Arctic security
Policy analysis of the circumpolar states

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Since the end of the Cold War the security scenario in the Arctic region has changed significantly. Academics have written about new dimensions of security states must now take into consideration. The purpose of this article is to compare the declared policies of the eight member states of the Arctic Council - Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States - focusing on sovereignty, security and defense. The purpose is to establish: a) whether the new security scenario is reflected in these states' official policy documents, and b) whether there is a difference between the policies of the five coastal states - Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and the USA - and the other three circumpolar states. One key difference between the coastal states and the other three Arctic Council members is that the former have a stronger legal position in the Arctic territorial regime (Byers, 2009; United Nations, 1982).

As this article focuses on Arctic security at the beginning of the 21st century, the Cold War security scenario will not be discussed in any detail. Many academics have written about security and how the concept has changed after the Cold War, but this article is inspired mainly by the writing of two authors, Dr. Lassi Heininen and Dr. Rob Huebert. Both have written about Arctic security and outlined the new security threats in the region. Their findings will be used to set the stage for this article and as a tool for analysis. In this context it is important to note that by using such narrow approach, a complicated discourse is being greatly simplified. The article draws on official policies of the states, speeches, reports and academic literature.

Setting the scene

In 1987 Mikhail Gorbachev gave a groundbreaking speech in Murmansk. He emphasized the need to improve conditions in the Arctic region in terms of peace, cooperation, confidence building, science and environmental protection. Two decades later much has improved along the lines Gorbachev hoped for, as can be seen in Heininen’s writings. According to Heininen the Arctic has in many ways turned out to be a success story, as the region has become less a scene for military confrontation and more a scene for international cooperation (Lasse Heininen, 2004; Heininen, 2008b). Compared to the Cold War period, the Arctic is also much more stable and tensions are lower. It nonetheless remains strategically important when it comes to maintaining the balance between the main nuclear powers (Heininen, 2008a).

According to Huebert (2004) the Arctic states need to address the following dimensions of security:

1. Traditional security: often defined as military security threats or hard security. Military threats in the Arctic have decreased rapidly after the Cold War but
cannot be wholly discounted. The main concerns regarding traditional security threats are nuclear deterrence, nuclear defense and terrorism. As defined by Heininen (2008a) traditional security emphasizes two kinds of power, both military and political.

2. Environmental security: Environmental threats, such as trans-boundary pollutants affect all states but cannot be effectively dealt with by a single state. Such threats have been influential in directing the circumpolar states towards closer cooperation. Even though the states have taken big steps towards cooperation, mainly in the field of environmental research, political will is still lacking for the states to provide the necessary resources in order actually to solve the problems (Huebert, 2004).

3. Human security: Focuses less on the state and more on individuals and their communities. In the Arctic there are three main focal points in terms of human security: health security, cultural security and food security (Huebert, 2004).

Arctic strategies

The Arctic is a region that is greatly affected by climate change. As the ice melts increasing number of states and other actors declare their interests in the region. That should not come as a surprise in the light of how rich the area is in natural resources, such as oil and gas, and then the possibility of new shipping routes opening up. All this demands for the Arctic states to stay alert, and form their new strategies towards the region, which is what they have been doing since 2006. Here below are the main points of their strategies concerning the three different security aspects, traditional, environmental and human.

Canada

Canada has the second longest coastline bordering the Arctic, after Russia, and has declared a vital interest in the region. The Canadian government published a Northern strategy in 2009 where four priorities are emphasized: exercising Canada’s Arctic sovereignty; promoting social and economic development; protecting the North’s environmental heritage; and improving and developing northern governance (The Government of Canada, 2009).

