

Arctic Security: Different Threats and Different Responses

A Discussion Paper

A position paper presented for the 3rd NRF Open Meeting
in Yellowknife and Rae Edzo, Canada, September 15-18, 2004

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Introduction:

Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic and its peoples have experienced new challenges to its security. The very nature of arctic security has undergone profound transformations in both meaning and impacts. The challenge to those who live in the north, policy-makers and researchers is that there is a need to not only consider new threats to the areas security, but it is also necessary to incorporate new thinking as to what constitutes security in the Arctic. Whose security is being threatened and what can be done to protect this security? These are challenging questions that do not provide easy answers. Furthermore, different conceptualizations of security require policy actions that often threaten other types of security. Thus, this debate is not only important for academics, but carries important ramifications for all northerners. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to provide a brief overview of the different types of security in the Arctic

Historical Understandings of Security in the Arctic

Prior to the Cold War, the harsh conditions and geographic isolation of the north meant that there were little consideration given to Arctic security by non-northerners. But this did not mean that issues of security did not exist. For the indigenous inhabitants of this region, security was best understood as survival. As long as there were adequate food and shelter, personnel security was maintained. However, should something interfere with the traditional hunt, or weather patterns alter beyond what was expected, life in the north would become dangerous to the personnel safety of both the hunter and his family.

New security challenges developed as southerners began to make their way north. There are some records of conflict between the Inuit and early European explorers in North America. There are also records of communities suffering through various epidemics as new diseases were brought by those from the south. For example, the entry of European whalers throughout the north often brought pandemics that wiped out entire villages. All of these new challenges posed direct threats to the security of the local communities and their inhabitants . At the same time, the security of the European explorers was also threatened by their own ignorance of the land and the skills needed to survive. The Franklin expedition is the best know example of the ultimate cost to the security of all those sailing with the explorer.

However, the north was largely ignored by the southern belligerents in the many wars that took place as the age of colonialism began. The limited technology of the time prevented southern armies from making their way very far north. It was not until the Second World War that technological developments allowed for the deployments to the southern fringes of the north. However, it was the onset of the Cold War and the rapid accompanying weapon development that opened the north to the armed forces of the main belligerents of that conflict.

The development of long-range bombers, missiles, and nuclear powered submarines allowed for both the USSR and the NATO states to utilize the north as a major strategic transit point. As the nuclear weapons threat grew, the geopolitical realities of the location of the USSR and the US meant that both sides focussed on the ability of their main weapon systems to travel over the pole. This was the shortest means of transit for aircraft, missiles and submarines to reach targets if war broke out. No one expected that there would be major land operations through the area, but should war erupt both missiles and aircraft would cross in mass numbers over the polar region. Almost all of the Arctic nations became heavily involved in developing military systems that would be deployed in the region. Canada, Denmark (Greenland) and the United States spent substantial effort was in developing systems such as the North American Distant Early Warning system (DEW line) to warn of either a bomber or missile attack. Iceland's location became important for the detection of any Soviet submarine's attempting to enter the Atlantic. Norway was expected to face a Soviet northern attack in the event of hostilities. Sweden, while neutral, needed to maintain substantial forces so that neither side would be deterred from attempting to using Swedish territory as a point of attack. Thus of the northern states five (Canada, Denmark, Iceland and United States) were in NATO, one (USSR) in the Warsaw Pact with an association of another (Finland); and the eighth Arctic state (Sweden) had a strongly armed neutrality.

Throughout the Cold War, this strategic reality meant that there could be little international cooperation and that the security of both the state and the local inhabitants was severely affected by the Cold War. The entry of the militaries into the north on both sides had a strong influence on all indigenous peoples. The introduction of the wage economy through the construction of the DEW line in the North American north fundamentally altered the way of life for many North American indigenous people. The entire structure of nuclear deterrence was predicated on the successful monitoring of a surprise bomber and/or missile attack over the polar region. As long as both sides had confidence that an attack could be detected in time to launch their own missiles, the logic of mutual assured destruction (MAD) was said to have maintained the peace. Thus, the Arctic remained a critical theatre of operations. This in turn meant that security in the region was understood entirely in military terms.

