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# Euroarctic strategies and synergies

*Urban Wråkberg*



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# The great game of the Arctic

That global warming is melting the sea ice of the High North has been making headlines for long. Some commentators have drawn further media attention by claiming that this melting is also eroding the hitherto stable number and positions of the northern geopolitical players. These alarmists have predicted a global scramble of national agents and private enterprises for newly accessible natural resources, particularly after a Russian flag was planted on the sea bottom at the North Pole in 2007 (a geopolitical stunt that some Russian individuals pulled while charting the seabed for the submission of Russia's Arctic Exclusive Economic Zone to the United Nations). The idea has been propagated that the Arctic coastal states (and perhaps others) are competing to "claim sectors" of the Arctic. Many new map designs are circulating in the news and online attempting to demarcate actual and possible claims for Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) in the Arctic. Deeming from discussions on blogs and in the media, because these maps are often unclear or viewed casually, and the accompanying text incomplete, many readers seem to confuse the EEZ with some kind of sectoral claim similar to the polar sectoral claims made by certain states in the 1920s. Some sectoral claims exist in the polar regions but are not generally acknowledged  $\frac{3}{4}$  those in the far south were deactivated under the Antarctic Treaty. The EEZ, on the contrary, is a well-defined and accepted concept of international law.<sup>1</sup>

Several observers have presented Arctic outlooks based on military or Realist perspectives without heeding the novel dynamics that are important in the Arctic today.<sup>2</sup> There is arguably a common northern interest in the multilateral development of knowledge and in the pooling of resources to improve environmental protection, run sustainable fisheries, expand logistical systems (such as new maritime routes), and invest in offshore industry. These major opportunities interest all Arctic coastal states (as well as global

<sup>1</sup> M. Byers *Who owns the Arctic? Understanding Sovereignty Disputes in the North*. Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 2010; H. Corell, "The Arctic: an opportunity to cooperate and demonstrate statesmanship," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* Vol. 42, 2009, pp. 1065–79; H. Haftendorn, "NATO and the Arctic: is the Atlantic Alliance a Cold War relic in a peaceful region now faced with non-military challenges?," *European Security* Vol. 20, 2011, pp. 337–61.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. Borgerson, "Arctic meltdown – the economic and security implications of global warming," *Foreign Affairs* 87, 2008, pp. 63–77; O. Alexandrov, "Labyrinths of the Arctic policy: Russia Needs to Solve an Equation with Many Unknowns," *Russia in Global Affairs* Vol. 7, 2009, 110–18. Cf. P. A. Berkman & O. R. Young, "Governance and environmental change in the Arctic Ocean," *Science* Vol. 324, April: 17, 2009, pp. 339–40.

agents with the resources to conduct business in the far north) and provide the rationale for collaboration.

The UN began work on its Convention on the Law of the Sea in the 1950s, which several states ratified in 1994. Its Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) became operational in the late 1990s. This means that now when the polar ice melt is making Arctic sea routes and raw materials accessible we fortunately already possess the suitable tools of international law to regulate maritime business, and establish the EEZs of the Arctic coastal states. It should also be noted that the Arctic's disputed maritime zones have so far been co-managed with remarkable success.<sup>3</sup>

The EEZ of a coastal state is not an extension of its territory in any common sense. Rather, it is a set of zones beyond the state's shoreline that the state controls to varying degrees based on the UN Commission on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Law of the Sea is regarded as a major international achievement, furthering accountability and sustainability in the management of the world's resources. It applies to the Arctic Basin and is acknowledged by all Arctic coastal states except the United States (which does, however, accept its relevant provisions as customary international law). UNCLOS also codifies such principles as the freedom of the sea and the right-of-way at sea, many of which were already accepted in international maritime practice.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> U. Wråkberg, "The great game of the North: a global scenario for domestic use?," in S. Bones & P. Mankova, eds, "Norway and Russia in the Arctic: conference proceedings from the international conference: Norway and Russia in the Arctic, Longyearbyen 25-28th August 2009," *Speculum Boreale*, No. 12, Tromsø: University of Tromsø, 2010, pp- 152-63.

