

Changing Geopolitics of the North

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The circumpolar North has been described on a spectrum ranging, from a colonial external point of view, from a periphery to an internal image of a homeland of peoples with their identities. In classical geopolitics the North was seen as a reserve of natural resources and military space for patrolling, training and testing for the sovereignty, and security-political and economic interests of the arctic states. The industrialized, militarized and divided circumpolar North of the Cold War, however, started to thaw in the late 1980s as a result of increased interrelations between peoples and civil societies, as well as international cooperation and region-building by states.

This more human approach of geopolitics in the 1990s meant, on one hand, increased stability and decreased military tension, and, on the other, a rise of wide and deepening international and inter-regional cooperation. As a result of these developments, the circumpolar North has become a stable and peaceful area. Further, this meant a significant change in northern geopolitics. However, neither international relations nor geopolitics remain unaltered, and consequently, the geo-strategic importance of the region is growing, with significant geopolitical, socio-economic and environmental change occurring in the North with regard to certain factors, such as strategic energy resources, energy security and climate change (e.g. Heininen 2007b).

In the manifold growth in its geo-strategic importance, which the North has recently witnessed we can find on one hand, continuity of how in the North “space” has been utilized and treated as “non-political” in classical geopolitics. Unlike new geopolitics that emphasizes indigenous peoples as (international) actors and the importance of identity/ies. Further, critical geopolitics has another approach of “politicization” of space which can be seen on one hand, in external and internal images on the Arctic (e.g. Heininen 2007a), and on the other, how knowledge and power are used when defining impacts of climate change such as ‘uncertainty’ in the North. (see Table 1)

Significant geopolitical change: from confrontation into cooperation

The transformation from the confrontation of the Cold War period into wide international cooperation in the 1990s was the first significant change in circumpolar geopolitics and international relations. Further, this development emphasizes the importance of cooperation across national borders to foster political, common and comprehensive security and promote human development and democracy (Östreg 1999, 16-17; Heininen 2004). The change also meant a new institutional landscape based on wide international, mostly multilateral, cooperation in and for the circumpolar North with both intergovernmental and civic organizations and forums (e.g. Chaturvedi 2000), such as the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, the Arctic Council, the University of the Arctic and the Northern Research Forum.

In the circumpolar North the end of the Cold War period has meant many changes and been perceived in various ways. For example, according to Willy Østreg (see this volume) the endeavour of the post Cold War world society, mostly meaning re-conceptualization of national security has been promoted through the sets of interrelated processes, of “civilianization”, “regionalization” and “mobilization”. Correspondingly, as stated by the Arctic Human Development Report the main themes, or trends, of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations in the early 21st century are first, the increasing circumpolar cooperation by indigenous peoples’ organizations and sub-national governments; second, region-building with states as major actors; and third, a new kind of relationship between the circumpolar North and the outside world, demonstrating that the North has relevance in world politics (Heininen 2004; also see Table 2). These processes and themes include region-building and the establishment of new organizations such as the Arctic Council (Ottawa Declaration 1996), devolution of power and high activity of indigenous peoples’ organizations, growing academic and scientific cooperation as well as concern over the environment by civil organizations and civil societies. As a result of the latter, a new kind of ‘wild’ circumpolar cooperation for the environment and some sort of ‘connectivity’ between non-state actors was born, and consequently, central governments were forced to react to the new situation by more sophisticated mechanisms such as institutional inter-governmental cooperation to regain control over international cooperation and reassert the primacy of their national interests (e.g. Käkönen 1992).

All in all, each of the above, *per se*, indicates and reflects a significant change, and when all are put together the picture is a multi-functional process more complicated than previously in the colonial days or in classical geopolitics.

Further, northern peoples' organizations have become international actors with their own agendas and certain relevance in world politics like the influence of the epistemic community in the Stockholm Convention on POPs shows. This is largely based on the above-mentioned 'connectivity', which has also been interpreted to mean that the circumpolar North can be defined as an internationally distinctive region (e.g. Young and Einarsson 2004, 18-19), in addition to the ability of northern peoples and communities to develop "innovative political and legal arrangements that meet the needs of the residents of the circumpolar North without rupturing the larger political systems in which the region is embedded" (ibid, 237).

