On September 30, 2014, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) in Waterloo, Canada, with support from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER), the Embassy of Canada in Washington, D.C. and Carleton University in Ottawa, co-hosted a high-level conference to discuss the accomplishments to date of the Canadian Arctic Council Chairmanship, and to look forward to the major themes of the upcoming U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council starting in Spring 2015.

The discussion included three panel discussions and two keynote addresses from Canadian and U.S. Arctic experts who examined existing and future challenges and opportunities for cooperation in the Arctic region. Panelists included senior Arctic officials from both federal governments, regional political leaders, and aboriginal, environmental, and academic experts. The conference offered an important opportunity to explore and harmonize North American Arctic Council priorities as climatic change transforms the Arctic Ocean.

Roughly 200 persons attended the conference with over 1000 online viewers from different countries, underlining the unparalleled interest in the Arctic and its governance. Key points raised during a rich and diverse discussion are summarized below.

Accomplishments of the Canadian Arctic Council Chairmanship So Far

The conference began by reviewing the achievements of the Canadian chairmanship thus far, as well as lessons learned and best practices that can be shared with the United States as it prepares to assume the chairmanship in April 2015. The Canadian chairmanship theme is development for the people of the North. According to the Canadian Chair, without incorporating the interests of the peoples of the North and how they envision the Arctic in 2020 and beyond, the Arctic Council cannot effectively address and respond to emerging challenges in the Arctic.

Canada's main goals over the past year and a half have been the advancement of sustainable circumpolar community development, and strengthening the voice, capacity, and participation of indigenous peoples and Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council. This emphasis was welcomed by several Alaskan, Territorial, and environmental speakers. The Canadian Chair has been giving special attention to social development of indigenous communities, including mental wellness, and the promotion of traditional indigenous knowledge.
Canada's flagship project to promote responsible economic development for the Northerners and one of its main achievements as chair of the Arctic Council is the launch of the Arctic Economic Council. As part of its "development for the people of the North" theme, Canada has also been focusing on safe Arctic shipping, responsible resource development, protection of the Arctic marine environment, and the development of guidelines for sustainable Arctic tourism. Adaptation to climate change and environmental and scientific issues were said to remain a strong focus under the Canadian chair as the Council continues to evolve in more policy-oriented directions.

Canadian lines of effort included strengthening the Arctic Council through tracking and archiving the work of its many working groups, task forces, and projects, and promoting consensus, transparency, and continuity through cooperating with Observers (including a new group of six Observer countries that Canada and other members welcomed in 2013), as well as multilateral environmental organizations and other institutions.

American Plans for the Arctic Council

American speakers foresaw continuity with Canada’s broad priorities including improved economic conditions for Arctic inhabitants, safe shipping, sustainable resource development, and protecting and adapting the Arctic environment at a time of rapid climate change.

Overall, broad overlap and continuity between Canadian chair priorities and American plans for the Arctic Council were identified in areas such as marine issues, social development, enhancing the participation and capacity of Permanent Participants, tracking and archiving projects, listening to Northern voices, and strengthening the relationship between the Arctic Council and other international organizations with shared interests in the Arctic. The need for continuity on responsible economic development, the Arctic Economic Council, and marine shipping was emphasized by Alaskan participants.

Operational goals for the upcoming U.S. Chairmanship of the Council include strengthening the institution as a forum, for example continuing to work with the Permanent Secretariat of the Arctic Council to track projects and improve implementation of agreements; increasing the involvement of Observer States and Permanent Participants; enhancing relations between the Arctic Council and other international and intergovernmental Arctic organizations; and generally improving accountability and transparency within the Arctic Council.

Another broad goal of the U.S. chairmanship is to develop a robust public outreach program and educate Americans and citizens of other nations on the importance of the Arctic and its potential global impacts.

The agenda of the U.S. chairmanship will address maritime issues in particular, including the possibility of a regional seas agreement, as well as ways to improve maritime safety and fisheries stewardship. Climate change and its effects on the Arctic region will be a primary focus of the U.S. chairmanship, with particular attention on the impact of pollutants such as black carbon and methane, an ecosystem-based management system for fisheries, and global standards for safe Arctic drilling. According to Admiral Robert Papp, U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic,
the United States has a “moral imperative” to preserve and protect the Arctic through safe shipping and sustainable development.

A unique challenge of the U.S. chairmanship will be the transition to a new administration after the 2016 presidential elections. Maintaining continuity and a clear vision of the United States’ goals over the next two years will be imperative to a successful chairmanship.

**Recommendations for the U.S. Chairmanship**

As Canada prepares to pass the torch of the Arctic Council to the United States, speakers passed along suggestions of key issues that should be addressed over the next two years. First, the United States should promote the implementation of the Arctic Council’s 2011 Search and Rescue and 2013 Oil Spill Preparedness and Response agreements through concrete protocols and national actions. Second, the United States should embrace more meaningful oil spill prevention commitments, such as higher liability caps. Additional recommendations for the U.S. chairmanship include further developing a black carbon initiative and other methods to mitigate the effects of climate change; promote the importance of the Polar Code, particularly Part Two which addresses pollution prevention; and encourage the resolution of maritime boundary issues, including U.S. ratification of UNCLOS. Canada and the other Arctic states and actors will be looking to the United States for strong leadership on these key issues.

