

THE HIGH NORTH AND TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY

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The High North and Transatlantic Security

Overview

In recent years, the High North has become the focus of growing attention from states bordering the Arctic and other interested nations both nearby and at some distance¹. This development is primarily due to recent melting in the Arctic ice caps. Nations bordering the Arctic include the United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, and Russia. While not technically within this area Sweden, Finland, and Iceland are sufficiently close to the High North to have a direct interest in the area.²

The Arctic Ocean has two principal sea passages: the Northern Sea Passage near Russia and the Northwest Passage near Canada. A continuation of melting of the Arctic ice caps could allow maritime travel through these two passages for much if not all of the year. In addition it is theoretically possible that new passages through other parts of the Arctic region could be developed as well. Thus, it may prove feasible and practical at some point, assuming also appropriate technological capabilities are developed, for nations to utilize this area in ways that until recently had not been thought possible.

For example, newly opened waterways have the potential to evolve into profitable shipping lanes given that navigation time and distance between Asia and Europe could be reduced significantly. In addition, the attraction of energy reserves located under receding ice could lead to a race for Arctic territory and carries the potential for future conflicts. For these reasons, significant High North issues are beginning to emerge with respect to such areas as shipping, trade, territorial rights, natural resources, and national security.³

Indicative of the growing importance of the High North, is the fact that all five nations bordering the Arctic have in recent years promulgated major policy statements concerning the region. In addition, organizations such as the European Union (EU) have also become engaged on the issue. Very importantly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the transatlantic military alliance, has also taken a strong recent interest in the High North.

Emerging High North Issues

A number of important High North issues are emerging and, if present Arctic trends continue, will increasingly become national and international concerns. All these issues are fundamentally related to national security interests. These issues include the following.⁴

¹ The High North is a term used with increasing frequency to designate territory north of the Arctic Circle, and most often refers to the European or Eurasian areas of the Arctic.

² Even nations at some distance, including China, South Korea, Japan, and India, are focusing on the High North.

³ See Borgerson, Scott, "Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, no. 2, pp 63-77.

⁴ Other issues that may become of increasing interest but which are not discussed in this paper include fisheries, environmental issues, safety, micro prospecting, and scientific research, including genetic molecules and resources in the deep seas.

Maritime Transportation/International Trade

As a general proposition, passages through the Arctic region could reduce maritime transiting distances by thousands of miles as compared to various more southern shipping lanes, including the Suez and Panama Canals. One Arctic route traverses north of Russia (Northern Sea Passage or Northeast Passage). This route in fact is even now open for a few weeks in the summer. There is also another route, the Northwest Passage which is located north of the Canadian mainland.

Thus, for example, a passage via the Russian route could potentially cut days to weeks off shipping transiting between Asia and Europe. Traveling a route from Yokohama Japan to Rotterdam Netherlands via the Russian path could take about 4,500 miles, or about forty percent, off of the typical route through the Suez Canal. Also, passage from Seoul, South Korea to Rotterdam is about 12,600 miles but by using the north of Russia route the trip could be around 3,500 fewer miles and ten days shorter.⁵ Transiting via the Northwest Passage could reduce travel time by twenty-five percent. Indeed, the Northwest Passage could become a major transit route for international trade between Europe and Asia, reducing travel times significantly.

If and when shipping can travel straight through the Arctic, the time and distance for travel would be reduced even more. Financial savings for shippers could therefore be substantial over time. At the same time, taking advantage of potential savings could be very challenging. Among other things, increased commerce through the High North would require an enhanced and capable maritime infrastructure. Such an infrastructure would need to include such items as navigational aids, shipping standards, and search and rescue capabilities (especially given the growing number of cruise ships in the area). International coordination and cooperation and arrangements for security of transportation would also be necessary.

Natural Resources

The extent and accessibility of undersea natural resources in the High North is not completely clear but undoubtedly substantial reserves exist. A 2008 United States Geological Survey estimates that the Arctic region contains 90 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids in twenty-five areas. Estimates are that this accounts for roughly thirteen percent of the unexplored oil in the world and thirty percent of the natural gas. Indeed, ten percent of current total known petroleum reserves are located in Arctic fields already in the exploration stage.

Motives and interests vary among the Arctic states as they assess the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing territorial, commercial, and even military expansion northward. Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly the case that projected reserves of vast hydrocarbon resources are a compelling factor for growing interest in the region.

⁵ See for example: "Two German Cargo Ships Pass through Arctic Passage", Associated Press, September 11, 2009.

Conflict over Arctic natural resources at some future point cannot be ruled out. At the same time, there also exist factors mitigating against the potential for conflict. For example, most of the projected natural resources are located within already agreed territorial zones. Indeed, a significant percentage of the resources that are located in the High North are actually within areas already accepted as under Russian control. Further, given that much of the undiscovered oil and gas is estimated to be offshore, many challenges would exist in terms of accessing and exploiting such resources, and which could discourage resource extraction efforts. These include developing an adequate infrastructure, financing high costs and assuming substantial risks, and dealing with challenging conditions, including ice flows and significant ocean depths.

International Legal/Territorial Issues

Russia, Canada, Norway, the United States (with Alaska), and Denmark (via its sovereignty over Greenland) are referred to as Arctic states because they border the Arctic Circle. These states by agreement are limited in their Arctic territorial claims to a 200 mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around their coasts. This limit was established in an effort to prevent competing claims of sovereignty and military deployments which could trigger conflict.

