# The end of the post-Cold War in the Arctic

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**Abstract:** Trans-boundary cooperation by states, indigenous peoples and sub-national governments as well as region-building in the Arctic region has been so successful that the region is peaceful with high stability. In spite of some disputes on maritime borders, asymmetric environmental conflicts and global problems there are neither emerging conflicts nor foreseen reasons for them. Thus, it is possible to argue that the ultimate goal of the Arctic states - to decrease the military tension and increase political stability - has been accomplished. Furthermore, the Arctic states do not acknowledge a world-wide perspective, or take it into consideration, while they see changes, such as globalization, more readily as a threat rather than anything else. However, globalization in the Arctic is actually more an ambivalent process having brought not only negative but also positive impacts, such as recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, into the region. All this strongly indicates that the post-Cold War period has ended in the Arctic. This article discusses on significant changes in the Arctic region and major challenges of the early-21st century's Arctic. It first examines the success of the first significant geopolitical change, i.e. the shift from pre to Cold War geopolitics, and then considers the next important and emerging change faced by the Arctic states. Its goal is first to briefly identify the major responses provoked by this change among the Arctic states and then to discuss globalization in the entire region. The paper concludes that at the early 21st century as a geopolitical entity the North plays more important role in world politics.

## Introduction

In the 1990s, the Arctic, or the circumpolar North, became a new international region, and was also said to be a distinctive region (e.g. AHDR 2004, 17-20), much due to a significant geopolitical change. This can be considered as the first 'Arctic boom' in post-Cold War geopolitics. By the early-21st century, the main themes or trends of the post-Cold War circumpolar geopolitics and international relations were first, an increasing circumpolar cooperation by indigenous peoples' organizations and sub-national governments; second, a region-building with unified states as major actors; and third, a new kind of relationship between the circumpolar North and the outside world (Heininen 2004).

In addition to these trends there are two well-defined discourses, which have oriented the nature of most of the geopolitical discussion at the early 21st century (e.g. Heininen 2010a): The mainstream discourse reflects the degree of stability and peacefulness gained by the region. This is a result of the achievement of institutionalized international Arctic cooperation in the post-Cold War era, and the fact that the region is legally and

politically divided by the national borders of the Arctic states. On the other hand, there is a second discourse which has challenged this by arguing that there is a 'race' for natural resources, and therefore emerging regional conflicts, based upon the importance of state sovereignty and national interests.

As I have written earlier (Heininen 2010b) there are also two other perspectives, if not yet discourses, that deserve attention, since they both deal with globalization. They can also enable us to approach Arctic geopolitics and security that go beyond the traditional terms of power, conflict and cooperation. These two other perspectives are: first, that a new and significant environmental, geoeconomic and geopolitical change, or another Arctic 'boom', is taking place within the Arctic region (also Palosaari in this volume); and second, that the region is playing more important role in world politics. This article emphasizes the success of the first significant geopolitical change, but focuses more on the above-mentioned two perspectives, by briefly describing the new and emerging change and the responses by Arctic states to it. This leads to discussion concerning globalization in the Arctic and its further role in world politics.

## Successful geopolitical change

The first significant geopolitical change in the Arctic, on one hand, saw the end of the Cold War period and its confrontation in the region. On the other hand, there was a boom of international and inter-regional cooperation across national borders by states, indigenous peoples and sub-national governments, as well as new rounds of regionalism and region-building, and consequently, a more human approach to geopolitics (e.g. Östreng 1999; Chaturvedi 2000).

Indeed, it has been said that this international cooperation has been so successful that at the early 21st century the entire Arctic region is peaceful and stable, and thus, the Arctic states have (almost) completed their ultimate 'mission'. As indicated by the slogan 'from confrontation to cooperation' the most important political goal in the Arctic has been to decrease the military tension of the Cold War era and to increase the political stability of the region. However, environmental protection has not, yet, been completed within the region, and this means that severe environmental problems still exist, while the mass-scale utilization of natural resources is increasing.