**The Future of Arctic Governance**

A common theme throughout the conference is that there is an unprecedented and growing interest in the Arctic and the issues of the region. This growing interest has been demonstrated partly through the dramatic evolution of the Arctic Council since its creation in 1991. However, with the expansion of the Arctic Council to include new Observer States, come challenges to the Council’s already malleable governance structure. It was emphasized that Arctic Council governance and financing is in need of constant review and improvement. The Arctic Council needs to work on a long-term shared vision that transcends two-year Chairs, better implementation of Arctic Council agreements, increased accountability and transparency within the Council, a strengthened role of the Permanent Secretariat, and efforts to make its important work better known.

Besides the challenges to the structure and governance systems of the Arctic Council, current geopolitical tensions could pose obstacles to the future of Arctic cooperation. Both Canadian and American officials emphasized that collaboration with Russia would be maintained in the Arctic Council, an important area of agreement. Emerging challenges in the Arctic, such as search and rescue capabilities and oil spill response and preparedness, are concrete issues that require the commitment and cooperation of all Arctic nations, as well as non-Arctic actors who are invested in the region and will be impacted by its changes. A strong focus on the Arctic Council’s founding premises of environmental protection and sustainable development, as well as examining new opportunities for practical cooperation, could preserve and protect existing cooperative patterns among Arctic and non-Arctic states during tenuous geopolitical times.
Passing the Arctic Council Torch:  
A Review of the Canadian Chairmanship and  
Preview of the Upcoming American Chairmanship  

Tuesday, September 30, 2014  
8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.  
2nd Floor Conference Room  
Center for Strategic and International Studies  
1616 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20036  

CONFERENCE AGENDA  

8:30am: Registration and Light Breakfast  

9:00am: Welcome Remarks by  

Ms. Heather A. Conley  
Senior Vice President for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic, CSIS  

Mr. John Higginbotham  
Senior Fellow, CIGI and Carleton University  

9:05am: Keynote Address: Accomplishments of the Canadian Arctic Council Chairmanship  

Mr. Vincent Rigby  
Chair of the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials
9:30am: Panel One: The Canadian Chairmanship: The Story So Far

Premier Peter Taptuna  
Government of the Nunavut Territory

Ms. Susan Harper  
Senior Arctic Official, Canada

Ms. Okalik Eegeesiak  
Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Council

Dr. Alexander Shestakov  
Director, Global Arctic Program, WWF

Dr. Andrea Charron  
Professor, University of Manitoba

Moderated by

Ms. Heather A. Conley  
Senior Vice President for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic, CSIS

10:45am: Keynote Address: The U.S. Arctic Council Chairmanship

Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr.  
U.S. Special Representative to the Arctic

11:15am: Panel Two: American Plans for the Arctic Council

Ambassador David Balton  
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science

Representative Robert Herron  
House of Representatives, State of Alaska

Ms. Marilyn Heiman  
Director (U.S. Arctic), The Pew Charitable Trusts

Mr. David J. Hayes  
Distinguished Visiting Lecturer in Law, Stanford Law School
Senator Lesil McGuire  
Senate, State of Alaska  

*Moderated by*  

**Mr. John Higginbotham**  
Senior Fellow, CIGI and Carleton University  

12:30pm: Lunch  

12:30pm: Lunch Keynote Address: An Arctic Council Report Card: The View from the Canadian North  

**Premier Bob McLeod**  
Government of the Northwest Territories, Canada  

1:30pm: Panel Three: The Future of Arctic Governance  

**The Honourable David Ramsay**  
NWT Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, and President, Pacific Northwest Economic Region  

**Dr. Michael Byers**  
Professor, University of British Columbia  

**Dr. Lawson Brigham**  
Distinguished Professor of Geology and Arctic Policy, University of Alaska Fairbanks  

**Dr. Terry Fenge**  
Senior Policy Advisor, Arctic Athabaskan Council  

*Moderated by*  

**Ms. Heather A. Conley**  
Senior Vice President for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic, CSIS
On behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Centre for International Governance (CIGI), we invite you to join us for a high-level conference to take stock of the accomplishments achieved during the Canadian Arctic Council Chairmanship, such as the inauguration of the Arctic Economic Council, and to look forward to the major themes of the upcoming U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2015. The conference will engage senior officials and experts as they examine future challenges and opportunities for cooperation in the Arctic region, as well as the future of the Arctic Council in light of current geopolitical tensions with Russia.

This conference is hosted in partnership with the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Waterloo, Canada.

Lunch will be served.

Please RSVP to Caroline Rohloff at CRohloff@csis.org

The discussion will be ON the record.

Need help finding us? Use the map of our new location on csis.org with parking lots and metro stops.