



RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

Resource Security Watch No.50

July 10, 2023 **Annie Swingen, Hakim Morris**

Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Science and Technology; Resource Security; Arctic; Baltics; China; Russia; South Africa; Ukraine

WASHINGTON WORRIES ABOUT THE ARCTIC...

For the Pentagon, the Arctic region is becoming a source of growing focus – and worry. At a panel discussion in early April, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Arctic strategy and global resilience Iris Ferguson sounded the alarm on a number of fronts. While climate change has resulted in the opening of trade routes, expanded exploration opportunities, and widened access to natural resources like oil, gas, and rare-earth deposits, Ferguson noted, it has also allowed "our adversaries [to] have greater presence and access to the region." "There's a sense that we in the Pentagon also need to be thinking more proactively about what we need to operate in the theater, how we work closely with our allies and partners."

This awareness is resulting in notable shifts in U.S. strategy. The Defense Department, along with the country's military services and combatant commands, is in the process of updating the 2019 U.S. Arctic Strategy so as to better maintain a safe, secure, and peaceful region. The strategy involves enhancing domain awareness, understanding the region's changing environment, conducting military exercises, and developing new tactics and equipment for Arctic operations. However, operating in the Arctic presents unique challenges in military terms, among them extremely low temperatures that affect engine performance, oil viscosity, and soldier exposure. Additionally, communication and infrastructure in the High North are limited, something that – according to Ferguson – is a perennial issue that has the U.S. looking to private sector firms to incorporate low-Earth orbit technology for better communications to the Arctic. (U.S. Department of Defense, April 5, 2023; *Bloomberg*, April 14, 2023; GIS, April 17, 2023; *National Defense Magazine*, April 28, 2023)

...AS MOSCOW MOBILIZES IN THE REGION

On April 6th, Russia kicked off two days of Arctic military drills with participants from nine unnamed non-Arctic countries to test Russian-made equipment. The exercises featured up to 1,800 soldiers, 15 ships and 40 aircraft and, according to a statement from Russia's Northern Fleet, were designed "to protect the security of Russia's merchant marine and sea lanes such as the Northeast Passage." Following the March 2022 decision by the "Arctic 7" (Canada, the U.S., Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland) to boycott Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council due to its invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is increasingly looking eastward for cooperation and investment in projects previously involving Western firms. (C4isrnet.com, April 4, 2023; *Deutsche Welle*, Apr 11, 2023)

BREAKING CHINA'S STRANGLEHOLD ON THE RARE EARTHS MARKET

In a bid to reduce dependence on Chinese supplies, Sweden, South Africa, and Australia are leading the way in utilizing mine waste and by-products to extract rare earth elements. Projects now underway focus on extracting rare earths from mining debris or by-products, with the potential to significantly reduce the expected deficit in these critical elements over time. The efforts reflect a scientific reality; recovering rare earths from waste is quicker than developing new mines, making it an attractive solution to meet growing demand.

In Sweden, iron ore miner LKAB plans to extract rare earths from by-products of existing iron ore mines. Rainbow Rare Earths in South Africa aims to process waste from years of phosphate mining, while Iluka in Australia is preparing to process stockpiled by-products from mineral sands production. These projects are expected to benefit from new technologies for separating rare earths, such as ion chromatography, which offer lower environmental footprints compared to traditional methods used in China. The increasing prices of rare earths also make these projects economically viable. (Reuters, April 4, 2023)

RECOGNIZING THE HOLODOMOR

A number of European parliaments, including those of Slovenia, France, Belgium, and the UK, are recognizing Ukraine's 1932-1933 Holodomor famine as a genocide. Jani Prednik, a member of the Social Democratic party of Slovenia and one of the initiators of the relevant resolution in that country's parliament, described the Holodomor as "one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes and crimes against humanity of the 20th Century." This increased recognition is fueled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, and its ongoing aggression against Kyiv. But while the parliamentary declarations carry symbolic weight, legal experts caution that they do not hold the same legal significance as court rulings. Genocide prosecutions need to meet stringent legal standards, and retroactively applying genocide laws is generally not possible. However, there are now discussions about the potential for future genocide charges against Russia due to its present actions in Ukraine, with policymakers and geopolitical experts drawing parallels between today's war and Soviet-era atrocities, including mass killings, the widespread destruction of cities and seizure of essential foodstuffs. (*Euronews*, May 26, 2023)