Among the learned lessons from this significant geopolitical change is the importance of new approaches to understanding and defining regional problems, especially the importance of seeing 'change' as a 'challenge', not as a 'threat'; particularly when international politics is in a transition, as it has been since the end of the Cold War period. Here the Arctic region can be taken somewhat as a special case, since there the transition we are speaking of had actually already started in the 1980s, and was, therefore, not due just to the end of the Cold War, but rather was affected by growing concern on the environment as well as by the devolution of power (e.g. in Alaska, Canada and the Nordic region). The latter saw the rise of

new regional economies, as well as the rise of a new self-consciousness of Northern indigenous peoples as well as a growing concern about the environment by local and regional actors in Northern regions (e.g. Heininen *et al.* 1995).

The latter was based on the environmental 'awakening' which had started already in 1960s in the 'Western' world, but which gained more notice and response from local and regional, non-state actors of the North in the 1980s. As such, the Arctic states were pushed to act by indigenous peoples and other non-states actors. They also took the agenda to heart, reacting positively to these challenges and started the so-called Rovaniemi process for Arctic environmental protection. The process was institutionalised by the governments of the eight Arctic states, first when they signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in June 1991 (Rovaniemi Declaration 1991), and then when the Arctic Council was established in 1996 (Ottawa Declaration 1996). This institutionalism was supported, on one hand, by functional and trans-boundary cooperation on environmental protection, and on the other hand, by a region-building initiative which relied upon local and regional as well national actors.

All in all, this marked the beginning of the current international northern cooperation, and it required a significant shift in state politics to occur: that is to say a shift from 'power politics' into more 'sophisticated policy' on many fields of 'low politics'. Indeed, the cooperation has involved the military as well as traditional security and security-policy only partially, through such agreements as the Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (AMEC) between Norway, Russia and the USA. In this way, a more institutionalized international cooperation than previously - much through inter-governmental organizations and forums - played an important role in decreasing military tension and increasing political stability between the two blocs and former rivals (also Bailes in this volume).

Followed from this round of new co-operation, at the early 21st century the Arctic states are in a situation where their original 'mission' has been 'accomplished', and it seems that there is now no new 'mission' in its place. Yet change within the region continues to occur, particularly as a result of climate change and globalization. The latter have been presented through some scholarly discourses as 'dangerous' new elements within the region, are easily understood as 'threats' (e.g. Huebert 2011). Much that is new within the region it can be, however, more accurately, understood as representing 'challenges', though some of them, without a doubt, are demanding, they are not threats, per se (e.g. Heininen 2011a).

## Another significant geopolitical change

In spite of the discourse on a the 'race' in the North, and despite the emerging potential conflicts, the reality is, however, that at the moment there is neither a real 'race' on natural resources, nor a series of emerging conflicts, nor any reason for them, in the region. In fact, according to international politics and IR, cooperation includes competition, and competition is not determined to signal potential 'conflict', and

disputes or disagreements do not necessarily lead to open hostility. Instead of 'conflict' in the region we find a few disputes on maritime borders, some asymmetric environmental conflicts and a few outstanding land claims by indigenous peoples. We also find, of course, major challenges for the region, such as combating the impacts of long-range (air and water) pollution, climate change and globalization.

Equally important and relevant, however, is recognition of the fact that along with the aforementioned challenges, another significant environmental, geoeconomic and geopolitical change has occurred to the Arctic region. There are indication of the large-scale utilization of natural (mostly energy) resources, climate change accompanied by physical impacts on the region as well as an interrelated uncertainty, the growing importance of energy security, flows of peoples, goods, ideas and capital generated by globalization, and growing global interests toward the region and its resources. (for more details see Heininen 2010b)

This latest change, however, although can be taken as a evidence of continuity, i.e. the spectrum of changing positions of geopolitics in the Arctic in the recent centuries, it is important to recognize a couple of new features of this new geopolitical position, the first being that the change is both rapid, and multi-functional being geopolitical, environmental, geoeconomic and global. This should be taken into consideration and needs a more comprehensive and human approach to security (also Ingólfsdóttir in this volume). One need only to consider, for example, that although the Arctic region is not the first real victim of climate change – it has already hit with severe impacts to many developing countries in Asia and Africa, such as Bangladesh, and small island states in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, such as the Maldives – climate change has a serious security dimension in the Arctic region.