In addition to the EEZ's, all of the Arctic bordering nations with the exception of the United States⁶ have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). With respect to the Arctic, UNCLOS permits member states to regulate economic activity, resource exploitation, and corresponding environmental impacts within their EEZ.

Under the terms of UNCLOS, nations that have unresolved territorial issues that involve competing claims by other nations⁷ in the High North have either submitted claims or conducted scientific expeditions to gather information and evidence to support their positions. For example, Norway has submitted a claim to the Loop Hole in the Barents Sea, the Western Nansen Basin in the Arctic Ocean, and the Banana Hole in the Norwegian Sea. Russia and Norway have disagreed regarding delimitation of economic zones in the Barents Sea. Finland and Russia have a 1990 maritime boundary agreement which has not been ratified by Russia. There is also a dispute between Canada and Denmark regarding the Hans Island in the Davies Strait.

Territorial concerns are connected with issues related to the legal framework for access to the High North and its resources. Under UNCLOS, coastal nations as noted above can establish a 200 nautical mile EEZ and have the right to develop resources in the seabed and subsoil. However, there is no mechanism provided to define respective

⁶ The U.S. has signed this treaty, but it has not as of this writing been ratified by the United States Senate.

⁷ For an overview of High North claims see Sven G. Holtmark, *Towards Cooperation or Competition*, Research Paper No.45, NATO Defense College, 2009.

rights and limits where the zones or continental shelves arguably overlap between two or more nations. This can lead to disputes related to delineation of EEZ's and continental shelves.

UNCLOS allows access rights to seabed and subsoil beyond the 200 nautical miles if they are in fact a part of a nation's continental shelf but does not make clear how these rights are specifically to be determined, or how to determine who has access where zones might overlap, including the question of whether something really is a continental shelf as such. The result is the existence of overlapping claims regarding continental shelves.

For example, Russia has submitted a claim to a huge swath of Arctic territory, asserting that Siberia and the Arctic seabed are connected to the same continental shelf. In 2001, Russia submitted to the UNCLOS a formal claim for an area of 1.2 million square kilometers (460,000 square miles) that runs from the undersea Lomonosov Ridge and Mendeleev Ridge to the North Pole which approximates the size of Germany, France, and Italy. The U.N. commission did not accept the claim and requested additional data and information. Russia sought to reinforce its position by sending a scientific mission including a nuclear-powered icebreaker and two mini-submarines to the area.

Separately, Denmark has suggested that part of the Arctic seabed is actually an extension of Greenland. Russia and Canada will likely contest this claim. In addition, there are other various unresolved territorial claims and counterclaims in the Arctic region. For example, the U.S. and Canada have an unresolved boundary in the Beaufort Sea where oil, natural gas, and other resources may exist. Further, experts in Denmark are seeking to connect the North Pole to Greenland and in Canada are working to identify a connection to Ellesmere Island which is Canadian territory.

As a result of this situation, there are in principle several alternative approaches to a legal regime for the High North region.⁸ First, as the European Parliament suggested in 2008, a legal regime similar to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 could be established. However, this seems unlikely since the Arctic states at the Arctic Ocean Conference convened by Denmark on May 28, 2008 released the Ilulissat Declaration, which effectively rejected the establishment of any new international legal regime to regulate the Arctic.

Second, a new legal structure could be developed. Thus far, there has been little interest evidenced for in effect starting over in the High North in terms of a legal regime.

A third alternative is to reach agreements upon an ad hoc basis within the context of already existing customary international law, gradually perhaps evolving into something more formal. To the extent any existing law is utilized, developing case law

⁸ For an overview, see "The Fabled Northwest Passage: Global Warming, Canadian Sovereignty and the Shortest Europe-Asia Shipping Route", Remarks by Professor John Norton Moore at the American Bar Association International Law Meeting, New York City, April 3, 2008.

from the International Court of Justice could also be relevant. This is in fact an approach that could appear acceptable to the five nations adjacent to the High North directly and could include bilateral as well as multilateral agreements.

Finally, a legal structure exclusively on the basis of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Seas could be pursued. This appears to be the approach at present of most, if not all, of the Arctic bordering nations which support observing already existing legal understandings. Given that the U.S. and Russia have both agreed with this position, it is unlikely that an entirely new legal regime for the Arctic will be developed.

National Security/Defense Issues

During the Cold War, the Arctic region was a zone of security concern for both the West and the Soviet Union. The NATO allies, for example, deployed substantial intelligence assets, developed plans and capabilities for countering the Soviet Northern Fleet, and deployed nuclear submarines traveling beneath the polar icecap. For its part, the Soviet Union maintained and deployed substantial military capabilities in areas near the Arctic. For both sides, any nuclear exchange would likely have involved missiles flying over the polar region.

In the initial post Cold War years, the High North faded from interest in the West as attention focused on security challenges in the Balkans and the Middle East. Subsequently, and at present, the region has emerged again as a new security focus.

In a general sense, all the nations bordering or near the High North are newly concerned about ensuring both military access to the region and the requisite military and other capabilities to do so. Such capabilities are seen to be needed in order to ensure the ability to protect or defend territory which nations claim in the region, as well as to protect shipping in peacetime or in time of conflict, and to ensure access to natural resources. As a result, the region's militaries are focusing on such matters as the possibility of new or enhanced military bases, the logistics requirements for a challenging environment, and new warship routes, if and when new access emerge routes in the region.

In the broadest sense, nations view economic growth and prosperity, as well as access to necessary natural resources, to be essential to their national security⁹ Thus, while a variety of issues are of importance to High North nations, all key issues discussed in this paper are interconnected with national security objectives, perceptions, and concerns.

