

Geopolitics of a Changing North

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Work in Progress - Draft of August 2008

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 late of 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 raise 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. All in all, 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.

This is a position paper for the 5th Open Assembly of the Northern Research Forum *Seeking Balance in a Changing North* on September 24-27, 2008 in Anchorage, Alaska, USA to discuss on in general what we might mean by “a Changing North” and particularly what can be defined as key factors and dynamics indicating a change (see also Heininen 2007). Discussions in the plenary sessions as well in the roundtable and project sessions are expected on one hand, to concentrate on key factors and dynamics indicating changes in the North and northern geopolitics, and on the other hand, to highlight in particular the matters of the role of research and the social relevance of science, and the interplay between politics and science.

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 endeavour of the post Cold War world society has been promoted according to Willy Østreg (2008) through four sets of interrelated, but highly incremental processes: a “reconceptualization” of regional security, i.e. a distinction has been made between military and civil security, “civilianization”, i.e. the multiplying of cooperative regimes in civil

issue-areas, “regionalization” of decision-making processes, and an intentional “mobilization” of non-state actors in Arctic policy formation. These processes include such as region-building and 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 concern on the environment by civil organizations and civil societies. As results of the latter, a new kind of ‘wild’ circumpolar cooperation for the environment and some sort of ‘connectivity’ between non-states actors was born, and consequently, central governments were forced to react 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).

Correspondingly, the main themes, or trends, of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations in the early 21st century are stated by the Arctic Human Development Report: 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). Each of the above, *per se*, indicates and reflects a significant change, and putting them all together the picture is more a complicated and multi-functional process than used to be the case 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 much based on the above-mentioned ‘connectivity’, which has also interpreted to mean that the circumpolar North can be defined as an international distinctive region (e.g. Young and Einarsson 2004, 18-19), as well 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, even reasons for serious conflicts, as well without most of global crises such as food crisis, climate crisis and developing crisis defined by General Secretary of the UNs at the G8 Summit in July 2008. This is a real achievement in times, when in the world there have usually been about twenty major armed conflicts 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 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 and their peoples, settlements and man-made infrastructure and a nature (e.g. ACIA 2004), the Arctic has become one of the first fronts of, 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 also 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 weapon 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 to become present for to utilize energy resources, however, state-owned, national oil and gas companies, like for example 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 part of the international system. For example, we could easily relate two of the above-mentioned themes of circumpolar geopolitics to the context of globalization due to the fact that cooperation between indigenous peoples' organizations can be interpreted to be global and the relationship between the North and the rest of the world is global. 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: apart from the circumpolar North being a focus of growing global interest of 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 like that 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 conditions of a nature and weather, and currently 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, there in the North is occurring a significant level of rapid and multi-functional change, which might have several consequences. Further, 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)?

Main 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 trans-national 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; besides, “states’ activities aimed at ensuring energy security are an important element in their foreign policy”, and that “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 the main indicators of the on-going multi-functional change in, and growing global interest toward, the North (see also Table 1):

- 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 for 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 forth-coming). In spite of the dualism of climate change here the development is not determined and do 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 about \$ 225 billion (Duhaim and Caron 2006), which is based predominantly on the large-scale exploitation of hydrocarbons for the energy needs of the northern developed countries, is high, but particularly 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 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 energy security is a very global phenomenon the North is becoming highly strategic in world politics and geo-economics;

5) Fifth, followed from the growing utilization of energy resources and increased flows of globalization infrastructure and **transportation** are badly needed. Proper logistics includes both the existing seas 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 a nature such as sea ice and makes easier to "conquer" the North Pole, it creates bigger challenges for human-built infrastructure in melting permafrost, which is much 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, those of labour and tourists, and they are detectable 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 a new kind of (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, actually it is 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 on 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 strategic importance of the North is growing and 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, socio-economic 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 for a such as the Arctic Council and conferences of 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 at this stage for open discussion and dialogue on relevant northern and global issues, as well as the implementation of the interplay, is the Fifth Open Assembly of the Northern Research Forum. Based on our discussions and analysis, some starting points of the Open Assembly might focus on the following conclusions and/or hypotheses: 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 geo-strategic 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.

Table 1: The Changing Geo-Politics of the North: Main Indicators

Factors / Dynamics

Phenomena

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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