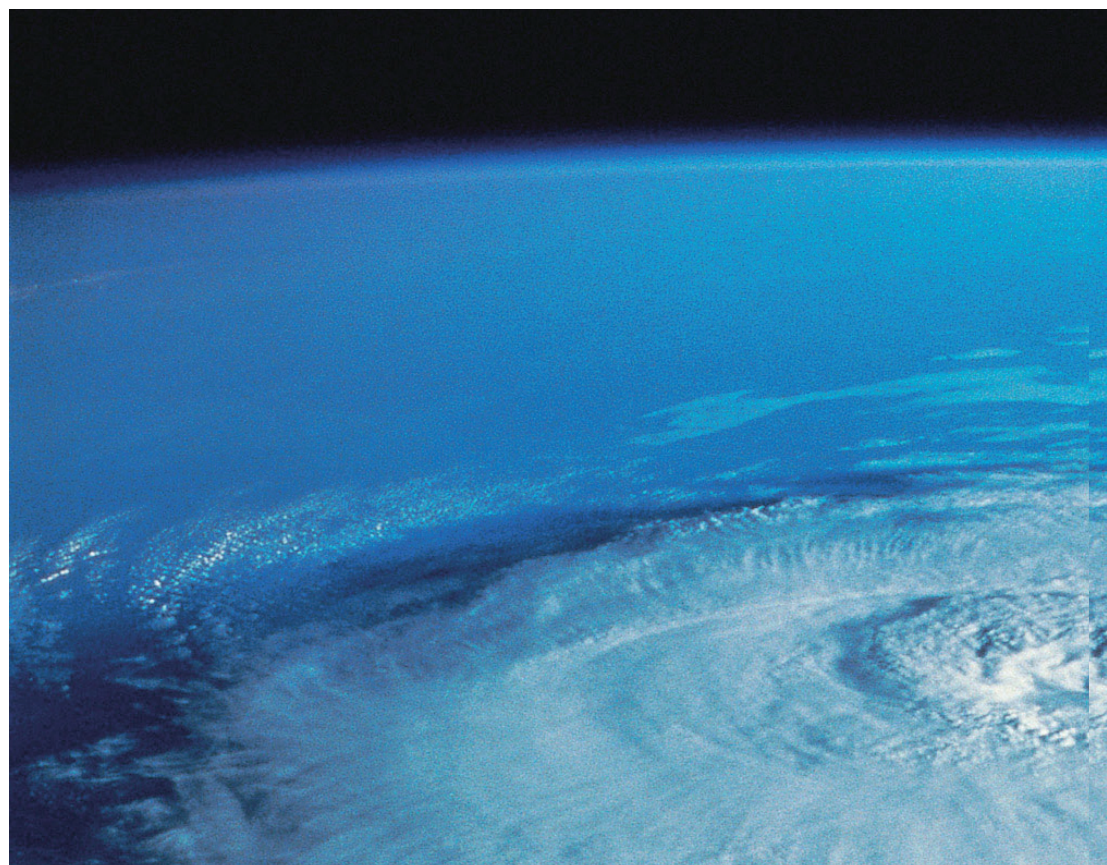


THE ARCTIC REGION AS A BRIDGE

Jayantha Dhanapala presents a case for cooperation – in the name of Arctic security

Why should we focus on the Arctic, one of the most remote and climatically inhospitable regions of the world? Let me tell you what my reasons are. First, we live in an increasingly interdependent world and the hard evidence of climate change proves that the felling of Amazon forests in Brazil or CO2 emissions in China have a cumulative global impact, whether they lead to the disappearance of Tuvalu into the Pacific Ocean or the sinking of the Maldives closer to our own island-country. In a literal sense therefore, the 17th-century English Metaphysical poet John Donne's celebrated line that "no man is an island entire of itself" is truer today than ever before!

Second, the melting of the Arctic Cap will facilitate the mining of resources, especially oil and gas, and lead to an increase in commercial shipping. The ownership of resources and sovereignty of areas like the Northwest Passage are already being contested, and the applicability of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has to be more sharply defined – especially in areas where there is an overlap of claims. The Global South, in whose countries the 'Bottom Billion' live in extreme poverty and who are going to be hit hardest by climate change, see this potential resource exploitation in the context of globalisation and its impact on energy costs – especially as the



UN tries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Some also see the area outside the territory claimed by the littoral states of the Arctic as part of the global commons and the common heritage of humankind. A global regime could thus be established over the Arctic, to mitigate the effects of climate change and for the equitable use of its resources in areas outside the territory of the eight circumpolar countries.

Third, as someone who has devoted most of his working life to the cause of disarmament, and especially nuclear disarmament, I am deeply concerned over the fact that two nuclear weapon states – the United States and the Russian