National Perspectives

⁹ "Security Prospects in the High North: Geostrategic Thaw or Freeze? Sven G. Holtmark and Brooke A. Smith-Windsor (ed), NDC Forum Paper 7, NATO Defense College 2009.

Norway

For Norway, the High North is an issue of great importance.¹⁰ As long ago as October 2005, the Norwegian government stated that the High North would be its top strategic priority in the years ahead. In December 2006, the Norwegian government made public a “High North Strategy” with a follow-up paper in March 2009. The Norwegian approach addresses several key High North issue areas: climate and environmental matters, maritime safety capabilities, energy and marine resources.

Given its proximity to Russia, many of Norway’s concerns relate understandably to current or potential disputes with Moscow. Overall, the Norwegian emphasis has been on a positive approach. As a result, cooperation with Russia is inevitably a high priority for Oslo. At the same time, as noted above, Norway had outstanding disputes with Russia, especially with respect to the use of Svalbard.

In this regard, in mid-April 2010 Norway and Russia jointly announced during a visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that after four decades of talks they had agreed to “close the question” of the demarcation of their Arctic sea border. The agreement would divide roughly in half an area of the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean covering some 175,000 sq km (68,000 square miles). The disputed area is located primarily between Gazprom’s Shtokman gas discovery and two oil and gas fields closer to Norway. Subsequently, on September 15, 2010 Russia and Norway signed an agreement that was intended to end the longstanding maritime border dispute. Indications also were that Russia had asked for Norwegian expertise in developing its natural gas resources in the region. It also remains to be seen whether the agreement, even if implemented, will change the basic Norwegian cautious approach towards Russia.

Norway’s strategy thus far has also called on Oslo to “continue to exercise sovereignty firmly...” in the High North region. Norway has also taken the lead at NATO in seeking to focus the Alliance’s attention on the High North. In the fall of 2008, for example, Oslo prepared an informal paper for Alliance members urging more attention at NATO to the High North region. A reflection of the Norwegian attitude was Norwegian Foreign Minister Store’s assertion that Svalbard is not only Norwegian territory but that it also falls under the requirement in Article V of the NATO Treaty which would require a collective response by NATO members to any outside nation’s actions to attack this area.

In addition, Norway has become increasingly concerned in general about Russia’s objectives and behavior, including especially Russian actions in Georgia. Oslo is concerned that Russian behavior towards Georgia might reflect a more general approach towards neighboring nations. Thus, Foreign Minister Store stated that “What happened in Georgia...clearly raises the issue of Russia’s relations with its neighbors and Russia’s respect for international law” and that...“Russia’s operation was in breach of international law” (although he added, not yet the start of a new Cold War as such). The

¹⁰ See Lindemann, Ole Andreas, “Norwegian Foreign Policy on the High North”, Oslo, 2009.

Norwegian Foreign Minister also asserted that NATO “is Norway’s anchor as it regards security”.

As a result of its concerns, Norway has decided to strengthen its military capacities in the High North region. For example, Norway has moved its Army headquarters as of August, 2009 from Oslo to Bardufoss which is located in the north. Indeed, most important elements of the Norwegian Armed Forces as a whole are being transitioned to the north thereby enhancing military capabilities already based near the city of Bodø. In addition, Norway’s new top modern frigates and the new fleet of fighter jets will help Norway’s defenses in the High North.

Norway has also since the late 1990s made the development of naval ships capable of operating in Arctic waters a priority with the deployment of five Nansen-class frigates. The Norwegian Navy also possesses Ula-class submarines as well as Skjold and Hauk-class patrol boats.

Denmark

Denmark proper is not an Arctic state as such. However, Denmark falls into this category due to its continuing control of Greenland. While Greenland is largely self-ruled, its foreign affairs remain under the direction of the Danish government. The region receives a sizable annual subsidy which amounted to approximately \$700 million and accounted for around sixty percent of Greenland’s government revenues.¹¹

In part to solidify its involvement with High North issues, Denmark in May 2008 hosted a conference of Arctic states at Ilulissat, Greenland. A principal objective was to encourage a dialogue by Arctic nations on the impacts of climate change and other Arctic issues. The participants agreed upon a concluding document, known as the Ilulissat Declaration, in which the foreign ministers of Denmark, Norway, Russia, Canada, and the United States noted the impact of climate change in the Arctic, posited the potential challenges of competing territorial claims, and described opportunities and risks associated with increased exploitation of living and non-living natural resources. The document noted the parties’ intention to work within the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and discounted the need for any “new comprehensive international legal regime to govern the Arctic Ocean.”¹²

Danish interests in the region include competing territorial claims with Norway, Canada, and Russia. At the same time, possible further changes in its relationship with Greenland make Denmark’s future in the Arctic uncertain. For example, Denmark’s relationship with Greenland could be affected by any further warming trends, as increased access to Arctic natural resources could encourage Greenland to seek even greater autonomy, perhaps culminating in independence. This is especially true if rising

¹¹ CIA World Factbook, “Greenland”, November 10, 2009.

¹² The Ilulissat Declaration, *Siku News*, May 29, 2008.

energy wealth would negate the island's need for economic subsidies from Denmark.¹³

Conversely, Arctic changes could in fact actually increase Greenland's reliance on Denmark. Arguably, if its Arctic natural resources become accessible, Greenland may in fact see its interests best supported and protected by a close relationship with a stronger political and military power such as Denmark.