<sup>4</sup> H. Figenschou Raaen, "Hydrocarbons and jurisdictional disputes in the High North: explaining the rationale of Norway's High North policy," Fridtjof Nansen Institute Report 11, 2008;. "Maritime jurisdiction and commercial activity," *The Norwegian Atlantic Committee: Focus North*, No. 6, Ocean Futures 2007

**Figure 1.** Exclusive economic zones of the EU states, and of others in the European Arctic.



Source: Arctic Portal

The Law of the Sea recognises three zones of diminishing national control beyond the shore of a coastal state. First, there is the territorial sea, which extends 12 nautical miles (nm) (22 km) and where the state regulates the use of natural resources on the sea surface, down the water column, on and beneath the seabed. However, even in this inner coastal zone, the state has no legal grounds to interfere in the “innocent” passage of foreign vessels. A coastal state may extend an EEZ outside of its territorial waters to a distance of 200 nm (370 km) beyond the shore. Within the 200 nm EEZ, the state is free to regulate the use of all natural resources. Thus, only the coastal state can fish, drill for oil or gas, and grant permission to a foreign agent to do the same in this area. International shipping that is not exploiting resources is, however, free in the EEZ outside of territorial waters.

Article 76 of UNCLOS specifies a new mechanism for lengthening the boundaries of an EEZ where there is a continental shelf that extends further than 200 nm from the shore. Later versions of the convention (UNCLOS



III) have specified that the shelf band may not exceed 350 nm (648 km) and have included definitions on submarine ridges, natural submarine elevations, distant islands, and larger bays (which are subject to interpretation in actual evaluations and negotiations). In the area of the EEZ beyond 200 nm, the coastal state only controls the resources of the seabed. An EEZ cannot apply to the abyssal ocean plain, including its ridges of non-continental geological origin, nor to the water volumes or the surface of the high seas. Any state, landlocked or not, has equal rights in these areas. The Norwegian claim on an EEZ was approved by the CLCS in 2010.<sup>5</sup> The other Arctic coastal states, with the possible exception of the U.S., are expected to submit national claims on EEZs and will need to pursue extensive scientific mapping of the seabed in the process.

The UNCLOS articles and scientific criteria mentioned so far apply only when establishing the limits of an EEZ on the high seas. More often than not, a coastal state must negotiate the borders of its EEZ with its neighbours and consider other borderline arbitration principles used in international law based on, for example, the shape of the coast of the borderlands and on the outlying islands. If diplomatic negotiations turn into business-minded bargaining common geo-economic interests could appear and turn the key. Arctic melting may well increase the prospects for settling EEZ issues because improved accessibility of northern natural resources means expanded possibilities for future economic gain for the nations involved, provided that agreements on their borders at sea are reached. Norway's concerted conciliations with all of its neighbours made it possible to close the several bilateral deals necessary to settle its EEZ, including an accord on the long sea border between Norway and Russia, which was agreed upon in 2010 after 40 years of negotiations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf., among the documents leading up to this: "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea: Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, Summary of the Recommendations of the CLCS in Regard to the Submission Made by Norway in Respect of Areas in the Arctic Ocean, the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea on 27 November 2006, Annex VI, adopted by CLCS on 27th March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> T. Neumann, "Norway and Russia agree on maritime boundary in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean," *The American Society of International Law: Insights* Vol. 14, No. 34, 2010.

# The political landscape of the Arctic

In his famous speech in Murmansk on 1st October 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev proposed extensive disarmament in the Arctic as part of his *Pereestroika* programme and invited discussion on a new policy of joint industrial development and international research cooperation. The Murmansk initiative was the beginning of the end of the Cold War stalemate in the Arctic. It opened new prospects for economic growth in the Euroarctic, improved the rights of its indigenous peoples, and made possible partnerships for managing environmental hazards, such as the proper disposal of nuclear waste in Russia. The Murmansk initiative also included a suggestion on multilateral cooperation in Subarctic and Arctic research. Gorbachev introduced the idea of a joint Arctic research council, which became a reality in 1996 when the Arctic Rim states signed the Ottawa Declaration and founded the Arctic Council.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2.** Prof. Vladimir Kalinnikov briefing Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987 on the work of the Russian Academy Science's branch Kola Science Centre in Apatity, NW Russia.