All of this changed with the end of the Cold War. The military forces of most of the Arctic nations were reduced, through not eliminated from the north. With the end of hostilities between the USSR and the NATO countries, the need for the systems dedicated to maintaining nuclear deterrence were substantially reduced. It is now that new conceptualizations of security and related policies became possible.

The Nature of Security in the Post Cold War Era

The end of the Cold War has meant that security can now be examined in a context that goes beyond the traditional realists' paradigm which is primarily based on military security. This is not to suggest that realism has been replaced, but rather there are now alternative means of understanding security that offer alternative understandings of security. Before one is left with the impression that such distinctions are only meaningful for academic discourse, the point must be made that the different types of security carry different policy ramifications. What then are the different types of security and what are their policy implications?

Throughout the Cold War the predominated understanding of security was based on the theory of realism. This focuses on military threats to the state and is considered to be the traditional form of security. As such, it is the state that needs to act to protect itself and its citizen from the threats of others. As the previous discussion shows, the main threat to the

Arctic was based on the possibility of a nuclear war between the NATO countries and the USSR. The core assumption of realism is that unless states take the necessary actions to safeguard their own security, they will be subject to attack by other states or parties hostile to their interests. The main policy ramification is that states must ensure that their own security is maintained. The means to do so is through the development of their military capabilities either on their own, or in alliance with other states that share their values and interest.

As the end of the Cold War developed, several analysts began to consider the possibility that threats to the environment were of equal importance to military threats. Some analysts argued that a nuclear war could have a catastrophic environmental impact that went beyond the physical damage caused by such a war. This concept became known as the theory of nuclear winter. Proponents of this argued that a nuclear exchange that remained isolated to North America, Europe and the USSR would ultimately destroy all human life. While this particular theory remains controversial, many other analysts began to note the dangers posed to the global system through environmental degradation caused by human action. It became clear that the causes of the pollutants were global and could threaten the very existence of entire states. For example, it is feared that increased temperatures could cause the melting of the ice-sheets of Greenland and Antarctic. The resulting rise of sea-level would then submerge low-lying island states or coastal states such as Bangladesh eliminating their very existence. Because the causes of such problems are complex and cross international borders, efforts to respond to environmental threats places a premium on cooperative behaviour within the international system. In accordance with the need to understand the causes of the various sources of environmental degradation there is also a premium on the need to develop and expand scientific understanding. The solutions to the problem are seen as needing both a state and individual-based response. States must agree to the solutions that are determined, but they are best developed if the behaviour of the citizens within the state is also modified to mitigate against the source of the pollutants.

A third form of security, - human security - was developed as a direct challenge to the traditional security. Emerging as an important theoretical and policy force in the early 1990s, human security challenges realist assumptions on two points. First, human security contends that it is often the state that is the biggest threat to the security of its own citizens. This was predominately based on the action of states that justify the mistreatment of their own citizens in the name of national security. Thus, police states and other forms of authoritative states were seen as the biggest threat. However, even the action of democratic states were soon targeted as creating insecurity when they went against the peaceful interests of the international system. The second theme of human security is that the best means of responding to threats to the international system is through cooperative behaviour of both the individual through civil society and with the state. Supporters of human security contend that it is through the enlightened joint actions of civil society and states in the international system that can introduce the norms and new institutions necessary to eliminate threats to international peace and security. The development of the international ban against anti-personnel mines is cited as the example of how a specific weapon system that caused undue suffering among non-combatants was reduced.

Human security also includes health security and cultural security. Health security is focussed on the threats to the health of a community through actions that are taken by either the state that contains the community or through action taken by the greater international community. The impacts of the threat are substantial and can threaten entire communities. As an element of human security, the policy ramifications of this approach places a premium on cooperative behaviour of both civil society and the state. Cultural security is deemed to be the means of ensuring that a community's way of life is

maintained. This is particularly true for indigenous peoples as the forces of globalization threaten their way of life.

There are other types of security but these are the three main types that affect those living in the arctic region. This paper will now consider what each of these different types of security means for the north.

Traditional Security and the Arctic

The end of the Cold War has reduced but not eliminated issues pertaining to traditional security in the Arctic region. There are three main areas of continued concern: nuclear deterrence; nuclear defence; and terrorism.