Denmark itself has focused increasingly on the security aspects of its relationship to the High North. In September 2009, the Danish Defense Intelligence Agency suggested that increased transiting and natural resource exploitation in the Arctic could lead to political or even military conflicts. Denmark has also sent a naval expedition to the Arctic to demarcate territory it believes is under its jurisdiction. Further, Denmark's Arctic-capable naval assets are complemented by a Naval Air Squadron, which operates the Navy's helicopters and which can support offshore patrol frigates. The Danish Navy will also have three Ivar Huitfeldt-class frigates in its inventory starting around 2012-2013. Finally, Denmark plans to upgrade military facilities in Greenland.

Russia

Russia has a longstanding interest in the High North.¹⁴ For one thing, a sizeable portion of Russia territory borders on or near the Arctic Ocean. In addition, substantial Russian natural resources are located in its northern region and thus High North-related trade is a significant dimension of the Russian economy. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev has stated that around twenty percent of Russia's GDP and twenty-two percent of Russia's exports are produced in the Arctic region.

In September 2008 Russia adopted an overall Arctic strategy which highlights the perceived importance of the region to the future Russian economy. A stated objective is to make the Arctic the top source of natural resources, as well as to define Russia's continental shelf, within the decade. This strategy also calls for the development of the infrastructure for a major sea transportation route.

Russian officials project the Arctic region as potentially the country's main source of natural resources in the 21st century,¹⁵ especially given that up to ninety percent of Russia's hydrocarbon reserves are located on the continental shelf in western Arctic areas such as the Barents, Pechora, and Kara Seas and in the Timan-Pechora basin. Assuming current trends, utilization of hydrocarbon resources in these areas could become practical by around 2025-2030.

If and when the Russian Northern Sea Route becomes available for commercial traffic, Russia will have a key role with respect to new transiting paths. As noted above,

¹³ See Petersen, Nikolaj, "The Arctic as a New Arena for Danish Foreign Policy", Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2009.

¹⁴ See Baev, Pavel, "Russia Engages and Challenges Its Neighbors", International Journal, Vol. 63, No. 2; pp. 291-305.

¹⁵ President of Russia, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", July 12, 2008.

these routes could significantly reduce the distance ships must travel between Europe and the west coast of the Americas as well as Northeast Asia and the Far East. Even at present, Russia insists upon issuing permits for ships seeking to transit the Northeast Passage.

From Moscow's perspective, the security dimension of the High North is of great importance. The Kola Peninsula, for example, provides direct access to the Atlantic and the Arctic, and ensures a base of operations where essential military and defense capacities are located.

Russia thus far has a mixed record on Arctic security issues. On the one hand, the Russians have advocated keeping the Arctic as a zone of peaceful cooperation; and in general have abided by relevant legal regimes, such as the UNCLOS, in the Arctic.

On the other hand, Moscow has in recent years made a variety of assertive statements regarding the High North. For example, the draft "Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation until 2020" explicitly identifies the Arctic as an arena for geopolitical competition and posits military force as an appropriate tool to protect Russian hydrocarbon resources. In more concrete terms, as noted above, a Russian mini-submarine in August 2007 planted a Russian flag on the Arctic Ocean floor (around 2.5 miles under the sea) at the Lomonosov Ridge after collecting soil samples with the intention of demonstrating that the ridge is part of the Eurasian landmass.

A strong approach was also reflected by the Russian Ministry of Defense's July 2008 announcement that it would strengthen its military presence in the Arctic and Svalbard region. In addition, a strategy paper issued by the Russian Security Council in May 2009 stated that "the presence and potential escalation of armed conflicts near Russia's national borders are the major threats to Russia's interests and border security". Most significantly, the paper went on to add that "In a competition for resources it cannot be ruled out that military force could be used to resolve emerging problems".

Other indications of Russian assertiveness regarding the High North include statements by Russian officials that the U.S. and other western nations and NATO are seeking to limit Russia's international influence and keep Russia weak. Further, Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin in March 2009 warned NATO not to get involved in the Arctic.

In August 2007, Russia resumed air patrols over the Arctic. In recent years, the Russian Air Force has flown more than 90 missions over the Arctic, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans, and the Russian Navy has also returned to the Arctic with the Russian Northern Fleet at Murmansk increasing its patrols in the region. It also appears that Moscow is improving plans and capabilities for possible conflicts in the High North. For example, the Ministry of Defense plans to form an Arctic spetnaz special forces unit.

Canada

The Canadian government has taken a strong interest in the High North and has outlined a comprehensive northern strategy to defend Canadian interests in the region. Priorities include exercising Arctic sovereignty, protecting the environment, and promoting social and economic development. In order to advance these priorities, the Canadian government has invested a great deal of effort to improve infrastructure and strengthen capabilities for exploiting Arctic economic and commercial opportunities.

As far as land claims and issues of sovereignty are concerned, Canada has disagreements with the U.S., Russia, and Denmark. Key disputes include Denmark's claim to Hans Island and competing claims to the same parts of the Arctic continental shelf among countries bordering the Arctic.

There is also a Canadian concern about the Northwest Passage. Canada's position is that this passage is an internal waterway. Most other countries, including the United States, view it as an international strait. The dispute between the two North American countries was highlighted in 1985, when a U.S. coast guard icebreaker passed through the waters without having asked for Canadian permission. Subsequently, Canada declared the Northwest Passage to be "internal waters". Along these lines, Canadian Prime Minister Harper in 2008 also endorsed stricter registration requirements for ships traveling via the Northwest Passage.

