

The Northern Research Forum:

A case study for High Northern cooperation

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Introduction and setting the scene

The twentieth century brought militarization to the Arctic and it became the stage for military tension and confrontation between the two Cold War superpowers. This situation was triggered by the Second World War and it can be argued that at this time sovereignty reached the northern most regions of the world. The superpowers were “ideological, political, economic and military” rivals, and their rivalry led to the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the first and only intergovernmental military organization dealing with the Circumpolar North (Heininen, 2010b). Perhaps more importantly, NATO’s strategic concept from 2010 does not mention or include the Circumpolar North or the Arctic at all (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2010). During the Cold War the ice covered waterway was a common route for nuclear powered submarines between the Atlantic and Arctic Ocean, and it became a vital area for airspace in the age of strategic airpower (Byers, 2009; Zellen, 2009). The submarine threat still exists today, but is considered a smaller threat than for example transnational criminal activity and related threats coming from non-state actors (Byers, 2009). Combined, the militarization of the Arctic and the growing industrialization led to the establishment of new cities and towns in the Circumpolar North and these new areas became increasingly important in terms of natural resources. The peak of this stage of militarization was the late 1980s, in spite of arms controls and disarmament agreements between the two superpowers. As the Cold War neared its end the third stage of Northern security emerged, and this period brought with it less military tension and more international cooperation, including non-state actors (Heininen, 2010b).

Two of the most influential factors, triggering this shift in high northern security are the Regan and Gorbachev meeting in Reykjavik 1986, and later on, a speech made by the former Soviet president Gorbachev in Murmansk 1987. In his speech he refers to the importance of the Reykjavik summit “A different situation has developed, and no one could act after Reykjavik as if nothing happened. It was for us an event that confirmed the correctness of our course, the need for and constructiveness of new political thinking” (Gorbachev, 1987. p.1). Further on in his speech he made several noteworthy proposals on how to improve the situation in the High North with the aim to “Let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace. Let the North Pole be a pole of peace” (Gorbachev, 1987. p.4). His

suggestions include a nuclear free zone in Northern Europe; A consultation between the Warsaw Treaty Organization and NATO on restricting military activities in the Baltic, Northern, Norwegian and Greenland Seas as well as increased confidence building in these areas; Peaceful cooperation in developing the resources of the North; Scientific cooperation and cooperation on environmental protection (Gorbachev, 1987).

Since the Cold War the security scenario has changed drastically. These changes have been spoken of as the broadening out of the security concept and can be traced back to the rise of environmental and economic security agendas in the 1970s and 80s as well as to the growing concerns about transnational crime in the 1990s. The definition of threat was widened from being purely military, to include a broader agenda, such as environmental, economic and societal factors (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). As the focus shifted from the military sector, stability grew and the most prominent challenges and threats became ones that states cannot fight on their own, cooperation on High Northern issues became a lot more feasible, and institutions and all kinds of forums for such cooperation were established in the Circumpolar North. This is when the Northern Research Forum was established.

The Northern Research Forum was initiated by the president of Iceland Mr. Grimsson, in a speech he gave at the University of Lapland in 1998. In his speech he emphasized that in spite of their differences the Baltic, Barents and Arctic Council had together contributed to the new structural reality in Northern Europe demonstrating that the end of the Cold War had brought the Northern regions into key positions. The Northern states had also been given a new opportunity for cooperation built on open dialogue and friendship. Moreover, these fundamental alternations bring with them new challenges for scholars, researchers and students to describe and interpret the changes. New questions need to be addressed, like "Who governs, where and how?" (Grimsson, 1998. p.4). Built on the successful model of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) the president suggested the creation of "an integrated community of Northern European scholars dealing with issues, projects and problems related to the future of our countries and regions, an academic network which year by year would deepen and extend our understanding and provide Northern European institutions with sound substance for the democratic decision-making process" (Grimsson, 1998). The Northern Research Forum started working from Iceland in 1999 with the formation of a steering committee and a secretariat (Northern Research Forum).

The aim of this paper is to examine the developments in the Circumpolar North focusing on the Northern Research Forum as an active participant. The first chapter deals with the globalization of the Arctic, the second chapter is about going from stability to peace, and the third chapter is on the NRF as the Arctic village square. Finally, conclusions will be drawn.