So partly followed from this significant change in the geopolitics and status of the region, and partly due to more economic and domestic reasons, all the eight Arctic states have recently become more interested in their northern parts and aware of the importance of these regions as well as the entire Arctic. Consequently, they have each adopted an Arctic strategy or state policy. Indeed, most of these strategies and policies - those of Canada, Finland, Iceland, the Kingdom of Denmark, Sweden and the USA - can be seen as reflections of the recent changing conditions in the Arctic region and can be understood to be responses to the latest significant change in the Arctic environment and geopolitics, including a growing global interest toward the region and its resources. Moreover, unlike the other cases, there are also other (more) important reasons: The Danish/Greenlandic draft strategy was due to the new self-governing status of Greenland; the 2006 Norwegian High North Strategy is rather independent and reflects Norway's new position in the High North and new kind of relations with Russia in the North; and finally, the Russian State Policy, is first of all, a pragmatic means for promoting domestic policy. (Heininen 2011b)

Furthermore, each of the Arctic states has identified and (re)defined itself as an Arctic or Northern country or state. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on state

sovereignty and national interests among the Arctic states which is clearly reflected in the Arctic strategies and policies of the five littoral states of the Arctic Ocean. Prioritized within the strategies tabled by Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Russia and the USA, are state sovereignty and national security / defence; with an aim to strengthen their military defence and border patrolling and rather significant military expenditures (also Cela in this volume). These priorities very much reinforce the nationalistic approach to the north now emphasized by of each of these states. They differ significantly from an approach oriented towards stability and peace based on international cooperation which have been adopted by the three other Arctic states. Unlike, Finland, Iceland and Sweden emphasize comprehensive security and international cooperation per se and as means to increase security. (Heininen 2011b)

A bit ambivalent, if not controversial, is the fact that all the strategies, except that of Russia, prioritize both economic development, including regional development and infrastructure, *and* the environment and environmental protection. Finally, in the strategies and policies of each of these states, there is the common feature that a world-wide, global perspective is little discussed and not much acknowledged: only the strategy by the Kingdom of Denmark and that of Finland include this broader perspective.

All in all, the latest significant multifunctional change in the Arctic is a reason enough for the Arctic states to adopt a national Arctic strategy or policy, and it might explain, at least partly, the emphasis on state sovereignty and national security. But somewhat surprising is how little a world-wide, global perspective has recently been incorporated into strategic discourses, particularly since the global perspective or globalization is nothing new in the Arctic. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that the Arctic states are fully authorized members of the global community and are actively involved in world politics as independent states and as members of the United Nations and its sub-bodies, other intergovernmental organizations as well as economic, political and military organizations. They are also members of several international - both world-wide and regional – organizations and agreements, and one of those is the Antarctic Treaty System, where most of the Arctic states are consultative members, even though they are located at some geographical distance from this Southern continent and the South Pole. Finally, the Arctic states are also actively involved in international trade, most of them much depending on that, and the (globalized) world economy.

Does this mean that most of the Arctic states are not happy with the growing interest toward the region from the outside of the region, mostly from Europe and Asia? Or, are they afraid of globalization? This mistaken impression is easily garnered because the Arctic states – who are the (founding) members of the Arctic Council – have not been able to agree on the status of new observer states within the Arctic Council. Indeed, this is a somewhat delicate issue for the Arctic states, since the current observer countries are all European states, and most of the applicant states are from Asia, from countries such as China, Japan and Korea, together with the European Union.

If the Arctic states really do neither recognize the world-wide, global perspective, nor want to acknowledge its value, they are not capable of evaluating the real situation in the region, and differentiating between challenges and threats. This might create obstacles to maintaining the regional stability they have already achieved, and to deepening peace within the region, or even prevent them from going further and deeper in their successful Arctic cooperation. This would be a pity, since the degree of institutionalized international cooperation already built in the Arctic is a real achievement, and has a value, *per se*, in a current world fraught by political tension, regional armed conflicts, and constant global warfare, as well as experiencing (almost) constant financial, economic and political crises.