Canada's principal Arctic concern relates to Russia. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has emphasized the importance of the High North and has reacted very vocally to Russian expansion into the Arctic. Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon stated in early 2009 that Canada would not be bullied by Russian encroachments on the Arctic.

With respect to security issues, in addition to Canadian concerns about the 2007 Russia flag-planting incident noted above, the Canadian Defense Minister Peter McKay in 2009 contended that Moscow had sent its military planes very close to Canadian airspace. He added that Canadian jet fighters would intercept Russian planes should they cross into Canada.

Thus, it is not surprising that in August 2010, Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon asserted that Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic was the country's "top foreign-policy priority." He further stated: "That is why we are making new and targeted investments, be they patrol ships, a new polar-class icebreaker, reinforcements to our Canadian Rangers, better monitoring of our airspace and sea...".

Canada has also developed plans to increase its military capabilities related to the High North. These changes are outlined in Canada's defense strategy and include the acquisition of three armed ice-breakers, six Arctic patrol ships, the opening of a new deep-water port in Nanisivik, increasing the number of Canadian Rangers stationed in the north, and improving surveillance and patrol capabilities. In addition, Canada has

established an Arctic military training center, a new port, and a fleet of Arctic patrol ships.

United States

The U.S. is an Arctic nation and, therefore, has a variety of interests and concerns regarding the High North.¹⁶ A comprehensive policy statement, the first since 1994, was issued as a National Security Presidential Directive in January 2009 during the last weeks of the Bush Administration¹⁷.

The Directive asserts that the U.S. has broad and fundamental High North national security interests and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests. These interests include: natural resources (oil, natural gas, methane hydrates, minerals and living marine species); energy security; missile defense and early warning capabilities; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence and maritime security operations; as well as an interest in preventing terrorist attacks.

The Directive goes on to suggest that in general freedom of the seas in the region is a top national priority, including for both navigation and overflights. It also asserts that the U.S. needs a more active and influential presence to protect its Arctic interests and to project sea power throughout the region. Finally, the document suggests that protecting U.S. rights in the High North is necessary to avoid a negative precedent with respect to U.S. rights of international passage at other important maritime transit points.

Therefore, the Directive states, the U.S. should enhance capabilities to protect its High North borders; increase monitoring of potential threats or challenges in the region; ensure unimpeded access and transiting through the High North; project a U.S. maritime presence to support key U.S. interests; and encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Aside from the text of the Directive, it is also otherwise clear that the U.S. is concerned about security issues in the High North focusing primarily on the expanding Russian presence and activities in the region. In addition, the U.S. has other security concerns. For example, the U.S. Ambassador to Norway Benson K Whitney stated in 2007 that the U.S. must focus on “the physical security of both production facilities and distribution lines in the Arctic to avoid disruptions caused by terrorists who might see a symbolic and effective way to undermine the global economy”.¹⁸ Further, the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) states that “U.S. interests in, and assured access to, the global commons will take on added importance. The global commons are domains or areas that no one state controls on which all rely.”

¹⁶ See Cohen, Ariel, “The New Cold War: Reviving the U.S. Presence in the Arctic”, Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, October 30, 2008.

¹⁷ U.S. Government, “National Security Presidential Directive NSPD-66, Arctic Region Policy, January 2009.

¹⁸ Speech to the Norwegian Academy of Science, Oslo, Norway, January 25, 2007.

The U.S, of course, has had for some time Arctic-relevant military capabilities¹⁹. At the same time, there appears to be emerging a new focus operationally on that region. The U.S. Navy has developed a five-year plan to enhance Arctic capabilities. Furthermore, the USS Texas submarine surfaced near the North Pole in October 2009, the third such surfacing by a U.S. submarine in that area in 2009. In an earlier apparent response to the planting of a Russian flag at the North Pole, a U.S. Coast Guard vessel undertook a mapping expedition of the sea floor off of Alaska. At the same time, given its interests in the Arctic it is somewhat surprising that the U.S. has only one serviceable icebreaker ship.

Nations Adjacent to the High North²⁰

Finland

The High North nonetheless is of primary importance to Finland. In a September 2009 speech, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland Alexander Stubb stated that “the High North will have a profound effect on Finland”.²¹ He went on to suggest that any opening of the region would have two major impacts on Finland: the initiating of new transport routes and the development of new energy resources.

Finnish policy also is based upon the presumption that developments in logistics and energy production create significant opportunities for the Finnish economy, particularly in the north of Finland. As with the other Nordic nations, Finland believes that cross-border cooperation among interested nations is important. Finnish policy also proceeds on the premise that Northern Finland is organically linked to the north of Norway and Russia.

Basic elements of Finnish High North policy include strengthening of the Arctic Council as a “global” forum for enhancing the international governance of Arctic issues.²² For this reason, the Finns along with the Swedes and Icelanders, were very unhappy with Canada’s decision to host an “Arctic-5” (coastal states only) Summit in March 2010. These three states would like only the Arctic Council to which they belong to have a role in policy discussions for the region. With respect to the Arctic Council, Finland believes that current and new observer states and organizations should be accepted. The European Commission should be granted an observer status in the Arctic

¹⁹ An example of U.S. perspectives on security issues can be found at “Agenda: 3rd Symposium on the Impacts of A Changing Arctic on Naval and Maritime Operations. See also “Who Owns the Arctic?” Marina Malenic Defense Daily, December 18, 2008.

²⁰ Note: Iceland also falls into this category but will not be addressed in this paper as that nation has no meaningful military capabilities.

²¹ “A New Arctic Era and Finland’s Arctic Policy”, September 29, 2009.