Globalization of the Arctic

In the immediate post-Cold War period the Arctic region was not the center of attention as it had somewhat been during the Cold War, and as it is increasingly becoming today. As the

infrastructure has been developing, so has the isolation of the Arctic diminished (Zellen, 2009). From the late 1980s a new regional identity has been emerging in the Circumpolar North. Both international and inter-regional cooperation has been increasing and numerous actors have entered the scene. Apart from the states we also have intergovernmental actors and nongovernmental actors. Environmental issues have often attracted nongovernmental organizations to the region, such as Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund that have campaigned for environmental protection in the North. This activity by non-state actors has encouraged the Arctic states to further enhance their cooperation which has led to the signing of a number of bilateral agreements on scientific and environmental cooperation between all the Arctic states. Hence, the end of the Cold War brought about a new era of international cooperation in the circumpolar north (Heininen, 2010a). Below is a list of some of the regional institutions and forums for cooperation:

- Nordic Council (NC) and Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) were established in 1952 as an official inter-parliamentary body in the Nordic region, with the aim to work towards joint Nordic solutions (Nordic Council).
- International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) was established in 1990, with all the Arctic states as founding members, and was meant to cover all sciences in the whole Arctic region (International Arctic Science Committee).
- Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was established in 1992, as a response to the geopolitical changes, triggered by the end of the Cold War. Among its main goals is to coordinate intergovernmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (Council of Baltic Sea States).
- Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) was established in 1993 to support and promote regional cooperation in the Barents region, and thereby contribute to peaceful development (Barents Euro Arctic Council).
- Arctic Council (AC) was established with the Ottawa Declaration in 1996, as a high-level intergovernmental forum for the Arctic states and Arctic Indigenous communities (Arctic Council).
- European Union's Northern Dimension (ND) policy was drawn up in 1999 and is shared by four equal partners: The European Union, Norway, Iceland and Russia. Its main goal is to provide a common framework to promote dialogue and enhance cooperation (European Union).
- Northern Research Forum (NRF) was established in 1999 to provide an international platform for dialogue, getting together researchers and a wide range of other stakeholders (Northern Research Forum).

All in all, it is not a question of whether or when the Arctic becomes globalized, it already is. Apart from the Arctic states themselves and the inhabitants of the region, various other states, institutions and firms have shown or declared great interests in the Arctic. The Northern regions have been heavily integrated into the global economy, as a result of increased utilization of the region's energy sources, and as such the region has attracted

major international environmental organizations. Furthermore, in terms of placing the region, "this goes beyond the traditional distinction between a core and a periphery" (Heininen, 2010a. p.270).

From stability to peace

Most human beings can agree that peace is a desirable condition and well worth continuously working towards. Peace is also much more than just a calm uneventful period between wars, and in order to make peace it is necessary to study the preconditions and learn from history. The aim of this chapter is to explore theories relevant to peace and peace building and place them in context with Arctic developments.

Negative and positive peace

Negative peace is a minimalist approach to the subject. It is the absence of direct violence, the preventing of war. However, negative peace is not sufficient to secure peaceful societies as it can include deep injustices that can sow the seeds of future confrontations or even conflicts. Positive peace, on the other hand, takes a broader more maximalist view, but is at the same time somewhat hazier. In order to work towards positive peace it is necessary to develop methods of peaceful change to prevent future issues from becoming the subjects of conflicts. Effective and sustainable peacemaking cannot be founded solely on the manipulation of peace agreements made by the political elites; it has to include peace building from the grassroots level (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2005). According to Holsti, there are eight preconditions to peace. The first one is that the system of governance needs to live up to the responsibility to set rules and regulations in accordance with the conditions of an agreement. Second, that in the aftermath of war the societal settlement needs to have a legitimate foundation. The third is assimilation, meaning that the gains of living in a society are greater than the gains of destroying it. Fourth, building deterrence into the system that is strong enough to deter defection. Fifth, conflict resolving procedures and institutions to ensure capacity to manage conflicts between members of the system. The sixth is, consensus on war as the fundamental problem, and the need to ensure clear principles for the legitimate use of force. Seventh, procedures for peaceful changes, and lastly, the eighth precondition for peace, the anticipation of future issues, that is the ability to anticipate future causes of conflict (Holsti, 1996; Ramsbotham, et al., 2005).

In the case of the High North it is safe to say that the conditions of negative peace are fulfilled. The region has for the past decades been free from direct violence and war. Positive peace on the other hand is more complicated to evaluate. Without a doubt many preconditions are met and there is every reason to be optimistic that the parties of interests will want to prevent the outbreak of violence. For example the five Arctic coastal states have signed a declaration stating that all disputes will be handled in a peaceful manner ("Ilulissat Declaration," 2008). Further, the Arctic states agree to use the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as a legal framework, and a number of

institutions that ensure cooperation and dialogue between the Arctic states have been established.