Source: Kola Science Centre

<sup>7</sup> M. Gorbachev *The speech in Murmansk at the ceremonial meeting on the occasion of the presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the City of Murmansk, October 1, 1987*. Moscow, Novosti Press Agency: 1987, pp. 23–31; K. Åtland, “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the desecuritization of interstate relations in the Arctic,” *Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* Vol. 43, 2008, pp. 289–311.

Several foreign policy innovations have been tested since the end of the Cold War, opening the way for cross-border interaction among former Warsaw Pact states, old and new European Union member states, and their neighbours. In 1993, for example, Norway inaugurated the cross-border cooperation of the Barents Euroarctic Region, based on agreements with the foreign ministries of Russia, Finland, and Sweden. Barents cooperation encourages mutual endeavours between local institutions and individuals for the common good. The Barents Region is part of the post-Cold War organisational landscape of the Euroarctic, but is also based on traditional patterns of trade, migration, and cultural contacts across the borders of northern Scandinavia and northwest Russia.<sup>8</sup> Barents cooperation has encouraged science-based environmental stewardship and cross-border partnerships in the public, education, and cultural sectors, although it has been far less effective in the business and infrastructure development sectors.<sup>9</sup>

The Arctic Council has admitted indigenous people's representatives as non-state actors to its high-level forum on northern policy-making, showing itself to be a geopolitical innovator. The council has devoted most of its attention to environmental issues based on its strong component of natural science experts. But several observers argue that it needs to be more efficient in imposing its own recommendations over the practices and policies of its member states and other nations in situations of discord.<sup>10</sup> The council's membership is limited to the Arctic Rim states, and attempts by several other countries to join as observers have been thwarted. Slim membership casts doubt on whether the council will be able to undertake greater tasks; larger constellations of states and agents would likely prove more geoeconomically beneficial in dealing with the opportunities and problems of the Arctic.

Sweden's declaration, on assuming its chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2011, was a well-considered attempt to improve the council's public outreach efforts and to open it to new observer states with more clearly defined roles.<sup>11</sup> The states and state unions (such as the E.U.) that some of the Arctic coastal states consider to have inconsistent Arctic policies (and

<sup>8</sup> T. N. Jackson & J. P. Nielsen, eds, *Russia-Norway: Physical and Symbolic Borders*. Moscow, Languages of Slavonic Culture, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> L. Heininen & H. N. Nicol, "A new northern security agenda," in E. Brunet-Jailly, ed., *Comparing border security in North America and Europe*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007, pp. 117–63; C. S. Browning & P. Joenniemi, "The European Union's two dimensions: the Eastern and the Northern," *Security Dialogue* Vol. 34, 2003, pp. 463–79.

<sup>10</sup> T. Koivurova & Md. Waliul Hasanat, "The climate policy of the Arctic Council," in T. Koivurova, E. C. H. Keskitalo & N. Banks, eds, *Climate Governance in the Arctic* Dordrech, Springer, 2009, pp. 70–2.

<sup>11</sup> K. Bergh, "Arctic cooperation must become more inclusive," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Newsletter* July/August 2011.

whose Arctic Council membership has been frozen due to this and other reasons<sup>12)</sup> must pursue their interests by their own northern instruments. In the case of the E.U., this includes furthering the work of its Northern Dimension partnerships and providing more funding for its new research coordinator in northern socio-economic sciences at the Northern Dimension Institute.