All in all, the international cooperation of the circumpolar North at the early- 21st century can be interpreted to be a success story due to the fact that the main aim of all relevant international actors, i.e. to decrease military and political tension and increase stability and peace in the northern 'military theatre' of the Cold War, has been reached. Consequently, security-politically the circumpolar North is a stable and peaceful region without wars and armed conflicts or even reasons for serious conflicts. It is not challenged with significant global issues such as food crisis, climate crisis and developing crisis, as defined by the General Secretary of the UN at the G8 Summit in July 2008. This is a real achievement in a time that has seen about twenty major armed conflicts the world over, mostly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Harbon and Wallersteen 2007).

Another significant geopolitical change: growing global interest toward the North

As a stable, peaceful and advanced region, the circumpolar North has seen positive developments within the Northern Hemisphere as well as in world politics: Within the region, a number of innovative political and legal arrangements have been developed, while a certain devolution of

power has also taken place. The diversity of northern nature and northern cultures is remarkable. Due to the fact that climate change has influenced greatly the northernmost (coastal) regions of the globe, their peoples, settlements, man-made infrastructure and nature (e.g. ACIA 2004), the Arctic has become one of the first fronts, and is used as a parameter, of climate change. Indeed, the circumpolar North has become a global “laboratory” or “workshop” for (multidisciplinary) research on climate developments which has made the North academically interesting (e.g. Heininen 2005).

Further, the circumpolar North has recently witnessed a manifold growth in its geo-strategic importance due to, on one hand its rich natural resources such as conventional oil and military-political reasons, and on the other, global security and environmental problems such as the existence of the nuclear weapons system, long-range air and sea pollution and climate change (Heininen forth-coming). There are also international governmental organizations and major powers from outside the region which take an interest in the North. For example, the new Northern Dimension is interpreted to mean a common policy of the European Union (EU), the Russian Federation, Iceland and Norway in Northern Europe.

In addition, northern issues are finally being given a higher priority on the EU’s agenda and matters relating to the north have been an important concern of the United Nations (UN) for years; for example, the UN has special duties in the region through the UN International Law of the Sea. Major powers from outside the region, such as the UK, France, Germany, China, Japan and South Korea are taking a growing interest in many aspects of the North, such as in scientific research, a field which allows the waving of a “flag”, particularly in the IPY 2007-2008.

Finally, there is a growing world wide, even global, economic and political interest toward the northernmost regions of the globe, particularly due to the estimated fossils in the shelves of the northern seas and visions of new trans-arctic sea routes. Consequently, trans-national corporations (TNCs) have strong commercial interests in becoming involved in the utilization of energy resources. However, state-owned, national oil and gas companies, such as those in Norway and Russia, now control about 80% of the world’s reserves (Robinson 2007).

Indeed, the North of the 21st century is not isolated, but closely integrated into the current world of globalization and a part of the international system. For example, two of the above-mentioned themes of circumpolar geopolitics are contextually related to globalization as cooperation between indigenous peoples' organizations can be seen to be global, and the relationship between the North and the rest of the world is of a global nature. Furthermore, individuals, societies and governments are impacted by similar global problems and challenges, and the growing demands placed upon them by the rest of the globe - all of which transcends the traditional distinction between a core and a periphery.

At present, however, this is not the whole picture; in addition to the circumpolar North being the focus of growing global interest, the eight arctic states also demonstrate a growing, national interest in the region and its resources. For this there are certain geographical, geopolitical, legal and historical reasons; geopolitically and according to international law the region consists of the northernmost parts of the eight arctic states with their sovereignty and national interests; therefore although the region has much in common such as geography, common history, same kinds of natural and climatic conditions and the current intensive interrelations, it is not totally correct to claim the circumpolar North as a distinctive international region.

Whereas for centuries the arctic states maintained a colonial policy toward their northern peripheries, nowadays they have concentrated their national interests on the North, and some of them have a special Northern agenda and policy. Consequently, in northern regions there exists a recognition of the politico-cultural legacy of state colonialism as well as a firm residue of 'national interest' by a state.

All in all, in the North a significant level of rapid and multi-functional change, which might have several consequences, is occurring. This raises a number of questions, e.g. whether the governments of the arctic states are ready for a thorough discussion on relevant issues, such as mass-scale utilization of basically untapped natural resource endowments of the region, existing disputes, and energy security in the context of institutionalized international cooperation like the Arctic Council and the United Nations. Or will there be more traditional responses and solutions, such as increased emphasis on national defence in Northern regions? Or, will this happen in a

bilateral context or in the context of different *ad-hoc* coalitions such as the five littoral states of the Arctic Ocean (e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway 2007)?