²²The Arctic Council was formed in 1996 in order to further cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States on issues of interest including sustainable development and environmental protection. The Council’s members are the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland.

Council. Finland also supports a stronger European Arctic policy. Helsinki believes that the EU needs to be active in protecting the environment, promoting sustainable use of resources, and engaging in the governance of the High North.

With respect to High North security, Finland strongly supports enhanced Nordic security cooperation. Finland has in the past generally avoided overt military alliances, and has pursued at least nominally a policy of neutrality out of concern for Russian reaction. Thus, it is not at all surprising that in February 2009, Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Stubb remarked regarding cooperation with other nations, “This will not be called a defense alliance. Finland remains a country that is not a part of any military alliance²³.” However, this may not be the final word. In fact, for a number of years some Finnish political and opinion leaders have urged that Finland join NATO. Indeed, Finland is now actively engaged with NATO in various ways, including membership in NATO’s Partnership for Peace.

Sweden

Sweden, which does not directly border the Arctic, has thus far taken a low key approach to the High North. There have been relatively few public pronouncements or policy statements by the Swedish government or its officials concerning the High North. Rather, Sweden has stressed the benefits of cooperation with other nations and international organizations in addressing High North issues.

This is not to say that Sweden has no security concerns in the region. In fact, Sweden has traditionally maintained a strong and capable military force. Throughout the Cold War, Sweden in fact cooperated unofficially with NATO and NATO nations in preparations for any Soviet attack.

Sweden continues to maintain a defense force that could protect its interests in the High North area. For example, Sweden's Berga-based 1st Marine Regiment includes a corvette squadron (two Göteborg class and support ship), a mine-countermeasures squadron (Landsort class and support ship), one submarine (Gotland class), and a forward naval support element. The Swedish Navy’s Gotland and Södermanland-class submarines are suitable for operations in Arctic waters.

Sweden’s Arctic-capable naval assets also include newly built Visby-class stealth corvettes. Also, as with Finland, Sweden in recent years has come closer to NATO. For example, Sweden is a member of NATO’s Partnership for Peace and it was also the first nation to join a NATO-organized consortium for the purchase and use of a multinational strategic airlift capability.

²³ “A New Arctic Era and Finland”, speech by Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, Arctic Policy, September 29, 2009.

Key Organizations with High North Interests

European Union

No European Union member nations border the Arctic. The closest fit is Denmark which as discussed above has an Arctic connection via Greenland. At the same time, the European Union has a clear interest in the future of the Arctic. The region as a whole includes three EU member states (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) and other nations (Iceland, Norway, Canada, Russia, and the United States)²⁴ with which the EU has ongoing political relationships. The EU's growing interest in the region is reflected in the fact that it issued three statements in 2008 alone on High North policy issues.

Although territorial boundaries and spheres of influence have become less stark since the end of the Cold War, increased global demand for hydrocarbon resources, along with revised estimates of the region's reserves, have turned Europe's attention to the High North's economic possibilities. As a result, the EU has outlined policy objectives and proposals for increased European involvement in several areas including protection and preservation of the regional environment, sustainable development of living and non-living resources, and improved multilateral governance.

From an EU perspective, the potential for climate change makes a coherent response ever more necessary. To this end, the EU has focused upon specific High North priorities. These priorities include preventing and mitigating the effects of climate change on the Arctic region. The EU also plans to evaluate the environmental impact of current EU policies (and relevant multilateral agreements) and promote wider use of environmental impact assessments in future policymaking.²⁵

The EU's interest in the High North is to some extent related to the fact that the Arctic's hydrocarbon reserves could significantly impact the EU's energy independence and security. The EU's general approach has been to seek development of these resources in the context of the Arctic's environmental concerns along with extensive multilateral cooperation.

With respect to the potential greater access to shipping routes, the EU would discourage discriminatory practices and allow third party (non-Arctic) states to use these routes but also suggests that Europe work to maintain a competitive lead in developing technology required for Arctic conditions. The EU has also noted the likely need for enhanced maritime surveillance and it is possible that the existing EU-developed Galileo satellite system could play a significant role in these efforts. In addition, the European Space Agency continues to research the possibility of a polar-orbiting satellite system. Such systems would make transport in the region much safer by providing timely information on traffic and emergencies.

²⁴ Commission of the European Communities "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The European Union and the Arctic Region." Brussels, November 20, 2008.

²⁵ Commission of the European Communities, 2008.

With respect to High North international legal issues, the EU has focused upon establishing a comprehensive Arctic policy, modeled after UNCLOS, including the areas of security, environmental management, and equitable access to the sustainable use of resources. As noted earlier, the EU has supported the utilization of existing legal structures rather than developing new regimes²⁶.

While the European Union overall has focused primarily upon political and economic issues, the EU does have a security dimension. Indeed, under the Lisbon Agreement which is now in the process of being implemented, security concerns may take on a greater role at the EU. In any event, the EU already in 2008 stated that “changing geostrategic dynamics have potential consequences for international stability and European security interests”. Further, the European Parliament in October 2008 noted its concerns about the security implications of a race for natural resources in the region. Given current and at least near-term future EU military assets and capabilities as such, it is unlikely that the EU could or would utilize military force in the High North. At the same time, the EU’s limited capabilities could be used for more modest disaster response requirements.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established as a counter to the Soviet Union. During the Cold War the High North region was very important to NATO. For example, concerns about Soviet military capabilities and how to defend against a Soviet attack in the north helped shaped NATO’s defensive military planning and capabilities. As the Cold War ended, however, NATO turned its primary attention to European expansion and security challenges to the east, southeast, and south. In fact, the High North received little attention at NATO.

