

Counterpoint: The United States Should Not Adopt More Aggressive Policies in the Arctic Region

Thesis

Adopting more aggressive policies in the Arctic would be costly and would harm the people, wildlife, and environment of the region.

Talking Points

- Aggressive policies focusing on resource extraction could exacerbate environmental degradation in a fragile ecosystem already impacted by climate change.
- Aggressive policies often neglect and violate the rights and needs of Arctic Indigenous communities.
- Expanding military and economic activities in the Arctic would require substantial investment, potentially diverting funds from domestic priorities.

Summary

For those opposed to a more aggressive US Arctic policy, a key concern is the detrimental effect an increased US presence in the region could have on the Arctic environment and its wildlife. Writing for the World Wildlife Fund magazine *The Circle* in 2023, Elena F. Tracy critiqued the prospect of resource-extraction projects in the Arctic, which she noted “pollute rivers, marine coastal environments, landscapes and the air.” She asserted that the environmental harms caused by resource extraction and related hazards such as oil spills “could be irreversible, wiping out wildlife populations and destroying traditional food systems and livelihoods.” In addition to harming the Arctic directly, Tracy argued that the extraction of fossil fuels would damage the Arctic a second time through the eventual use of the fuels themselves, which “contribute to the increase of global carbon emissions and exacerbate the climate crisis.”

Critics of an aggressive Arctic policy also argue that aggressive policies toward the region often neglect and violate the rights and needs of Arctic Indigenous communities. M. Rauhan Rasheed made that point in a 2025 article for *Modern Diplomacy*, noting that in the case of Greenland, the area’s predominantly Indigenous residents “have long sought to maintain control over their resources and governance” and, in recent years, the government of Denmark had “grant[ed] more and more freedom.” US president Donald Trump’s statements about purchasing or otherwise acquiring Greenland, on the other hand, jeopardized Greenland’s prospects for complete independence and instead “puts the island in the basket of mere strategic commodities.” Rasheed went on to link Trump’s disregard for the autonomy of Greenland’s Indigenous population, as well as

Denmark's own sovereignty, with "American imperialism, reminiscent of the past era."

In addition to calling attention to the negative ramifications of an aggressive Arctic policy, some critics argue that expanding military and economic activities in the Arctic would be a costly undertaking and divert funds from more worthwhile initiatives. Alec Evans summarized that argument in a 2021 article for *Responsible Statecraft*, writing that "Washington must avoid . . . substantial militaristic measures" in Alaska, as such measures "are unnecessary and misallocate significant funds and resources that could be better used elsewhere." He went on to argue that while some consider the Alaskan Arctic to be a crucial source of natural resources and thus in need of extensive military protection, its strategic importance to the United States is overstated. While the region contains numerous resources, including "massive untapped hydrocarbon deposits," Evans asserted that "the utility of extracting these resources is questionable" for several reasons, including that "most of these deposits lie in protected areas." Ultimately, Evans argued, "Just because we *can* become a dominant regional force doesn't always mean it's in our best interests to do so."

Ponder This

- The author has presented the fundamental positions for this perspective in the debate. Outline the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.
- If asked to begin forming an argument for this position, what sources would you need to build your case? What fundamental information do you need? What opinion leaders in this debate would you look to in solidifying your argument?
- What are the weakest aspects of the position outlined by the author? How might those weaker arguments help you prepare a counter argument?
- What additional Talking Points could you add to support this position?

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