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The Arctic at the Epicentre of a Change in the World Order?

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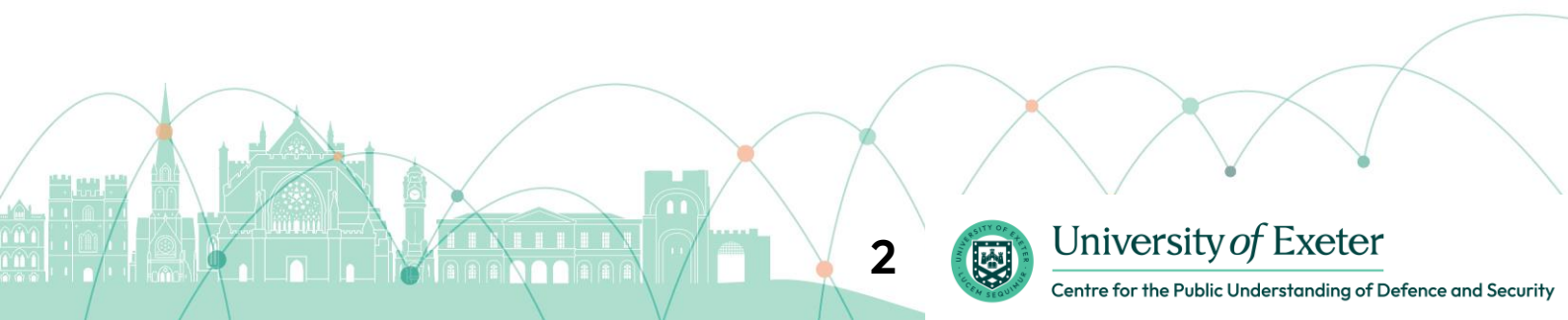
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The US government's determination to create a 'golden dome' above the Northern Hemisphere is being accompanied by the carving out of established Arctic territories (e.g. Greenland), an acceleration in space exploration, and an aspiration to achieve global technology ascendancy. These are the three critical and unavoidably entangled components of the US strategic aspiration; an aspiration which is entirely shared by China.

In fact, the US administration argues that it is China, not President Trump, that is responsible for underlying change in the US-led, rules-based international order, and the diminution of the neo-liberal framework that has financed and supported it to date. As Alex Capri relates in his book, *Techno-Nationalism*, China sees no division between geopolitics and business, it recognizes Trump's MAGA as China's cry too, and identifies (like America), space-directed technologies as pivotal in global governance.

The Northern Hemisphere golden dome initiative is a manifestation of this alternative, great power-centres emerging framework and geopolitical focus. Two critical spheres of interest are being competed for to this end – the Arctic region and the space domain.

The US has designated the Arctic, along with Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific region, as one of its three key geopolitical arenas in the 21st Century; all three are in the Northern Hemisphere. Recent US government announcements, appointments, and actions regarding the Arctic (including an enhanced US defence role for Canada and for Denmark's Greenland), make clear that the geo-economic-led commercialization and strategic defence of the Northern Hemisphere is underway and is being accompanied by a review of US Arctic doctrine. Inherent in the US approach is a recognition of the strategic convergence of the high latitude Arctic region with space, and the criticality of dual use technologies in polar and geosynchronous/elliptical orbits over the circumpolar north.