Key indicators of a geopolitical change

All this indicates that in the circumpolar North significant and rapid environmental, geo-economic and geopolitical change is occurring. As a result of this, northern regions and seas have become a target area for the growing economic, political and military interests of central governments of the arctic states as well as of major powers outside the region and transnational companies. A major attraction in this regard are on one hand, the huge (mostly potential) deposits of oil and natural gas in the region and the potential contribution of northern sea routes for global shipping; “states’ activities aimed at ensuring energy security are an important element in their foreign policy”, and “countries’ efforts to assure access to natural resources affect security dynamics” (Proninska 2007, 227-228).

With a view to the above, on one hand, scenarios for the future have been established (e.g. PAME; Brigham 2007) and on the other, security implications and threat pictures due to global warming have been drawn (e.g. Hubert 2007; Borgerson 2008), trying to foresee what will happen in the North. It may be more relevant and useful, however, to identify main indicators, i.e. the precise factors and dynamics which are indicative of changes in northern geopolitics. Consequently, I have listed the following geopolitical factors / dynamics, and relevant phenomena behind them, to be regarded among key indicators of the on going multi-functional change in, and growing global interest toward, the North (see also Table 3):

- 1) First, **national sovereignty** which is seen to be endangered by climate change in some of the littoral states of the Arctic Ocean such as Canada. On the other hand, it acts like a trigger of, or it is used as an excuse for, new national claims to expand executive economic zone, or a right to utilize natural resources or make an option for them;

- 2) Second, **military presence** is there for the defence of sovereignty and national security of the state. Security and military-policy includes first of all aspects of normal national defence and routine patrolling such as the patrolling of strategic nuclear submarines (SSBNs) and long-range strategic bombers in and above the Arctic Ocean, testing of weapons and military training, and deployment of radar stations, but also other implementations of the nuclear weapon system such as the missile silos in Fort Greely in Alaska as parts of the US national Missile Defence (NMD) system (e.g. Heininen forthcoming). In spite of the dualism of climate change here the development is not determined and does not necessarily mean that “the Arctic could descend into armed conflict” as for example, Borgerson (2008) has speculated;
- 3) Third, the **utilization of natural resources** has high strategic importance due to basically untapped rich natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas. Already the current total gross production of the circumpolar North of about \$225 billion (Duhaime and Caron 2006), based predominantly on the large-scale exploitation of hydrocarbons for the energy needs of the northern developed countries, is high, but the rough estimation that circa 20-25% of the world’s undiscovered oil and natural gas resources are ‘hidden’ in the shelf of the Arctic Ocean makes the utilization of strategic energy resources a very important factor;
- 4) Fourth, **energy security** is an important factor here due to the fact that it has a growing strategic importance among national interests for the state to assure access to energy resources. Further, energy issues are assuming a central position for the relations between major powers such as the USA, the EU, Russia, China and India, the interruptions of Russia’s energy supplies with its neighbours finally “made energy security a central topic”, and security relations became ‘re-energized’ (Dunay and Lachowski 2007, 23 and 48). Consequently, due to the fact that energy security is a very global phenomenon the North is becoming highly strategic in world politics and geo-economics;
- 5) Fifth, following the growing utilization of energy resources and increased flows of globalization, infrastructure and transportation are badly needed. Proper logistics include

both the existing sea routes and trans-arctic routes through the Arctic Ocean which indicate a revolution in global shipping and trade.

- 6) Sixth, **technology**, particularly a faith of technology, is an important factor, because the mainstream thinking is that an advanced, new kind of cold climate technology will solve the challenges and problems and thus save us. Here the irony is that at the same time when climate change helps to overcome the (last) challenges of nature such as sea ice and makes it easier to “conquer” the North Pole, it creates bigger challenges for human built infrastructure in melting permafrost, which is considerable according to the theory of “risk society” (e.g. Beck 1992), and a need for accident prevention;
- 7) Seventh, clear indicators of impacts of globalization in the North are on one hand, **global security problems** such as the nuclear weapon system and its new applications and testing of new weapons. On the other, there are global environmental problems such as long-range air and water pollution, and climate change which are able to create major challenges and risks to communities on coastal regions, forcing people either to adapt or become environmental refugees;
- 8) Eight, there are more **flows of globalization** such as flows of raw materials and goods, or those of labour and tourists, and they are detectably influencing the northern environment and northern communities;
- 9) Ninth, institutionalized **international, mostly multilateral cooperation** with stability emphasizes cooperation instead of confrontation and consequently, is the most fundamental human response to new challenges. Here climate change can be taken either as a new kind of a (geopolitical) factor to challenge the current intergovernmental cooperation or a good reason for deeper scientific, educational and other knowledge-based cooperation between different actors;