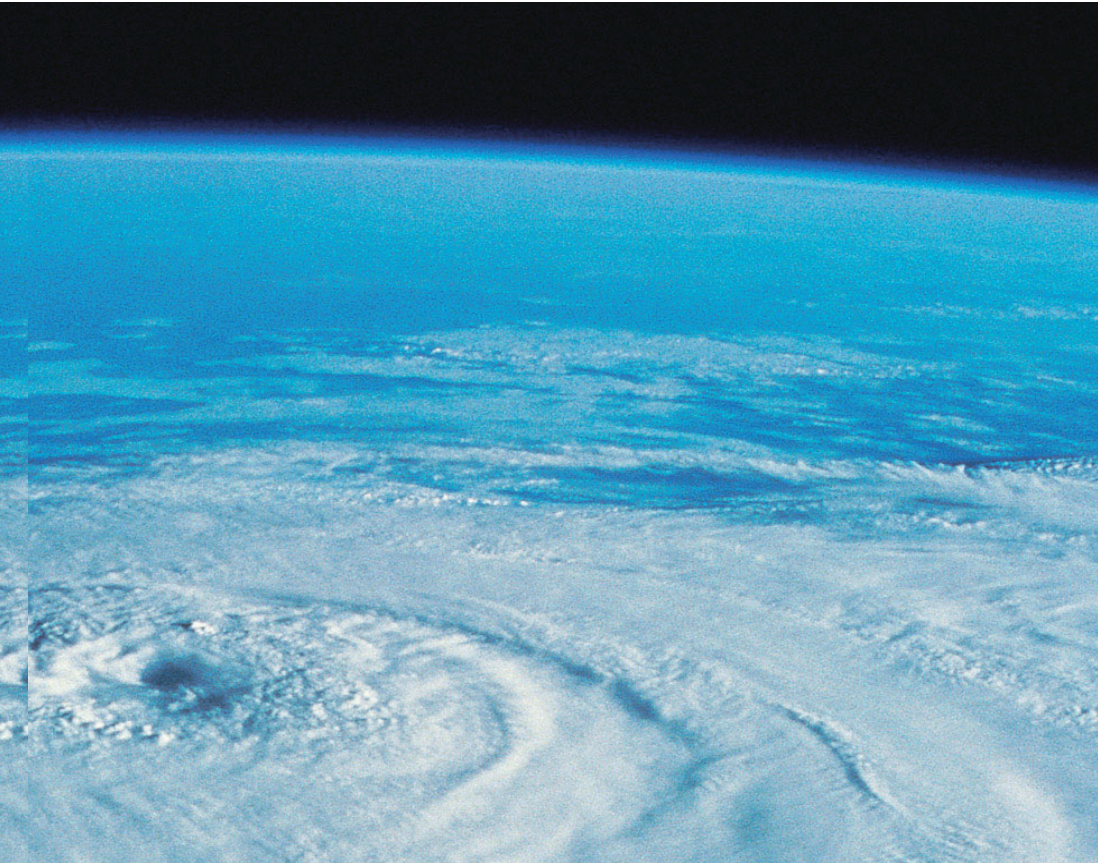
Federation, which together own 95 percent of the nuclear weapons in the world – converge on the Arctic and have competing claims. These claims, together with those of other US-allied North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries – Canada, Denmark, Iceland and Norway – could, if unresolved, lead to tension and conflict escalating into the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

A fourth reason – which I discussed with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (who has in fact visited the Arctic on an ice-breaker), when I met him in New York in October – is that this is a region where uniquely the international issues of the environment (climate change, in particular), the

threat of nuclear weapons, the human rights of indigenous people in their native habitat and the opportunity of advancing the rule of law converge.

No country owns the North Pole or the region of the Arctic Ocean surrounding it. The Arctic has a population of about four million, including over 30 different indigenous peoples who have lived in the region for more than 10,000 years and use dozens of languages, some of which are fast disappearing. Organisms living in ice, fish and marine mammals, birds and land animals are amongst the forms of life in this unique ecosystem. The natural resources in the Arctic Zone are vast and untapped. The US Geological Survey estimates that a quarter of the

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December at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha. Qatar is in the midst of heightened concerns over climate change after Sandy hit the east coast of the USA last month. Despite this, there is an unmistakable air of 'business as usual' in the policies being pursued (the subject was never discussed in the recently concluded US presidential election!).

We know that the developed world contributed disproportionately to the carbon emissions that have caused climate change. Developing countries – notably China and India – are poised to follow this bad example. The Arctic circumpolar countries are developed nations and they could set a major precedent by taking steps to achieve cooperative solutions to the problems of Arctic security across the entire gamut of political, economic, ecological, social and cultural aspects. It will be an example that will be welcomed by the rest of the global community. An all-encompassing Arctic Treaty signed almost a half-century after the Antarctic Treaty would be a major achievement.

To those sceptics who will dismiss this as unrealistic and impossible, let me quote the great Norwegian explorer, scientist and Nobel Peace Prize winning diplomat Fridtjof Nansen, who said: "The difficult is what takes a little time; the impossible is what takes longer."

world's undiscovered energy resources lie here – especially in the submerged plateau called 'the Chukchi Cap' (west of the Beaufort Sea and between the Bering Sea and the Chukchi Sea).

History has a strange way of repeating itself. The region includes the Bering Strait, which is believed to have formed a land bridge across which the earliest human migration took place from Eurasia or Asia to the Americas. Today, it promises to be a possible maritime conduit of increased global exchanges in shipping, commerce and other areas as a result of human-induced climate change. This has the potential of bringing nations and peoples together for peace and development. It also has the potential for disputes and conflict.

At this point, we have a

unique opportunity to make a choice. Security today is much broader than military security alone. It encompasses international peace and security, human rights and development. It is also a cooperative and common security, where one region's insecurity inevitably impacts on that of other regions. And so Arctic security is inextricably interwoven with global security, giving us all a role as stakeholders.

From Jared Diamond's impressive book *Collapse*, one learns that not every society faced with environmental collapse has in fact gone under like Norse Greenland or the Mayan civilisation. The Inuits did much better on Greenland than the Norse did, and they are still with us. Of the possible contributing factors to societal collapse, Diamond identifies society's response to its

environmental problems as being the most significant. It is this that makes collapse far from inevitable with long-term planning and a willingness to reconsider core values. It is the same lesson that Arnold Toynbee provided us in his multi-volume *Study of History*, with a description of the challenges humankind faced throughout history and its responses.

The point of course, is that we do have solutions to the problems of Arctic security, but they are solutions based on multidisciplinary and multilateral cooperation.

The 18th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol takes place from 26 November to 7