



Working Group 8:

ARCTIC SECURITY & CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Extract from:

Planetary Security:

Peace and Cooperation in
Times of Climate Change and
Global Environmental Challenges



Conference Report

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WORKING GROUP 8

ARCTIC SECURITY AND CONFLICTING INTERESTS

As the world's attention turns to the rapidly changing Arctic, new interests are projected into an already complex landscape. In this Working Group, we discussed how the interactions of these multiple interests challenge conventional concepts and approaches to security.

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Infographics: Philippe Rekacewicz, Visionscarto.net

1. CHALLENGES

"It is no exaggeration to say that the Arctic has crossed a threshold leading to what systems analysts refer to as a state change" – Oran R. Young²³

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Geographically, the Arctic comprises the Arctic Ocean, which is international water, and the land surrounding it. Politically, there are eight Arctic states in this polar region: Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Canada, Russia and the United States of America. They operate in various networks and alliances, from the regional scale of cooperation among the Nordic states, to the transatlantic scope of NATO, and the increasingly global perspectives of the Arctic Council. And culturally, the Arctic is home to many indigenous people groups, whose knowledge of the hostile Arctic environment has given them age-old resilience to change. Together, these actors and some new players will play a defining role in how the Arctic is managed in the future.

Communities in the Arctic are facing the challenge of unprecedented environmental change. According to the Arctic Council, "[t]he evidence of global warming is in no place more obvious than in the Arctic region. The Arctic has warmed rapidly during the last four decades. The magnitude of temperature increase in the Arctic is twice as large as the global increase." The US National Snow and Ice Data Center this year recorded the fourth lowest extent of sea ice in satellite record, evidence that "reinforces the long-term downward trend in Arctic ice extent".²⁴ As the Arctic warms, landscapes and ecosystems are being transformed, bringing new risks to human safety and security.

Arctic environmental change also presents a global challenge. The Arctic's sea ice is a major driver of global weather systems. As the ice melts, exposing dark seawater, less solar radiation is reflected back to space. Arctic change amplifies global warming. Ice and melted water from the Arctic Ocean have profound effects on ocean circulation patterns in the North Atlantic, from there influencing ocean and other climate systems over the entire

²³ Cited in Kraska J, *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change* (2011) (hereinafter Kraska 2011)

²⁴ National Snow & Ice Data Center (NSIDC), 'Arctic sea ice news and analysis' (2015)

<http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/2015/10/2015-melt-season-in-review>

planet.²⁵ These processes are well represented in computer models. Climate model outputs vary, but all show a clear trend towards warming in the Arctic and diminishing sea-ice extent. Unless strong efforts are put in place to mitigate climate change, the scientific consensus is that Arctic sea ice will completely disappear during the summer months before the year 2100.²⁶

This increased thawing and resulting environmental change in the region is both expanding opportunities and creating new challenges in the region, which contribute to its rising significance as a global security arena. The melting ice is expected to open new commercial shipping routes, and increase natural resource exploration, provide increased access to fishing stocks, and facilitate higher tourism numbers.²⁷

However, the risks and benefits of these opportunities differ for the various actors in the Arctic, and around the world. In particular, exploiting opportunities in the Arctic region can lead to escalating costs for adaptation to climate disruption elsewhere. Challenging clashes of interest are playing out at multiple levels, among Indigenous Peoples and local communities, environmental organisations, NGOs, regional groups, international bodies, commercial actors, and states. As interest in the region increases, it remains to be seen how the goals of each will interact.

Meeting the challenges of balancing these multiple interests will require local, regional, and international cooperation and foresight. As of yet, diplomatic and multilateral cooperation has existed alongside unilateral state action on the Arctic. While multi-member groups have taken shape, sovereign interests have become a politicised topic in virtually all of the surrounding states. Most recently, Russia has submitted a contested bid to the United Nations for the rights to 1.2 million square kilometres of the region.²⁸ Since 1982, territorial interests have been guided by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which establishes the right for countries to exploit the continental shelf up to 200 nautical miles from their shoreline.²⁹ Yet there are fears that this treaty could be transgressed, which presents a variety of potential territory-based scenarios. Firstly, international or regional conflict can occur if states in the region choose to pursue sovereign interests through military means. In addition, rising sea levels have the potential to alter geographical and maritime borders across the world, which could also ignite international maritime law disputes between states. Thirdly, some fear the return to land rights system based solely on a state's ability to defend the land/water in question.³⁰

²⁵ National Snow & Ice Data Center (NSIDC), 'Arctic sea ice news and analysis' (2015) <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/2015/10/2015-melt-season-in-review>

²⁶ Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group I, Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis, Chapter 12, Long-term Climate Change: Projections, Commitments and Irreversibility http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5_Chapter12_FINAL.pdf; See also Figure SPM.7b in IPCC AR5 WG1 on nearly ice-free Septembers predicted by 2050 <http://www.climatechange2013.org/report/reports-graphic/report-graphics/>