10) Tenth, followed from the previous **education, science and traditional knowledge** can be included as relevant new geopolitical factors in the age of uncertainty, particularly in combination with resilience, and political and legal innovations; and

11) Eleventh and final, **climate change** with its multi-functional impacts is one of the newest factors, in actuality a significant factor *per se* (Heininen 2008), to change northern geopolitics by bringing uncertainty into the societies, politics and governance of the region. Like the approach of “politicization” of space by critical geopolitics knowledge and power are used when defining impacts of climate change ‘to mean ‘uncertainty’ in the North.

In sum, all this entails the undoubted emergence of relevant issues and challenges which we will face, and consequently, we could analytically discuss these relevant issues and challenges, which are both northern and global and have a sort of costs and benefits calculation, too.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the 21st century, the circumpolar North is a stable and peaceful area with institutional, international cooperation, and the region has relevance in world politics. There is an increase of the geostrategic importance of the region due to, on the one hand, an emphasis on geo-economics and the importance of global problems such as climate change, and on the other, growing interest among the arctic states and major powers outside the region in the huge energy resources and the potential share of more accessible arctic regions in the global economy. Consequently, the strategic importance of the North is becoming high on the agenda in geopolitics and economics, both in the Arctic states and major powers outside the region. Furthermore, due to a growing need for, and even competition over, energy resources, there has been a steep rise in competition and claims on northern sea areas and shelves.

Further, and following from the above, significant geopolitical, socioeconomic and environmental changes are occurring in the North with relevant consequences, such as conditions of uncertainty, bigger risks to the environment and human security, threats to local autonomy and

sovereignty. These developments have given rise to traditional responses by individual governments, reducing the impact of multilateral cooperation, when actually there is a need for broader and deeper international cooperation both within the region and on a global level.

As a result of these developments, there is a growing and obvious need for fundamental discussion and negotiations on these issues and challenges. It has become an urgent question on which platforms these discussions will be conducted, either in the context of some *ad-hoc* coalitions or in institutionalized fora such as the Arctic Council and conferences of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic. Further, due to a growing and obvious need for fundamental discussion and open dialogue, the interplay between science and politics might help. One potential stage for open dialogue on relevant northern and global issues, as well as the implementation of the interplay between science and politics, is an Open Assembly of the Northern Research Forum.

Table 1: Main contents of Geopolitics and its implementations in the North

- Classical geopolitics: occupation and control of (physical) space, power politics of a state
 - e.g. the resource models, the technology models
- New geopolitics: geo-economics, actors and identities
 - e.g. Indigenous peoples as actors, the Northern Dimension
- Critical geopolitics: politicization of (physical) space, importance of social
- space, interrelation between knowledge and power
 - e.g. Arctic images, uncertainty of climate change

Table 2: Main themes of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations (according to AHDR 2004)

.. and how Globalization can be seen here

- 1) Increasing circumpolar cooperation by indigenous peoples' organizations and sub-national governments
 - *using the definition of globalization in geo-economics this is global*
- 2) Region-building with unified states as major actors
 - *first of all regional, but can as well be defined global*
- 3) New kind of relationship between the circumpolar North and the outside world
 - *definitely global, and has always been there, but the point is the direction(s)*

Table 3. The Changing Geo-Politics of the North: Main Indicators

<u>Factors / Dynamics</u>	<u>Phenomena</u>
1) National sovereignty	Physical space
2) Military presence	National security Power
3) Utilization of natural resources and new claims	Resource models Jurisdiction
4) Strategic (energy) resources	Energy security
5) Transportation	Logistics
6) Technological development	Modernization Faith of technology
7) Global (security) problems	Globalization World order (models)
8) Flows of globalization	Geo-economics
9) International cooperation and dialogue(-building)	Integration Governance
10) Education, science and traditional knowledge	Human capital Interdisciplinarity Interplay
11) Climate change	Uncertainty Epistemic community

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