhaps be argued that the article has a tendency to become too optimistic on some issues, as a result from the author's position within Arctic cooperation fora. In this sense, the article might become a reflection of the official Arctic Council standpoints, more than a presentation of thorough and balanced arguments to elaborate on possible transformations in the Arctic.
15. Attention and significance	It is difficult to assess the significance of this article, and the attention it has received. However, it is an important commentary written by one of the key persons within the Arctic cooperation fora.
16. Relevance for the Fram Centre	Lawson Brigham was invited as a speaker at the Arctic Futures side-event during the Arctic Frontiers conference in January 2012 in Tromsø. It will be relevant to follow Brigham's work and to invite him for future discussions, seminars, or other forms of cooperation.