While the end of the Cold War has reduced the dangers that had existed because of the commitment to nuclear deterrence. Both the United States and Russia have reduced but not eliminated their nuclear deterrent forces. The Russian forces have been cut back in terms of both planned reduction and unplanned. The dire economic situation faced by the post-Soviet leadership has meant that much of the existing Russian nuclear force has not been well maintained. The impact on the north is obvious since much of the Soviet nuclear deterrent force had been placed in northern bases. For example the Russian Navy has been allowed to withered due to insufficient funding. This has resulted in the improper decommissioning of older nuclear-powered submarines. Many have simply been left to rust in or near Murmansk. When the Northern fleet does go to sea, the result is often tragic as exemplified by the sinking of the Kursk. Nevertheless, President Putin has repeatedly stated that his government is committed to improving the capability of the northern fleet. Furthermore, the one ship building commitment that has continued throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s has been for the building of new submarines. The lack of adequate funds has severely slowed the process, but the continued commitment of the Russians to this programme means that the Russians hope to retain the ability to enter northern waters well into the future.

While the Americans have not faced the same economic challenges as the Russians, they have reduced their nuclear submarine forces. This in combination with the increased demands on American forces has meant that the Americans have reduced the visits of their submarines into Arctic waters. However, as demonstrated by the recent voyage of the SSN Honolulu to the North Pole, the American navy is still sending some of their submarines into these waters. In addition the USN has also begun to consider the operation of its surface fleet as the ice recedes due to climate change. While American officials are not planning to send surface vessels into these water in the immediate future, such considerations illustrate that they continue to view Arctic waters as strategically important and plan to retain their ability to travel through the region.

An important shift in American thinking regarding nuclear defence is also impacting on the Arctic. American commitment to National Missile Defence is predicated on the understanding that not all of the United States new and future enemies can be deterred from attacking. As a result, the Americans have committed to developing a defensive system that will allow them to intercept and destroy a small number of missiles launched against the United States. American policy-makers fear that either the technology or the missiles themselves that can reach American soil may fall into the hands of either terrorist organizations or rouge states. This being the case, the United States has committed itself to defending against such a possibility. The intention is to develop a layered system that will be able to defence against a wide range of missile threats. Currently, the first step is to provide interceptors that can destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles that would originate either from the middle east or North Korea. Thus, one of the interceptors base is currently

being placed in Alaska. While most of the detection systems are satellite based, plans are in place for the deployment of ground-based radar sites in Alaska, Greenland and the UK. Thus, the north is once again placed as a significant strategic transit route.

A new issue for Canada and the United States since the tragic events of September 11, 2001 has been the concern that the north could be used for entry into North America by terrorists. While this is not seen as the most likely route that would be taken, there are concerns that as security arrangements governing entry into the southern parts of the continent are strengthened, the north may become an entry point for terrorists. Thus, there are now efforts to improve the surveillance of the region and to develop a capability to intercept any unlawful entries. However, the actual capability is still weak. However, it can be expected that this will change overtime.

Beyond Russia and the United States, the other Arctic states have also continued to maintain military forces in the region. Canada has resumed military training operations in its Arctic for the first time since 1989. Likewise Norway and the United Kingdom recently mounted a substantial combined and joint training operation involving land, sea and air elements. Even Iceland was reluctant to see the possible closure of the American fighter base it hosts and was able to get the American to keep it open. While the tempo of operations has decreased substantially since the end of the Cold War, there are traditional security concerns that will ensure the maintenance of military forces in the area far into the future.

Environmental Security and the Arctic

As the Cold War ended, policy-makers and scientists from the Arctic nations saw the opportunity to improve international cooperation. In the early 1980s, Canadian scientists had begun to note that contrary to common belief, the Arctic region was not a pristine environment. At first this confounded researchers because the types of pollutants that were being found in the Arctic were not indigenous to the region. Some such as persistent organic pollutants (POP) were used mainly as insecticides and fertilizers. Obviously, such pollutants were not originating in the north. It became apparent that the pollutants were reaching the north through a series of geophysical factors. The distance travelled by the pollutants led to the term transboundary pollutants.