**Figure 3.** The Chinese polar research vessel *Xue Long*, “Snow Dragon”



Source: Yong Wang, State Ocean Administration of China

It will be of interest to some of the world's major economies – China, Japan, and South Korea – if Arctic melting persists and Russia adheres to its present policy of trying to develop the Northern Sea Route into an internationally competitive sea link connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans across the Arctic. But opening the Northern Sea Route will hinge upon big investments being made in northern harbours and other infrastructure and on developing cold region technologies in shipping and navigation. Especially if the financial crisis persists non-arctic major economies will be the once fit to make this possible as investors and by entering joint ventures.<sup>13</sup> Other major northern development plans in mining and offshore hydrocarbon extraction, would equally benefit from wide international enterprise.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. Østhagen, “Debating the EU’s role in the Arctic: a report from Brussels,” message posted on the web site by staff of the non-governmental Arctic Institute: Center for Circumpolar Security Studies, 2011. Available online: at <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/2011/10/2472-european-arctic-ambiguity.html> (accessed on March 1, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> L. Jakobson, “China prepares for an ice-free Arctic,” *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: Insights on Peace and Security* Vol. 2, 2010, pp 5–9; K.-S. Kim, “Policy Report: Natural Resources Development and Environmental Issues of the Arctic,” *Dokdo Research Journal* 11, 2010, pp. 81–93.

Foreign direct investment and other forms of business partnerships could offer shortcuts to diversifying the industries and labour markets of many northern company towns, making them more attractive and socially sustainable societies. Unfortunately, geopolitical conservatism eschews such global, business-minded perspectives in most of the decision-making processes on the Arctic, particularly in the Russian High North. It remains to be seen when  $\frac{3}{4}$  and if  $\frac{3}{4}$  new resourceful economic players will be welcomed beyond the Arctic Circle.

## Expert advice and northern policy making

Scholarly research is based on the principles of free speech and democratic dialogue among peers. An open exchange of ideas and factual information can, through reason, produce consensus that transcends individual interests. The scientific discourse demands sharing knowledge on theory, methods, and data. Through publications and reviews, imperfections and lacunas in the present knowledge can be identified and new research conceived. When results are pooled and analysed jointly and individually, an agreement can be reached on the best practices of solving pressing human problems.

**Figure 4.** In March 2011 the exploration rig *Polar Pioneer* made the largest find of oil so far on the northern part of the Norwegian shelf, at Skrugard in the Barents Sea



Source: Harald Pettersen, Statoil

Jürgen Habermas has demonstrated the democratic importance of the public sphere, and proved the epistemological significance of what he has called the ideal act of communication. In an “ideal speech situation,” participants are socially equal, are having the same capacity for discourse, and their words are not confused by ideology and error. In defining the prerequisites of an ideal act of communication Habermas moved theoretical philosophical reasoning into the sociological sphere without joining post-modern deconstructionists in denying the viability of a project striving towards consensus on truth through the open exchange of arguments.<sup>14</sup>

Habermas’ ideal act of communication is related to the norms of modern science, but it does not imply traits or tendencies of real science and technology such as reductionism, secular modernism, or technocracy. Sciences and scholarship often inform political decision making. Political evaluations based on comprehensive pools of reliable data should identify progressive strategies aiming for sustainable economic development and a fair standard of living for everyone. Thus, scholarship, science, and technology have the potential to improve the very social context of which they are a part. For this reason, research cooperation was a crucial component of the Murmansk initiative that helped transform the Arctic after the Cold War.

The roles of science and technology in modern industrial societies are, of course, complex, and have been recurring topics for research, particularly the problematic relationship between expert advisors and politicians in democracies.<sup>15</sup> At a time when many new and old northern stakeholders are establishing or updating their Arctic agendas, there is good reason to discuss whether there is a balanced supply of knowledge and expert advice on the polar regions. In transparently addressing this issue, the ministries of education, polar research institutes, and universities with Arctic ambitions should consider, for example, if the distribution of funding between the natural sciences and technology on the one hand, and the social sciences (including economic geography and multidisciplinary studies) on the other, is balanced, given that several important Arctic issues are multidimensional, with large components falling within the scope of the social sciences.