However, in recent years it became apparent that the potential for security issues to arise in the High North was increasing. The region was becoming a focus of attention for a number of nations and organizations and NATO also took a renewed interest in the region. Thus, NATO’s Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in December 2008 described NATO’s potential role in the Arctic. Focusing on the membership of four Arctic Rim states in NATO, de Hoop Scheffer described NATO as an ideal place for High North concerns to be discussed, disagreements to be mediated, and military strategies to be coordinated.

Shortly thereafter, as a reflection of this new focus, NATO convened a High North conference in Reykjavik, Iceland in January 2009.²⁷ At the session, NATO stated that the Arctic “is a region of enduring strategic importance for NATO and allied security...”.

²⁶ “The EU and the Arctic”, Adele Aurodi, Nordic Council of ministers 2009.

²⁷ “Security Prospects in the High North”, A seminar organized jointly by NATO and the Government of Iceland, in cooperation with the NATO Defense College; Reykjavik, Iceland 28-29 January 2009.

As it happens, all the nations that border the Arctic are NATO members with the very important exception of Russia. There are in fact outstanding areas of disagreement among the U.S., Canada, Denmark, and Norway over territorial issues but such disputes are highly likely to be addressed through multilateral forums or bilateral negotiations. Thus, despite certain territorial disputes and minor disagreements, the common interests shared by these nations make the possibility of conflict remote.

NATO's military capabilities are primarily composed of those of its members national military forces. Thus, any or all of those NATO nations that have military forces capable of Arctic region operations are in effect a part of NATO's High North military capabilities. In addition, NATO has some dedicated assets of its own such as AWACs air surveillance aircraft and also has established a strategic airlift capability consortium. NATO has the ability to conduct exercises and utilize search and rescue capabilities in the region as well. NATO's overall capabilities with respect to the High North could be enhanced even more if at some point Finland and/or Sweden were to join NATO.²⁸

A key variable in terms of NATO policies is Russia. Given its economic dependence on energy resources, the High North is a critical factor for that nation. Moscow could pursue an expansionist approach in the region or it could decide on a relatively cooperative approach. Undoubtedly, Russian use of force against Georgia raised concerns among NATO members regarding Russia's intentions in the High North and its willingness to use force. At the same time, there is an interest at NATO in finding ways to work with Russia, if and where possible. At a London Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Conference in October 2009, Admiral James Stavridis, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), i.e. the senior NATO military commander stated that "We need to get to a cooperative place with Russia. We need to have a serious dialogue. We need to recognize our differences but find zones of cooperation"²⁹.

Regional Cooperation Arrangements³⁰

In recent years, there has emerged a growing sub-regional interest in cooperation in the Arctic area for various purposes.³¹ Most significantly, the recognition of the need for coordination and open channels of communication regarding the evolving Arctic was reflected in a meeting (mentioned elsewhere) of the five Arctic boundary nations at

²⁸ It is generally assumed that if one of these two nations joined NATO, the other nation would as well. See "Finland, Sweden Consider Joining NATO", Defense News, February 25, 2008, p. 6.

²⁹ "NATO Commander sees Arctic Seabed as Cooperative Zone", Stars & Stripes, October 10, 2009.

³⁰ The United Nations has interests and activities related to the High North, including as noted elsewhere the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which took effect in 1994. The UN will not be discussed in detail as it has no security role related to the High North.

³¹ Other Arctic-related regional forums not discussed in this paper include: The Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council. Both play a key role in enhancing focus on safety and sustainable development issues. Nations also work through the International Maritime Organization and Arctic Council, UN agencies.

Illulisat, Greenland in May 2008. The nations attending agreed on the need to develop specific mechanisms for enhanced search and rescue capabilities, and also agreed that international law should be the basis for further discussions on territorial issues.

In the security realm, the Nordic Defense Ministerial (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland) in September 2009 discussed possibilities for cooperation in the High North. Nordic governments are in fact considering possible ways to, among other things, coordinate military naval activities. A key development was a report issued by former Norwegian Defense Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg on “Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy” which offers a variety of suggestions for regional cooperation at both political and military levels.³² He focused on various areas including crisis management, air surveillance and communications, satellite services, cyber security, and military cooperation on transport.

Stoltenberg’s proposals included a pan-Nordic Joint Operating Unit composed of naval, amphibious, and air assets to monitor and patrol common territories near and inside Arctic waters. The proposal would also establish a Nordic Maritime Response Force, a Nordic Satellite Surveillance System, and a Nordic Arctic Amphibious Unit comprised of units from within the Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Danish defense forces. He further suggested that naval forces could be used to support peacekeeping operations such as anti-piracy missions for protecting important shipping lanes. In addition, the nations involved could establish an air defense capability for Iceland.

Conclusion

The High North’s profile is clearly on the rise. Meetings, conferences and official policy statements have proliferated in recent years. Much, if not all, of this interest has emerged based upon the premise that environmental changes are inevitable and in turn will change the economic, political, and security dynamics in the Arctic region. All of this, it is suggested, would result in an increased potential for both conflict and cooperation.³³

At the same time, these assumptions should be placed in perspective. Environmental changes may not be as far-reaching or rapid as some have projected. Further, the challenges and costs of utilizing new transport routes and accessing High North energy resources could well prove significant obstacles. In addition, it is not at all clear whether a key actor, Russia, can build the modern energy infrastructure necessary to take advantage of energy resources within its jurisdiction.