²⁷ Kraska 2011

²⁸ Reuters, 'Russia resubmits claim for energy-rich Arctic shelf' (4 August, 2015) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/04/russia-arctic-idUSL5N10F3H920150804>

²⁹ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Part VI, Continental Shelf, article 82 www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm

³⁰ Paskal C, *How climate change is pushing the boundaries of security and foreign policy* (June 2007 Chatham House Briefing Paper) <http://www.partnershipforchange.ie/library/Report%2017%20How%20Climate%20Change%20is%20Pushing%20the%20Boundaries%20of%20Security.pdf>

2. RESPONSES

Forty-seven nations are currently engaged in one or more of the 14 international organisations dealing with Arctic affairs. Many international legal frameworks are concerned with the Arctic, especially regarding environmental and ecosystem issues.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Maritime Organisation play a pivotal role in pre-empting and addressing potential conflict in the Arctic region.³¹ Further, the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA) oversee claims by states to secure the outer limits of its continental shelf.

The Arctic Council, formally established in 1996, is a high-level intergovernmental forum that provides a means for promoting co-operation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the permanent participation of representatives of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic, who are consulted in all negotiations and decisions. It has steadily expanded the number of observers; China, Singapore, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea are now among the 12 non-Arctic observer countries. Meeting bi-annually, the Arctic Council issues non-binding declarations. In addition, its Working Groups produce authoritative scientific assessments on environmental change and sustainable development in the region. It currently operates three task forces charged with scoping emerging issues and proposing improved ways to deal with particularly challenging issues: the Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation, the Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic, and the Scientific Cooperation Task Force.

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Also known as the Finnish Initiative, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy is a non-binding yet broad-ranging agreement founded at a ministerial conference in Rovaniemi, Finland, in June 1991. All eight Arctic states are signatories to the agreement, which is widely seen as a precursor to the Arctic Council. It sets out the principles that underpin responses to Arctic challenges today: an emphasis on environmental monitoring and protection, and respect for the needs and traditions of Arctic Indigenous Peoples.

The European Union maintains an observer status in the Arctic Council, and regularly participates in meetings. On 20 January 2011, the European Parliament adopted an own initiative report and resolution on “A sustainable EU policy for the High North”. The report indicates the need for a united, coordinated EU policy on the Arctic region, stating the EU’s priorities, identifying the potential challenges, and defining a strategy. The scope of the EU’s Arctic policy includes: environment and climate change, support to Indigenous Peoples and local populations, research, monitoring and assessments, exploitation of hydrocarbons, fisheries, transport, tourism, and multilateral governance.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) is made up of the five Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Finland), Russia, and the European Commission. Established in 1993, the group attempts to facilitate sustainable cooperative development in an effort to prevent political tension between members.

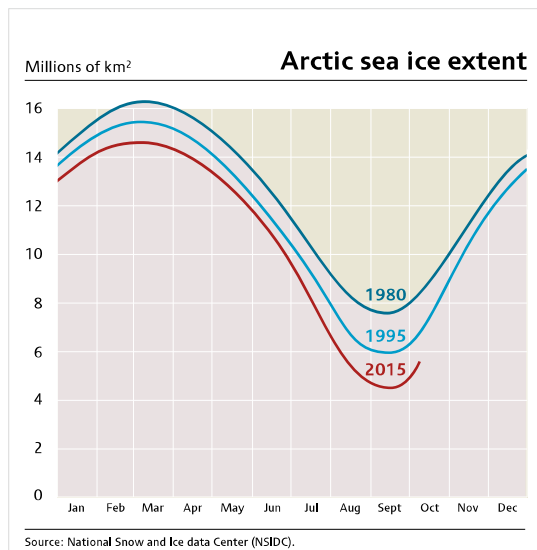
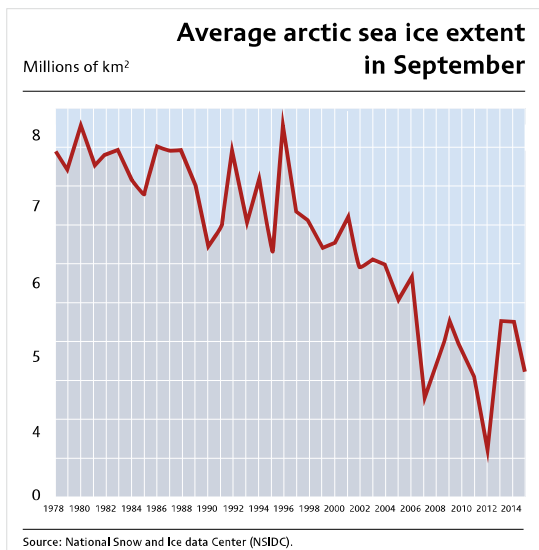
³¹ For Russia’s Arctic claim, see Van Efferink L, ‘Arctic Geopolitics – Russia’s territorial claims, UNCLOS, the Lomonosov Ridge’ http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/publication_efferink_van_leonhardt_arctic_geopolitics_russian_territorial_claims_unclos_lomonosov_ridge_exclusive_economic_zones_baselines_flag_planting_north_pole_navy/