## Globalization in the Arctic, and the North in world politics

Globalization is at the early 21st century very much seen as the bearer of problems for the region; problems such as pollution and climate change. Globalization's presence within in the region also brings some 'ambivalent' or even contradictory and beneficial influences. Along with pollution and climate change, for example, has come recognition of indigenous peoples' rights and 'diversity'. Nonetheless, many of the Arctic states, all which are all members of the global community, are either sceptical of globalization's impact, or they pay little attention to a world-wide, global perspective. Moreover, those that do pay attention to the globalist perspective see globalization as a 'threat' and a negative thing for regional actors.

In order to respond to this problem and to challenge these negative understandings of globlization, we need to approach geopolitics and security studies in a way which goes beyond the traditional terms of power and state, conflict and cooperation, as well as the state politics of the Arctic. Furthermore, we need to develop a discourse on globalization, which on one hand includes aspects from the previous discourses on impacts of climate change, emphasis on energy security and importance of international cooperation, and on the other hand, would take into consideration the on-going significant and multi-functional change. We also, however, need to develop a new kind of global leadership and statesmanship in the region, in order to be able to look beyond the unified state system (also Halinen in this volume).

When it comes to the presence of globalization in the Arctic region, it is possible to claim that it is nothing new, since global relations have influenced and effected by, the Arctic region for centuries. The short history of globalization in the Arctic is consists among other things, fisheries; the fur trade; the search for the Northwest Passage by European major powers; the consequent whaling and sealing activities that this search engendered; colonialism and (pre)industrialization (such as mining); exploration (such as the race to the North Pole) and flag planting; research and scientific cooperation (e.g. IPY); the 'militarization' in general and particularly the nuclear weapon systems; pollution, and other global environmental problems (such as climate

change); the consequent environmental 'awakening'; growing consciousness of own identity and traditional knowledge, and world-wide approach by indigenous peoples; democratization movement and self-government; devolution (of power) and region-building; and finally, growing global interest toward the region and its (energy) resources by powers from outside the region.[1]

When it comes to some sort of 'ambivalence' of globalization, there are two sides: that is to say there are both negative and positive impacts. Negative impacts include things such as pollution and climate change, modernity ('Cola-Colanization') and privatization; the latter including the fact, for example, that "Inuit moved from pre-capitalist times to capitalist liberal democracy in a single generation" (Abele and Rodon 2007, 50); new isms, and weakening of nation-states' ability (meaning sovereignty) to protect their northern communities from new (existing, potential and hypothetic) threats. Some ones of these impacts are severe and challenging, and they can easily be interpreted to be as threats bringing with them problems for the North. The latter are mostly global environmental problems (for more about global problems see Hakovirta 1996), such as long-range air and water pollution, climate change, and the fact that the oceans of the world are full of small particles of (plastic) waste. Partly, too, they are global security problems, particularly the nuclear weapon systems which have been deployed to the Arctic region.

The other side is that globalization has also brought positive things to the Arctic region. Among them are decolonization, devolution and growth of regional autonomy, recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, emphasis on the rule of (environmental) law and multilateral environ initiatives, new ICT and 'diversity' as a global value. Furthermore, as Helander-Renvall (2010, 207) points out, one ambivalent way in which globalization exists in the Arctic is because even though "local actors resist the effects of globalization…they adopt to globalization by using the same tool kit that globalization uses or is constructed of… indigenous peoples increasingly adopt modern goods and images and make them fit into local marine and terrestrial activities".

Also, climate change, which is said to be the biggest global threat or challenge in the Arctic, is ambivalent in the Arctic context. It also manifests one of the Arctic paradoxes, more severe impacts of climate change and the increasing utilization of natural resources. Yet, in spite of all the talk, statements and policies, it is possible to claim that climate change is not taken seriously enough. For example, as is shown by the following examples: First, the fact of climate change is not recognized in Russia as a real challenge to peoples' (human) security and the environment. Second, climate change was also not an issue in the Canadian election of 2011, which suggests some sort of 'sceptical idealism' by the Canadians (Hoogenson-Gjorv & Kristofferson 2011). Third, Norway has increased its oil drilling in the High North, which it defines "as a (new) petroleum province", even as it has stated its determination to be "the best steward of resources in the High North" (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006, 18, 13 and 55). This can be seen as an 'opportunistic adaptation' (Hoogenson-