Peace building

The first step after war has ended is to build peace. In order to do so it is necessary to link the control of violence to the rebuilding of relationships at the community level. For peace building to be effective it has to take place on three different levels. The top level consist of political and military leaders, the second level includes other influential people such as regional political leaders, and finally the third level, consisting of the grassroots of society, the common people and NGOs (Ramsbotham, et al., 2005). If we apply the logic of rebuilding relationships at the community level to the Arctic, we can see that a common feature of the Arctic institutions is their aim to improve the relationship between East and West by including Russia. Another common feature is openness to a variety of actors that do not usually have prominent roles in international diplomacy – such as the provincial governments, civil society groups and business representatives. However, participation by such actors is costly and funding to enable participation in Arctic affairs has for the most part been directed at indigenous peoples organizations, evidence suggest that environmental and business representatives have not significantly increased their participation (Stokke, 2007). On the bright side, the Arctic states are becoming better acquainted with each other, and seem to be aware of both the risk and the high costs of such divisions as the Cold War produced, and the colonial division in resource-rich regions like the Middle East that have resulted in both war and conflict over the past decades (Zellen, 2009).

All in all the post-Cold War has brought massive changes to the Arctic. Many of these changes show the awareness of the top level, the Arctic states. The states, in spite of emphasizing and taking measures to guaranty their sovereign rights, particularly the coastal states (Heininen, 2011), have enhanced their cooperation by establishing several institutions with the purpose of keeping an open dialogue. Many of these institutions have features that are important to peace building, such as openness - although there is always room for improvement.

Politicization, securitization and de-securitization

Related to the discourse on the broadening out of the security concept, briefly discussed above, are the terms “politicization”, “securitization” and “de-securitization”. Politicization involves assuring that issues appear to be open and decided upon in a normal political bargaining process. Securitization, in a way, is a further intensification of politicization by ensuring that there is an even stronger role for the state than done by politicization alone. At the same time securitization is opposed to politicization, in the sense that while politicization emphasizes openness, securitization means that the issues should not be made a matter of political choice or debate, it could even be said they fall under some sort of “laws of nature” (Buzan, et al., 1998). It has been argued that “at best, security is a kind of stabilization of

conflicting or threatening relations, often through emergency mobilization of the state” (Buzan, et al., 1998, p.4). Even though most people would agree that security is a better option than insecurity in international relations. It has also been argued that the best option is to aim for de-securitization. By doing so the issues are brought out of the emergency mode and into the political sphere to the process of normal bargaining, hence they are politicalized (Buzan, et al., 1998).

The Arctic in the early 21st century has attracted global attention. Although the Circumpolar states value their sovereignty many steps have been taken in the direction of de-securitization. Institutions have been established in order to enhance cooperation; the focus has been to include all stakeholders, also former rivalries; the lines of communications have been open and dialogue promoted. On the downside the Arctic institutions have been criticized for being weak as they lack authority to make binding decisions. Nonetheless, the AC has managed to get all its member states to sign a binding agreement on search and rescue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). All this is highly valuable in de-securitization of issues and keeping them on the political level.

The Northern Research Forum: An Arctic Village Square

Structure

Established in 1999 the Northern Research Forum (NRF) is an international platform with the main goal of promoting and maintaining an effective dialogue between parties of interests, both from academia and a broad range of stakeholders. The NRF addresses critical issues and highlights the opportunities for the inhabitants of the circumpolar region. A somewhat different approach was taken in the most recent assembly in Hveragerdi, Iceland in 2011, when a global perspective, linking the Arctic, Antarctic and the third pole, the Himalayas, was taken (Northern Research Forum, 2011b). The NRF also acts as an institution of the University of the Arctic by developing the capacity to address issues such as social and human capital, sustainable development and environmental security, just to name a few. However, it should be underlined here that the NRF is neither an institution nor an organization as such, but rather an international forum to promote dialogue between all parties of interest (Northern Research Forum).

The NRF adopted its own rules of procedures in November 2011 where it is stated that the main activity of the NRF is to host a biannual Open Assembly (although NRF associated activities may occur inbetween open sessions) rotating between the northern countries, addressing a wide range of regional, sub-regional and local issues. The participants come from the research community, policy making and other relevant sectors. Another important mission of the NRF is to encourage the participation of young researchers, and to welcome new and unconventional approaches when dealing with northern issues (Northern Research Forum, 2011a).

According to the rules of procedure the themes and sub-themes for the open meetings are approved by the steering committee, which is also responsible for the overall directions of the Forum. Serving as an advisory body the honorary board consists of members serving in their personal capacities, bearing no legal or political responsibility for the activities of the NRF (Northern Research Forum, 2011a). The honorary board consists of high-level individuals and national leaders. The day-to-day affairs are run by the NRF Secretariat which is located in Akureyri, and supported by the University of Akureyri and the Stefansson Arctic Institute (Northern Research Forum, 2011a).