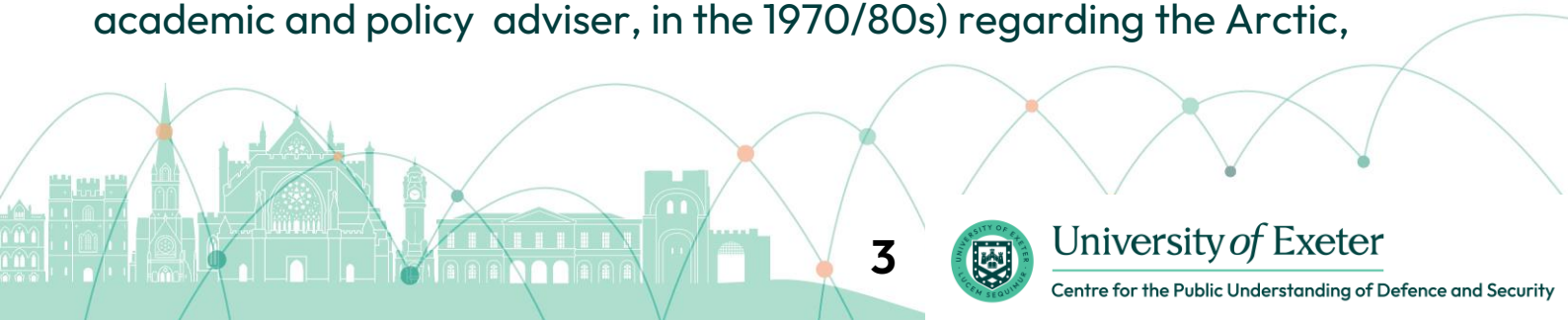
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Space is the extraterritorial domain that is at the heart of altering Arctic geopolitics and the US/China trade (read *technology*) war. And it is the same geopolitics that drive a sea-change in the international trading system and the splitting out of technology's global value chains (GVCs) along nationalist lines, contrary to the spirit of globalization. This is precisely why former, present, and future superpowers are all converging on both the Arctic region and space, and why the Northern Hemisphere is the geostrategic focus and the Arctic the geopolitical chessboard.

In short, as the Arctic is the highest latitudinal location in the Northern Hemisphere, the power that can direct satellite-enabled technologies from space above the Arctic region, can exert geoeconomic power and geopolitical/strategic influence over the two oceans and three continents comprising the Northern Hemisphere. For the U.S. (and China) the prize for dominating the Arctic and space is dominion over the Northern Hemisphere, together with its subset in the Western Hemisphere.

This partly explains why US Space Force is present in Nordic countries, and why Norway and Sweden have now established their own spaceports. One geostrategic concern for Washington is that the established Sino-Russian geo-economic partnership in the Arctic could steadily morph into a technology-facilitated, strategic *alliance* in space, over the Northern Hemisphere. It is surprising therefore that in recent US/Russian negotiations, the Kremlin has repeatedly invited US 'big oil' companies to return to the Arctic. If actioned, such a move would signal the end of the Sino-Russian geo-economic partnership in the region and crater any further talk of an alliance in space. This would, however, enable Washington to geo-economically cleave Sino-Russian relations in the Arctic (and by extension in space), without resort to force.

The apparent adoption by the US and China of geo-economically driven, technology-nationalism (a term first used by Robert Reich, the American academic and policy adviser, in the 1970/80s) regarding the Arctic,



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space, and technology, is in direct contrast to the present unipolar, neo-liberal economic consensus underpinned by decades of US-led, Bretton Woods-based globalization. Arguably, within this techno-nationalist framework, which acknowledges 'ownership' of both space and the Arctic, the US economic trade war against China only veils the real battle underway - over innovation in, and capture of, global technology. The strategic prize for the victor in this struggle is two-fold: economic domination of the global GDP-earning services sector - underpinned by exquisite (and space-based) technologies; and, secondly, the ability to assert both geopolitical and strategic governance over the entire Northern Hemisphere, via satellite-deployed dual-use, and so-called 'influence' technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum computing, big data, the internet of things, social media etc.) above the Arctic region. This struggle is already transforming GVCs and further endorses the shift in the direction of great power geopolitics. By this view, it is neither multipolarity nor neo-liberal globalization that will determine the future shape of global alliances and the international political economy, but contending loyalties to either US or Chinese technology/GVC-determined strengths. Lesser powers will soon have to choose their poison.

The geopolitical and strategic choices now facing Washington are associated with critical technologies that link the Arctic with space, and space with the Northern Hemisphere. Accordingly, Washington is making significant (and controversial) changes to both Arctic and space doctrine, planning/policy, and activities. Most controversially, the Trump Administration sees the Arctic frontline to lie in Greenland. Policy casualties to date have included the Polar Institute at the Wilson Center in DC whereas beneficiaries of new Arctic/space doctrine(s) are most clearly the likes of Elon Musk's Starlink and Space X, with their record of dominating technological innovation, and delivering competitive strategic space solutions.



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The period when US Arctic policy was undermined by China's climate strategy manipulation, and by their promotion of the Arctic as part of the global commons, is over. These largely unchecked Chinese political moves in the region (and space) frustrated and infuriated both the Pentagon and the US intelligence community. The review of US Arctic (and space related) doctrine, which includes Greenland as part of the golden dome project, represents a dramatic change of rhythm.

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