Gjorv & Kristofferson 2011). Fourth, though the USA deep-water oil drilling in icy northern seas is understood as an environmental threat, climate change is not. Finally, although it is explicitly stated in the 2008 (draft) Strategy of Denmark/ Greenland that climate change is "a major societal challenge that the Arctic and Greenland face", this is not seen as a negative thing in Greenland, since climate change "with the melting of sea ice will also affect the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas" which correspondingly "will increase accessibility and opportunities for exploration" (Namminersornerullutik Oqartussat, Udenrigsministeriet 2008, 22-23).

In spite of the fact that the most of the Arctic strategies / state policies can be understood to be responses to the recent (global) changes, there is still evidence of the surprising feature, as mentioned earlier, that most of them lack of a world-wide, global perspective. It is really only taken into consideration in the final strategy of the Kingdom of Denmark; which seeks "to strengthen the Kingdom's status as global player in the Arctic", since "political globalization is a reality" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011, 10-11); and in that of Finland. The latter states that the importance of the Arctic climate is obvious globally, and that both the global significance of the region and the high strategic position of (global) energy security have increased (Prime Minister's Office 2010). Canada's Northern Strategy is more modest here, since it only states that Canada is "the global leader in arctic science" (Government of Canada 2009).

All this is not only surprising, but also shows a lack of strategic thinking, or lack of capability to see new opportunities brought by a world-wide, global view, for both the Arctic states and the entire region. Therefore, it is needed to have an additional discourse, which deals with globalization and geopolitics in general, and particularly with the new geopolitical position of the 'regionalized' circumpolar North at the 21st century. This discourse is to argue that the position of the Arctic region, meaning the 'greater' circumpolar North (a region which is without exact, and often artificial, borders), is greatly strengthened in international relations and politics in the last twenty years. Further, this is to say that, in the early 21st century, the North can play a more important role in world politics; particularly it has transformed itself, 'becoming a subject instead of being an object'.

I have written earlier (Heininen 2005) about the following five perspectives or points of view, concerning why there has been a strengthening in the position of the Arctic region in international relations and world politics. They can be reprised briefly as follows: First, there is the Geopolitical perspective which suggests that the North is increasingly seen as a highly strategic area militarily, due to the nuclear weapon systems, and economically, due to strategic energy resources. Second, is the Scientific 'laboratory', or 'workshop' perspective, where the North is seen as a source for the generation of new information and knowledge. Third, is Diversity of Life and Nature perspective; while forth, the North is often seen from the perspective of a 'A

Peaceful Region with high stability' and not affected by any single major regional or global problem (such as war or armed conflict). Fifth and final, is the perspective of the North as an Innovation 'Center', since the North has appeared to be rich in innovations in governance, and political and legal arrangements.

The first part of the Geopolitical perspective is rather traditional and due to the legacy of the Cold War, since the main military structures, particularly the nuclear weapon systems of Russia and the USA, are still present in the Arctic and northern seas. Correspondingly, its second part, which should actually be its own category, is a combination of old and new: mass-scale utilization of northern resources is nothing new, but the fact that (global) energy security has become very strategic, emphasizing the importance of energy resources (see also Huotari, in this volume), is, though it is much based on options. Another rising new phenomenon is higher strategic importance of (drinking) water.

Concerning the Scientific perspective, the Arctic region can be interpreted to be an environmental linchpin playing a critical role in global environmental issues: first, as a laboratory and workshop for (multi- and interdisciplinary) research – particularly on the environment and (global) climate change; second, as a knowledge-based regionand workshop for the interplay between knowledge(s); and finally, in creating useful models for future action on environmental protection, based on international and institutional cooperation (also Heininen 2010b).

If these points of view are more concerned with material things, however, the remaining perspectives deal more with immaterial values. 'Diversity of Life', for example, includes distinct components of both biodiversity and diversity of cultures, and here this broader understanding of diversity together with sustainability and resilience can be taken as universal values.