³² Stoltenberg, Thorvald, “Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy”, Speech on February 9, 2009.

³³ There is no question that there has been some thawing in the Arctic region. At the same time, there is disagreement about what may have caused such thawing. In addition, key variables in determining future possibilities and interests in the High North are a) whether such thawing will continue and b) if so, to what extent and over what period of time. These variables should have a significant impact upon issues relating to the security dimension of the High North.

In any event, for planning purposes nations are likely to assume that the High North will indeed take on growing importance for their national interests. In this regard, security issues are a significant underlying dimension of the renewed attention to the High North. Full-scale conflict over differing interests in the High North is unlikely under present circumstances. Nonetheless, it makes sense for the nations of the West to enhance their security-related planning, capabilities, and cooperation individually, bilaterally, regionally, and multi-nationally. This preparation should include military-related capabilities as well as political and diplomatic initiatives.

The two most promising approaches for Western security interests in the High North are Nordic security cooperation and an enhanced NATO role. Regional High North security cooperation could include the development of High North capabilities in such areas as regional defense strategies planning, exercises, and search and rescue cooperation. The Nordic Battle Group, which was established through the EU, could also be a part of this regional capability package.

The other approach to establishing necessary Western military-related capabilities is to work through NATO. As noted earlier, with the major exception of Russia, all of the nations bordering the Arctic are NATO members. The other nearby nations are all either members of or else have close relations with NATO.

NATO can serve a variety of functions regarding the High North. As a starting point, NATO can be a vehicle for NATO members to discuss and compare perspectives and share information within a broader multinational security framework. NATO can provide an important forum for working out claims among interested nations and also for defusing any potential points of conflict. NATO can also develop specific High North-related capabilities and adapt its command structures. Examples include search-and-rescue missions and environmental emergency response capabilities. Further, NATO can deploy a training mission to Iceland as well as a NATO maritime training group to the region. In addition, NATO can develop cooperation with the Arctic Council.

In a separate but related area, the NATO 2008 Bucharest Summit decided that NATO would take on an energy security role. NATO has identified several areas for potential NATO activity including: information and intelligence fusion; projecting stability; advancing international and regional cooperation; supporting consequence management; and supporting the protection of critical infrastructure. To the extent that energy resources become a major issue in the High North in the years ahead, NATO could develop its capabilities in one or more of the above areas and apply them to the Arctic region.

NATO is currently working on a new Strategic Concept which will likely be adopted by the next NATO Summit to be held in Lisbon, Portugal in November 2010. One of the key issues for consideration is the geographical scope of NATO and its priorities in the years ahead. Other regions and other more pressing security challenges will undoubtedly be included in the Strategic concept as priorities for NATO. At the same time, how the High North is addressed will have an important impact upon NATO's

allocation of attention and resources to the region. A separate interesting question – which may never have to be clearly addressed – is exactly what is the northern boundary of NATO for purposes of the NATO Treaty’s Article V?

Ultimately, the most important factor with respect to a NATO role in the High North will be Russia. If Russia chooses a cooperative and constructive approach to High North issues, then the need for a NATO High North capability will diminish although not disappear.

One vehicle for both testing Russia’s intentions and for working cooperatively, if that is Moscow’s choice, is the already existing NATO-Russia Council. The NATO-Russia Council was formed as a mechanism for dialogue and also for cooperative projects where agreed.

NATO should continue to test Russia’s intentions and signal a willingness to cooperate with Moscow by making an effort to participate in military exercises and other ventures with Russia. These efforts can begin in areas of common interest such as surveillance and patrolling (NATO’s Operation Active Endeavor has already involved Russian ships), relief exercises, and disaster management. A sub-group on the High North could be established within the NATO-Russia Council.

However, should Russia choose a path of belligerent assertiveness and confrontation regarding the High North, the Alliance should take steps to enhance further current NATO programs relevant to the High North. These steps could be taken as a hedge in any event. For example, NATO could utilize its Integrated Air Defense System (NATINADS) and training exercises to strengthen surveillance, intelligence, and deterrence capabilities in the Arctic region. NATO could also deploy air surveillance missions similar to those it is providing currently in the Baltics. Also, the NATO Standing Maritime Group could be sent on occasion to the region.

Of course, the United States itself, as noted above, has its own national security interests in the High North. Certainly the U.S. can and should pursue its interests unilaterally when necessary. For example, the U.S. should enhance its icebreaker capability substantially and allocate more relevant military assets to Alaska.

At the same time, the U.S. can also benefit from working bilaterally on High North regional efforts. For example, the U.S. works with Denmark at the radar site and support facilities at Thule, Greenland. Also, the U.S. and Canada cooperate in various ways including working together through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) which among other things can detect missile launches towards North America. The U.S. could, as during the Cold War, work through NATO, an organization where it retains its leadership role.

In any event, it is of course to be hoped that emerging High North security issues and concerns can be addressed and resolved in a constructive manner. In this regard, it is important that nations such as Russia refrain from expansionist or belligerent rhetoric or

from deploying military forces in a threatening way. At the same time, Arctic nations allied with NATO must be prepared to protect and defend their interests in the region.

At the same time, it is to be hoped that the U.S. and its Allies can both protect their interests and also avoid conflict. The High North is an area to some extent of first impression. Creative approaches can be explored to minimize the potential for tensions or actual conflict. All of the Arctic nations should take advantage of an opportunity to protect security interests with constructive initiatives. In this way, the security dimension of the High North can serve as a laboratory for constructive approaches to international relations.

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