A recent initiative consists of five research project groups, which are now working within the NRF framework with the main purpose of strengthening the expertise of the NRF, and creating greater continuity between the biennial Assemblies. The group members come from different sectors of society, academia, politics, business, administration and private sectors (Northern Research Forum).

Contributions to the development

The themes of the open Assemblies from the first one in Iceland in 2000 to the most recent one, also in Iceland 2011 provide a clear picture of the issues the northern region has been dealing with. The theme of the 2000 assembly was “North meets North” and focused on history, economics, regionalism and governance, implementation of a northern dimension and science and technology. The second assembly (2002) had the theme “Northern Veche”, with the sub-themes human capital in the North, innovation in northern governance, and applying the lessons of history and economic development in the changing North. The third assembly (2004) had the main theme “The Resilient North - Human Responses to Global Change” and focused on several issues related to elected officials, governance, resources and co-management, culture and tourism. The fourth assembly (2006) had the overall theme “The Borderless North” where such issues as the influence of technology and borderless cultures were discussed. The fifth assembly in 2008 focused on “Seeking Balance in a Changing North” and in his introductory remarks to the fifth open assembly, held in Anchorage, Alaska Dr. Lassi Heininen, chair of the steering committee discussed additional goals that the NRF could strive for. First of all he mentions dialogue and stage building, to promote “open, free and democratic discussions” in a new and wider platform. Secondly, he talked about using the dialogue as a method to solve real world problems. Thirdly, “to cross sectorial and other borders of our modern cultural, political, legal and administrative system in one society and the whole (global) international community...”. Fourth, to promote the understanding that science is not limited to labs, it involves both people and the environment making the social relevance of science a crucial part of the agenda. Fifth, to bring together experts from different fields, disciplines, background with the aim of building human capital for a new kind of leadership while ensuring scientific legitimacy and a balance

between science, economics and politics. Finally, the sixth point Dr. Heininen made was to critically examine and discuss relevant issues (Heininen, 2008).

In his opening statement at the sixth open assembly in Hveragerdi Iceland in 2011 Dr. Heininen emphasized what may be two of the most distinctive features of NRF, its inter-sectorial and inter-disciplinary approach, and the need for this type of approach in modern, globalized societies. The sixth open assembly was somewhat different from the previous ones as it included the Arctic, Antarctic and Himalayas, and their common issues, all under the theme of "Our Ice Dependent World". As this demonstrates the NRF has managed to focus on a variety of different issues, that all have a common thread in that they are relevant and important for regions to discuss and explore.

Although the Arctic is the home of a number of international and intergovernmental institutions and forums for cooperation each of them only provides a piece of the puzzle, each comes with its own added value. The added value of the NRF is in the way it operates. It is neither just another forum for academics to meet nor just a platform for cooperation between policymakers. It includes all. The biennial Assemblies address prominent issues and is open to all interested parties. It can be viewed as a village square where people gather to discuss issues and possibly provide some solutions. The Assemblies do not only cross disciplines but also borders and sectors. By promoting such an open dialogue as the NRF does, and by emphasizing that every relevant subject is worth exploring, without any taboos it contributes to confidence building and is likely to increase trust in the same manner.

However, the NRF is only one of many international actors in the region and has to be alert and make sure it keeps up with emerging developments and other forums for cooperation. It also faces the challenge of renewing itself and maintaining its position as an important contributor to the development of the Arctic. On the bright side the NRF has earned a good reputation, it has been working for over ten years and many leading experts have contributed and worked within the Forum.

Conclusions

The past decades have brought great changes to the North and the High Arctic. This region that was frozen in more than one sense for decades, now has so much to offer. Climate change has certainly had its impacts as the melting of the ice is seen by many as a promise of increased access to natural resources like oil and gas, and new transportation routes. This has resulted in the Arctic becoming the object of global interests; it is no longer a private matter for the Arctic states. Because of the importance of the region, different institutions have been established to deal with Arctic and sub-regional issues, and many of them have the role of preserving peace and stability as part of their agenda. However, peace is not a simple term, it is not a question of having it or not. On the contrary it is something that needs to be constantly aspired to and headed towards. Since the Cold War ended the Arctic has been both peaceful and stable, and it is safe to say that the conditions of negative peace

are met. Positive peace is a different story; it should always be our goal even though it is something that is not likely to be entirely achieved.

The NRF is one of many contributors to the stability of the Arctic region. Its uniqueness is to be found in the way it operates, how it welcomes all interested parties, including those with unconventional approaches, and early career scientists. The emphasis is on interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial cooperation, linking politics and science. The uniqueness of the NRF is certainly something it has benefited from and as long as it preserves its good reputation and has participants willing to go the extra mile there is every reason to believe that the Forum will keep renewing itself and keep its role as an important promoter of open dialogue and contribute to Arctic peace and stability.

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