3. FURTHER READING

- An image of claimed land in the Arctic region by country: http://cdn.static-economist.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/original-size/images/print-edition/20141220_IRM937.png
- GeoPolitics North – A geopolitics organisation with links to Arctic strategy from a variety of states: <http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/>
- How climate change is pushing the boundaries of security and foreign policy: <http://www.partnershipforchange.ie/library/Report%2017%20How%20Climate%20Change%20is%20Pushing%20the%20Boundaries%20of%20Security.pdf>

Arctic Strategy by Country

- Kingdom of Denmark (2011 – 2020): http://usa.um.dk/en/-/media/USA/Washington/Arctic_strategy.pdf
- Sweden (2014): <http://www.openaid.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Swedens-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf>
- Finland (2013): <http://vnk.fi/documents/10616/334509/Arktinen+strategia+2013+en.pdf/6b6fb723-40ec-4c17-b286-5b5910fbecf4>
- Norway: https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/report_summary/id2076191/
- Iceland: <http://library.arcticportal.org/1889/1/A-Parliamentary-Resolution-on-ICE-Arctic-Policy-approved-by-Althingi.pdf>
- Canada: <http://www.northernstrategy.gc.ca/index-eng.asp>
- United States: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf





4. ANALYSIS

The Arctic area, for the moment, mainly untouched by human beings, hosts a very sparse native population, who have adapted very well to one of the most rude and hostile climate. For centuries, they have also wisely managed a living in an extremely vulnerable environment.

But the whole region is going through enormous changes. First of all, the climate change induced by the elevation of temperature is now proven to accelerating much faster than was previously predicted by the IPCC at the end of the 1990s. Secondly, this fragile region is experiencing a rapid increase of both mineral and energy resources exploitation, not to mention maritime traffic.

It is clear that economic interests in the Arctic area as a result of globalisation are socially and politically in conflict with the native Arctic communities. This is a very complex multi-layered environment where a lot remains to be done, especially in negotiating sovereignty and control of the Arctic Ocean, the main transportation corridors (Northwest and Northeast passages) as well as the local issues.

In this socially and environmentally changing world, the influence of the various actors are asymmetrical; economic power trumps other social and even sometimes political criteria for decision-making. At present, in spite of significant progress, local communities are still facing difficulties in raising their voices and expressing their opinions during the elaboration or implementation of large industrial projects, extraction infrastructures or the construction of big dams.

Historically, colonial attitudes have shaped governance – and they still do today. This is disempowering communities who cannot eventually decide on important elements used to plan and develop the territory. In the economic landscape, in addition to the private industrial companies who are possibly supported by the political authorities, external states as a third party actors may have an important if not more influential roles than the group conventionally seen as direct Arctic players.

Globalised and neo-liberalised corporatist capitalism is dominant, powerful and visible – but it is just one of the many economic systems at play. It relies on a strong enough state (public sector efficiencies and coordination), and needs to be in balance with local economies, which play an essential role in social cohesion and human security, and the commons both local and global. The short-term profit imperatives that are pushing companies into Arctic exploitation have irreversible consequences for the complex set of securities on a global scale. These longer-term costs do not appear on corporate balance sheets, and are not featured coherently in national economic planning.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The empowerment, views, needs and hopes for the future of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic are as varied as those of any international group of people, but due to their long experience and territorial practices, one wonders whether Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic should be given the right to self-determination in order to allow them to be more responsibly involved in the decision-making process.

There is no way back from tipping points. Choices can still be made about avoiding the worst Arctic (and global) impacts, but these decision points are rarely articulated. Opening the Arctic to new flows of people (tourists, resource extraction) locks the world into known accelerators of climate change. The Arctic can now be “opened” even without people – for instance, military defence options now include automated technologies.

What kind of governance is needed for these complex global issues? Accountable and transparent governance implies new global forums for multi-actor dialogue. The Arctic Council's experience shows the value of regional forums with diplomatic credibility (even with external actors who do not have a border or a direct link to the Arctic area), wider contributions from international observers, and a remit oriented towards knowledge gathering and sharing and a longer-term perspective than "normal" political decision-making. Within Arctic nations (and other countries!), Arctic issues deserve wider recognition and engagement.

Forums and institutions that maintain long-sighted views and discussions, which allow for ideological pluralism rather than the suppression thereof (because of extreme and uncertain conditions and high rates of change) are particularly useful.

The current debate and negotiations on economically and politically managing the Arctic territory and sea remain widely open. The option is not necessarily to share the traditional concept of "one country, one full sovereignty". It is to invent a new form of territorial governance through sharing, participation, cooperation, and eventually pooling together the means of development, and collectively deciding (by all actors) on what is the level of "reasonable intensity" the Arctic area can sustain without harm for the nature and the people.

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