As the Cold War ended, policy-makers from several northern states wanted to take steps by which to encourage greater cooperation among the former adversaries. Given the need to develop an international response to the problem posed by transboundary pollutants, it was decided that a focus on these problems would be the best way to promote cooperation. The overall impact of this decision was to elevate the issue of environmental security as the primary issue for international cooperation in the circumpolar north. This was institutionalized by the creation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) which was then evolved into the Arctic Council. While these institutions have included other issues in their mandate, environmental protection remain as the core mandate.

Both organizations have operated in similar fashions. Contained within each are several working groups and task forces. Each of these addresses different forms of environmental concerns, such as the marine environment (PAME) and flora and fauna issues (CAFF). Each of these bodies is designed to provide a forum in which an international understanding of the particular environmental problem can be understood. For the most part, these groups gather existing information and do not generate their own research. Once there is a share understanding of the issues, these bodies are then mandated to develop international courses of action. The greatest challenge facing these bodies however, is that they cannot mandate action to be taken, and their budgets are very limited.

The major benefit of AEPS and the Arctic Council has been their ability to mobilize a better understanding of the threats to the Arctic Environment. Currently the main focus of the Arctic Council is on the issue of climate change. At the next meeting of the Arctic Council in November, the Arctic Climate Change Impact Assessment Report will be tabled. Best on a review of the work of the worlds leading scientists, this report will provide the definitive assessment of the impact of climate change in the Arctic.

In terms of environmental security, the Arctic region has benefited from the willingness of the main Arctic nations to examine and cooperate in regards to the international threat posed by various types of pollutants. There has been more limited success in the development of action undertaken to remedy the problems. There have been some accomplishments in responding to the problem of transboundary pollutants, but there is much less success when it comes to dealing with climate change, mercury contamination and pollution from oil and gas development. For the most part, the Arctic states have not shown a willingness to cooperate on an international basis to resolve problems, or provide the necessary resources to do so. However, given the fact that the concept of environmental security is relatively new, it is too soon to rule out future cooperative behaviour utilizing significant resources. Rather, it is clear that environmental security concerns are changing some of the ways that international cooperation is undertaken in the north.

Human Security and the Arctic

As previously mentioned the focus of human security tends to be on the individual and/or community and not on the state. Within the context of the north the main focus has been on three main issues; health security; cultural security and food security.

The core human security problem is meeting the needs of a young and growing population as the forces of globalization dramatically alter the traditional way of life for many. There are severe pressures that are now fundamentally altering a way of life that has existed for eons for many of the northern indigenous peoples. The traditional way of life is becoming less practical as traditional foods become more difficult to hunt and catch. They are becoming contaminated by the transboundary pollutants while the impact of climate change is negatively impacting on the traditional knowledge used to determine when it is time to safely venture on the land and ice. Furthermore the availability of television and other forms of communications means that many of the younger generation no longer wish to continue the old way of life.

However, as the old ways become eroded, the physical realities of the north have meant that the younger generations are not able to fully integrate into the modern economic system. There are not enough jobs to employ an expanding and large younger population. Thus, unemployment remains very high. To add to the problems, southern food is very expensive to export to the north. This combined with the decrease in consumption of traditional foods is beginning to create a health crisis among many of the younger population. Junk foods and other foods of questionable nutritional value are increasingly becoming the food of choice. Thus, as the north changes, the indigenous peoples are facing threats to their food and health security. While this affects each individual differently and some communities are better able to handle the transformation, there is no doubt that a crisis is beginning to develop.

Ultimately the changes that are now occurring in the north also threaten the cultural security of the indigenous peoples. Given the multiple threats that now assail the traditional way of life it seems unlikely that it can remain unchanged. The question that now arises is

the manner in which it will adapt to the forces of globalizations that come for the south. What component of the old way of life can be retained? What will be lost? These are not yet clear.

Conclusion:

The challenge before anyone who wishes to consider the different threats to security in the Arctic is to determine what is the nature of the threat; who is being threatened? ; and what are the best means of responding to the threat? As this very brief discussion makes clear there are numerous means by which threats in the Arctic can be understood. As such there are numerous types of security. The challenge for those who call the north home and for policy-makers are determining which are the main threats to northern security. The question that remains is how can this be done.