



Avoiding a Full Arctic Meltdown

A Blueprint for Near-Term Global Action

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Introduction and summary

Supplied with new evidence of accelerating Arctic warming and approaching environmental tipping points, the Obama administration will convene science ministers from around the world in September to assess the rate and consequences of Arctic climate change and weigh global strategies for averting its worst effects.¹

This first-ever White House Arctic Science Ministerial—which will include top science advisers, high-level officials, and Arctic indigenous community leaders—coincides roughly with the one-year anniversary of President Barack Obama’s 2015 Alaskan Arctic trip.² After his historic visit to the High North, President Obama told *Vogue*, “The looming crisis in the Alaska Arctic is a tangible preview of the looming crisis of the global condition.”³

The president is right to worry. The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet, setting off a cascade of dangerous changes at the top of the world that include vanishing Arctic snow and ice,⁴ thawing permafrost,⁵ and melting of the Greenland ice sheet.⁶ These changes risk triggering irreversible tipping points with perilous side effects, such as unmanageable sea-level rise and coastal flooding,⁷ more frequent extreme weather,⁸ and increased warming and carbon emissions.⁹ These changes threaten the well-being of people around the globe.

Fortunately, a small window of time remains to avoid a full Arctic meltdown. World leaders and science ministers have a number of opportunities this year to take groundbreaking actions that would help avert cataclysmic Arctic warming and accelerate the transition to the low-carbon global economy. These actions include:

- **Shine a stark light on the latest Arctic science at the White House Arctic Ministerial in September:** Attendees have an opportunity to make a compelling case for urgent global action to fight climate change. They should also launch a high-level panel of leading policy and science experts and establish an early warning system to predict the long-term health of critical Arctic systems under different emission reduction scenarios and help world leaders set future national goals that guide countries away from crossing unsafe Arctic-warming thresholds.¹⁰

- **Join and build on the Paris Agreement on climate change:** The United States and China both formally joined the Paris Agreement on September 3.¹¹ Other world leaders must immediately follow suit so that the agreement can take effect this year. World leaders should also build a rock-solid and transparent system to hold countries accountable for meeting and periodically strengthening their climate commitments.¹²
- **Advance other global actions to curb climate change:** These include reaching agreement on an amendment to phase down dangerous and heat-trapping hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs; creating a strong market-based system to curb aviation emissions; and setting an ambitious goal to cut Arctic black carbon pollution and committing to create a similar regional target for methane.¹³

By taking these doable yet meaningful steps, world leaders and science ministers can help put the world on a low-carbon emissions pathway that avoids the most dire effects of Arctic and global warming.

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