The cost of field stations, icegoing research vessels, monitoring facilities, and communication networks are, of course, high, but largely motivated by the necessity to scrutinize the impact of human activity on the

<sup>14</sup> O. A. Payrow Shabani, *Democracy, power and legitimacy: the Critical theory of Jürgen Habermas*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 2006, pp. 44–50; J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1981.

<sup>15</sup> E. Fisher, “‘Upgrading’ market legitimization: revisiting Habermas’ ‘Technology as Ideology’ in neoliberal times,” *Fast Capitalism* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2007. Available online: [http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2\\_2/fisher.html](http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2_2/fisher.html) (accessed on March 1, 2017).



polar regions. However, countering global warming and polar melting not only depends on monitoring and forecasting climate change and developing alternative energy sources, but also on finding the optimal rates and measures for cutting emissions to avoid depriving societies of the economic resources necessary for achieving such cuts.<sup>16</sup> Finding a balance involves socio-economic discounting, scenario building, modelling, and evaluation on a global scale to produce a new policy consensus based on natural and social sciences, technology, macroeconomics, political science, and cultural studies. This reality is not sufficiently mirrored today in political allocations of research funding in, for example, polar research.

Other policy issues worthy of debate pertain to the ways in which research funding is distributed inside any relevant discipline. Europe and the U.S. are trending back toward the traditional internalistic academic system of distributing the main part of available funds among competing research projects and individuals based on previous achievements measured by scientometric means. In practice, this method is reduced to simple bibliometric rankings of quality and productivity based on the number of publications in a closed set of peer reviewed journals and citations within the literature. The system is known to augment the so-called Matthew Effect in science; its drawbacks were discussed during the advent of social studies of science and have been recognised within the relevant research communities ever since.<sup>17</sup>

One of the consequences of the Matthew Effect is that excellence in research may be achieved but can lack continuity over time in a given social setting, subject area, or speciality, which can be detrimental to the national, regional, and local availability of expertise. It is difficult to build sufficient research expertise to address the multifactorial issues of certain geographical areas, such as the Arctic, under the present funding system. This system works against the kind of instant service from the research sector that most political decision-makers, administrators, stakeholders, and the media would like to have in exchange for the funds spent on research. Calling the “research brigade” in times of urgent need, only to learn that we do not have any experts because no local personnel was “excellent” enough to fund, is not always easily solved by going on the international knowledge market or determining what readings we should try to download or find at the nearest library. In any case, this is not the way to build a convincing global, regional, or national leadership on northern matters. Sufficient continuity, a reasonable breadth of national expertise,

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<sup>16</sup> W. Nordhaus, *A question of balance: weighing the options on global warming policies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. See also. N. Stern, *The economics of climate change: The Stern Review*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> R. K. Merton 1968. ‘The Matthew effect in science’, *Science* 159, 1968, pp. 56–63.

and a stronger articulation of strategic goals in distributing research funding are the solutions to this problem.

**Figure 5.** Keeping continuity in Arctic expertise, renovation work in the summer of 2011 on the research station of the Russian Academy of Science in Barentsburg, Svalbard



*Source: Urban Wråkberg*

However, the limited political appeal, at least in Europe and Scandinavia, of maintaining and expanding research budgets on the High North hinders those very actions. A related phenomenon is apparent in some countries where a historical unwillingness to fund permanent polar research institutes has resulted in their absence today. The task of finding experts when preparing policies on the High North will, as a result, be slow and costly, while seeking them out abroad could be complicated by issues of language, trust, and culture.

Several other political issues pertaining to northern research deserve discussion but are outside the scope of this paper. In concluding, however, it is worth noting a tension inside academia itself, embodied in the question of to which one of the two stereotypical visions of the High North's future any researcher is committed. On the one extreme is the north as a pristine nature reserve where human impact is minimised through regulations and surveillance; on the other is the north as a developing region where the presence of indigenous peoples, recent settlers, and even short-term labourers and tourists are all regarded favourably.









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