

*Conclusion*¹

Sten Rynning, University of Southern Denmark

The 'new' Arctic is opening a new dimension of global politics. It is most vividly illustrated by the globe and the need to turn it in new directions if we are to grasp the geography of polar issues: all the globes and most of the maps of this world look at the world horizontally, placing the equator horizontally at the middle and inviting the observer to gaze right and left, east and west. The Arctic is a chopped up area located at the northern margins of the map. Google Earth and other electronic maps offer relief – they can be twisted and turned in all directions – but it will take some time before we change our mental maps and find it natural to adopt a polar perspective.

Fortunately, the Arctic is a case of slow motion change. The ice is melting but has yet to disappear, and working conditions remain extreme. Shell, the energy company that has been granted exploratory drilling rights off Alaska by the U.S. government, has had to adjust ambitions after some hard going. Having suffered a wrecked drill ship and drilling barge in 2012 – in addition to severe criticism from environmentalists – the company announced that it would not do any drilling in 2013.² Meanwhile, in Greenland, the high hopes for a lucrative iron mine in the Isua fjord remain tentative while two established gold and zinc mines have closed on account of high costs and low income.³ Investors are buying time, and the slow motion pace of

¹ Editor's Note: The footnotes in this article and in the others in this issue of the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* have been left in the European format in which they were received, except that they have been placed at the bottom of the page to ease readability. We apologize for any confusion this may cause our North American readers.

² Eilpering and Mustafson, 2013; Jarvis, 2013.

³ Hannestad, 2012.

things facilitates it. In this there is encouragement to policy-makers who must craft a new political order to manage Arctic affairs.

Collective security and collective defense are an 'ideal-types' of what the future may portend. The world may come together to provide for peaceful Arctic change and exploitation for the common good; conversely, the world may divide into alliances jostling to secure control and influence at the expense of one another. One overall conclusion of this book is that these futures are some time off. For observers of the issues, it is not terribly surprising. More interesting is the shape of things to come in the near future because they will put us on path for either ideal-typical scenario.

The Fulcrum: The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is where we should direct our attention. First of all, it is where global standards meet regional power brokers. These standards are notably those embedded in the UNCLOS regime, and regional power brokers is an appropriate label among several because the members of the Arctic Council have singled out themselves as first among equals, as Nils Wang underscored in his article. The art of interpreting the fit between general rules on the one hand and particular conditions on the other inevitable involves a measure of politics. The eight full members of the Arctic Council will, to an extent, be able to make the law for the region. To be sure, UNCLOS involves a dispute settlement mechanism, but there is a lot of maneuvering involved in preparing cases for such settlement, including the preparation of 'geological data' and associated territorial claims. Moreover, if there are issues of dispute, and if the Arctic Council members take it upon themselves to sort out these issues, it will be harder for outsiders to challenge their agreement via the UNCLOS system.

This brings us to a second facet that underscores the importance of this Council, and it concerns China. China has been vying for observer status in the Council and gained it in mid-2013, not least because the full Arctic Council members sought to affirm the centrality of their club. The wider question concerns China's sense of entitlement, highlighted by David Wright, and thus its refusal to accept a marginalised status. One of China's strongest cards, besides its economic weight and reach, is

precisely the global rulebook of UNCLOS. It is a tool for arguing that universal standards should be applied in an open and transparent way and thus not in the diplomatic hallways of Arctic Council decision-making. It is also a tool for driving a wedge between the Arctic Council members because the United States has yet to ratify UNCLOS, and UNCLOS is very dear to some if not all of these members. The problem in the United States is the insufficient number of Senators willing to ratify the treaty, which the executive strongly backs, and behind this debate lurks the issue of defining the way in which UNCLOS might help the United States maintain its foothold in Asia, which remains the most vital sea region for the United States and will remain so for the foreseeable future.⁴The future of the Arctic Council may help the United States and China stabilise their relations if it involves an agreement on managing UNCLOS, and by implication territorial claims at sea; conversely, Asian geopolitics could arrest rapprochement and spill over into the Arctic Council, making collective defense the more likely future.

The third good reason for watching Arctic Council developments concerns the European Union (EU). Like China, the EU is destined to gain observer status but it has for now fumbled at the goal line. More important than the timing of its observer status is the type of engagement the EU will prove capable of bringing to the table. As Andreas Østhagen demonstrated in his article, the EU is tempted to adopt a strongly normative position that in important ways rubs against the interests of the Arctic countries. If this type of confrontation comes into being, even if only slightly so, it could invite discord on the two dimensions above. First, a position emphasizing universal norms of good governance and environmental protection will naturally reinforce global standards and erode the claim for privileged regional governance: such governance will only be legitimate if run in accordance with global rules, and the EU will help tie down such governance. Second, China will help, because it is in the Chinese interest to align with the EU's normative agenda. China does appear to have genuine environmental and scientific interests, as Wright concludes, but to have the EU break the barrier to Arctic Council decision-making would from a Chinese perspective, quite simply, be politically convenient.

⁴ Wright, 2012.

Is Sub-Regional Governance Possible?

As these three issues inside the Arctic Council develop and push affairs either in the direction of greater governance and collective security or greater tension and collective defense, there remains the possibility that stakeholders will be able to develop a third way. Alyson Bailes explores this option in her article on the Arctic Council. It is possible that the Arctic Council could become a type of club that promotes transnational interaction and understanding while avoiding the pitfalls of high stake diplomacy and fever-pitched dialogue that have become the standard of United Nations Security Council deliberations or NATO-Russia relations. Perhaps these institutions are burdened by their Cold War legacy, and perhaps new formats more focused on practical matters stand a better chance of developing solutions rather than opposing positions.