Further to this is the viewpoint of an Innovation 'Center', meaning that there is evidence from the Arctic which demonstrate the feasibility and the desirability of applying advanced technologies within the region. There are also innovations in governance, co-management, and political and legal arrangements to address social problems and to meet the needs of the residents of the region "without rupturing the larger political systems in which the region is embedded" (AHDR 2004, 237). For example, as transnational peoples, the Inuit have been able "to reframe the colonial logic in the Arctic" using four different strategies (Abele and Rodon 2007, 58). Furthermore, as a knowledge-based region, the circumpolar North can act as a 'workshop' for the interplay between science and politics like for example, shown by the Open Assemblies of the Northern Research Forum. Following from all this, the Arctic can be understood as being, or becoming, a driving force for innovation.

The final perspective is that the post-Cold War Arctic, with its high stability and peace, is geopolitically and geostrategically rather unique. It is not overtly plagued by any big regional or global problem, such as a war, armed conflict or military crisis, and not even an uncontrolled race on natural resources. Much opposite, the region enjoys considerable and intensive

multi-national cooperation across national borders on one hand, by the Arctic states and by northern indigenous peoples and other non-actors, and on the other, between the region and the rest of the world. This is much an immaterial value, until you lose this stable position, and it easily becomes very concrete, such as a war or armed conflict.

If this really means a change in problem definition in terms of security premises, it might also mean that a new kind of security paradigm is possible (see also Koivumaa in this volume). However, the current state of affairs in the North can already be seen as a success story, both regionally and in the broader context of the whole international system, where, in the case of the latter we see at the early 21st century two large scale wars and several minor wars, armed conflicts, and a constant fight against (international) terrorism.

Hence the northernmost regions of the globe are not isolated, but closely integrated into the global system and the international community. Its current state is, however, neither guaranteed nor necessarily stable, but can be changed and charged by new threats, either in the region, or most probably, from outside the region. Therefore, it is necessary and useful on one hand, to look beyond the post-Cold War Arctic and undertake political discussions concerning security of the globalized Arctic. But even further, it is also necessary and useful to (re)define the circumpolar North as a 'globalized' space and to have more scientific research and academic discussion concerning the actual state of regional security, as well as the state of security studies which deal with the Arctic region, with an aim to look beyond the unified state system (also Heininen 2011a).

## Conclusions

One of the most fundamental features of the post-Cold War Arctic is that the region is peaceful with high stability, and that there is neither real race for natural resources nor are emerging conflicts (or reasons) for them foreseen. There are, however, a few maritime disputes and other familiar regional challenges to face, such as pollution, climate change and globalization. A new and less familiar series of challenges, are also emerging however. These bring both significant and multi-functional change in their wake, and include the large-scale utilization of energy resources, increasing demands for regional transportation and regional traffic, as well as other flows of globalization and a growing global interest toward the region and its resources.

After achieving the goal of decreasing the military and political tension of the Cold War, which occurred in close cooperation with confidence-building, in the early 21st century, the Arctic states are responding to the significant change in many, often controversial, ways: for example, by strengthening state sovereignty and national defence, or by a more comprehensive approach to security by deepening multilateral cooperation. A surprising feature is, however, how little the Arctic states take into consideration and promote a world-wide, global perspective, even though they are active members of the

global community, as well as being members of their joint international forum – the Arctic Council.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon in the Arctic: rather it has influenced the region for centuries. In the early 21st century it is more transparent, and spreading more rapidly, however, and therefore quite easily imagined to constitute a 'threat' to the region. Even though it is mostly seen bringing problems into the region - and some ones of them are obvious, such as pollution and climate change - it has also brought positive things, such as recognition of indigenous peoples' rights and 'diversity', as a global value, to the region. Thus, globalization has an ambivalent or contradictory presence within the North. The irony here is that at the same time as this ambivalency has grown, there are good reasons to argue that the position of the early-21st century's Arctic has already been strengthened in international relations, and that the North can play more important role in world politics.

## End notes

[1] For more details see Globalization and the Circumpolar North. Eds. by Lassi Heininen and Chris Southcott.University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks 2010.

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