Past experience teaches us a lesson or two in this respect. One is that the attempt to create transnational interactions and by way hereof greater collaboration and ‘a working peace system’ is not new. In fact, it was David Mitrany who coined the ‘working peace system’, and he was part of a wider effort in the early and middle parts of the 20th century to define new international relations in opposition to those that had produced war and misery.⁵ What followed was the school of thought known as ‘functionalism’ and according to which low politics – as in the crafting of working solutions to practical problems by specialised agencies – could transform international affairs by making regional governance desirable and thus eminently possible. It is a founding thought of the European Union.

Going by this special issue, the Arctic Council should move forward by de-politicizing as many issues as possible. Rather than bringing together the foreign ministers of members and observers, they should delegate matters to experts gathered in whaling commissions, seabed organisations, Arctic mining networks, scientific associations, and so on. Policy-makers should define some basic rules of the game but then set civil society free. As borders erode in importance because experts tend to look

⁵ Mitrany, 1966.

beyond them, the Arctic Council could turn into a real ‘neighborhood’ club – using Bailes’ terminology – that defuses political conflict and is open to anyone willing to invest expertise and engagement.

The experience of the European Union does offer sobering lessons, though. Functionalism did not vanquish Europe, though it remained as a driving factor most notably institutionalised in the European Commission. High politics have struck back – ever since French president de Gaulle in 1962 ungraciously relegated functionalism to the status of ‘volapyk’ – and the challenge is therefore one of defining high politics in such a way that it does not spoil whatever benefits functionalist cooperation can procure.

This will not be easy because the tussles around the Arctic Council are testimony to political relationships in flux, and the domestic logic of pitched rhetoric does sometimes trump the international logic of restraint, as Hilde demonstrated in his article on the military dimensions of the ‘New’ Arctic. It is hard to imagine functionalist cooperation taking off in earnest if political conflict abounds. The appropriate parallel may be the constitutional broil the EU has found itself in for more than a decade now, a process that began with German foreign minister Fischer’s call in 2000 for a constitutional answer to the challenge of defining post-Cold War Europe. It has been without end: there is a treaty in place now – the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 – but the constitutional debate continues, spurred by the Euro crisis and political unrest.

It seems inevitable that considerable political footwork needs to be done in the Arctic before functionalist sub-regionalism can take hold. The best option may be one of mimicking tried and tested institutional solutions for combining hierarchy and cooperation. One such solution is the United Nations Security Council with its distinction between permanent and rotating members. Another, though now largely marginalised, was NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group that likewise contained a high-level core, rotating members, and one voluntary absentee (France), which became NATO’s formula for managing nuclear strategy post-1967. What these formats demand first of all are clarified hierarchies of power. The UNSC permanent members came out of the victorious side of the Second World War; the United States simply had the means to marginalise France and set the tone for NATO’s Cold War strategy. The preeminent Arctic challenge is to establish this hierarchy. Subsequently it is to manage change – as

witnessed by the contentious debate in the UN over the possible enlargement of the UNSC – just as it is to ensure that the lesser powers gain enough stakes in the system to support it. But it is only possible to manage what has been established, and this is where the challenge lies.

If these observations are valid, it follows that the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008 is just the beginning of Arctic diplomacy. It cannot be an end point or considered a reference that newcomers must simply accept. The Arctic Council's most pressing task is to develop a partnership concept that in substance engages not only China but every major player that would like to participate in Arctic deliberations, from the EU to South Korea. Moreover, the invitation must be to genuinely open discussions on the Arctic architecture, which is also to say that current Arctic Council members must develop their own substantial agenda for these negotiations. They cannot hide behind the formalities of the Council or the reference to existing law (i.e., the Ilulissat Declaration). Canada and the United States must sort out their differences; Russia must be engaged; and the Nordic community of small states must be involved. It is up to them to define the political agenda that newcomers will encounter.

It is perhaps fitting to finish with a reference to Greenland, which holds great economic potential, as Bent Ole Gram Mortensen explains in his article. Greenland is part of the kingdom of one of the small states, Denmark; the United States is in (with the Thule air base); and China is moving in to exploit resources. Greenland could thus be a leveler for promoting orderly relations between these countries, and cooperation related to Greenland could presage wider cooperation in the Arctic Council. There is much to be gained from cooperation, and it may be that sub-regional governance in the short run and a wider sort of collective security system in the longer run is the most likely outcome.

However, this bright future will only come to pass if short-term efforts are made to align the high and low politics of the region. The engagement and inclusion of civil society in the Arctic can help foster the kind of benevolent problem-solving functionalism foreseen by David Mitrany and others, but it cannot develop outside a deliberate effort to clarify and stabilise political relations inside and in regards to the Arctic Council.

Bibliography

Eilperin, Juliet and Steven Mufson. 2013. Shell Abandons Arctic Drilling in 2013. *Washington Post*. 27 February.

Hannestad, Adam. 2013. Grønlands mineeventyr er i krise. *Politiken*. 11 May.

Jarvis, Brooke. 2013. Shell's Arctic Drilling Has Been an Epic Failure. *Rolling Stone*. 11 January.

Mitrany, David. 1966. *A Working Peace System*. Chicago: Quadrangle Press.

Wright, Thomas. 2012. Outlaw of the Sea. *Foreign Affairs*. 7 August.