Sovereignty appears to be one of the keys to the strategy, as it stresses the importance of Canada’s exercising sovereign rights and protecting its territory by land, sea and air. To these ends the Canadian government wants to maintain strong presence in the region and ensure capacity and capability to protect and patrol, including by military means (The Government of Canada, 2009). Another important factor of the Canadian strategy is international cooperation and law. Canada, despite having some unresolved disputes with other Arctic states, stresses that it faces no military threat and that all disputes are well managed and under control. The Ilulissat declaration from 2008 is used as an example in that context, where the five littoral states committed themselves to peaceful settlement of any overlapping claims (Ilulissat Declaration, 2008; The Government of Canada, 2009). It is nonetheless apparent that Canada aspires to be among the big powers in the region. The strategy emphasizes its good relationship with the United States, and also an improving relationship with Russia (The Government of Canada, 2009). Another interesting thing to note in this context is Canada’s willingness in the recent years to sidestep the Arctic Council by encouraging the five powers meetings (“Formalizing the” 2010).
Environmental protection is discussed, for the most part in relation to sustainability, and less directly related to security. Human security is indirectly discussed as the policy describes the different ways the Canadian government supports the Northern communities to make them healthier and more vibrant (The Government of Canada, 2009). Security as a concept is not mentioned in that context. Nevertheless it can be argued that both supporting the communities and protecting the environment are likely to lead to increased environmental and human security.

Denmark/Greenland

Denmark published its Arctic strategy in 2008. The strategy has two main policy objectives, to support and strengthen Greenland’s development towards increased autonomy and to maintain the Kingdom of Denmark’s position as a major Arctic player (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2008).

A significant part of the security discussion in the policy is devoted to environmental security, as it discusses what are called new challenges - opposed to the Cold War tensions between east and west - such as risks related to climate change, i.e. oil spills and pollution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2008).

The document expresses concern about the changing living conditions of the inhabitants of the region and mentions a special Danish program to support indigenous peoples in cooperation with Greenland, with the aim of improving their living conditions. Yet it is also stated that the Greenlandic Home Rule now has authority, both administrative and legislative, over key areas of its citizens’ lives: the judiciary, police and health to name but a few (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2008). That is regarding most aspects of human security.

In terms of harder security, NATO and the defense agreement with the USA are briefly mentioned but Denmark’s own military presence all year round is considered important. The military units have well defined tasks which are: To perform sovereignty assertion and monitoring; fisheries inspection, search and sea rescue; assistance to police and tax authorities; help with civil society; environmental and maritime pollution control and to maintain visible presence for the defense of Greenland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2008).

The Danish government recognizes the importance of international cooperation in the region as many of the challenges the Arctic faces cannot be counteracted by a single state. Yet the Danes express concern or even disappointment with the Arctic Council, which they feel has been less effective regarding sustainable development than was hoped for when it was established. The reason, in Denmark’s view, is that the USA has downplayed the Council’s role. Denmark wants to seek measures to strengthen the Arctic Council, and along with Sweden and Norway has agreed to use their three presidencies in the council from 2006-2012 to do so. Denmark is a member state of the European Union and believes that it would be a positive development if the EU could be granted observer status in the Arctic Council: this would increase the European Commission’s understanding of the Arctic and facilitate Greenland-EU cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2008).
Finland

Finland published its Arctic strategy in June 2010, in which it defines its own position as an Arctic state and a natural Arctic actor (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010).

Both human security and environmental security have great prominence in the policy as seen in its discussions of the status and rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the multiple impacts of climate change. International cooperation with all actors in the region to solve environmental issues raised by climate change is said to be essential. Examples of such environmental issues are the increase of maritime transportation, exploitation of natural recourses, biodiversity reduction, pollution and nuclear safety (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010).

The Arctic Council is considered the most significant forum for international cooperation as it is the only one involving all eight Arctic states along with indigenous peoples. Even though the five coastal states have met separately as at Ilulissat, Finland attaches importance to the Arctic Council keeping its position as the central forum for circumpolar cooperation. It is also considered important to strengthen other forums for cooperation such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Northern Dimension (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010).

Sovereignty, security and defense are not addressed in detail, yet it is stated that Finland’s interest is to maintain stability and cooperation in the region as well as to keep the security situation as predictable as possible. Finland wants to raise awareness of the Arctic and seek opportunities to promote safety in its broadest sense. There is a section on NATO where it is argued that even though the importance of this area has decreased for NATO after the Cold War, debates are in progress among some of its member states about what the organization’s role in the Arctic should be. NATO may be of value for the region in terms of search and rescue operations and improving situational awareness concerning environmental and natural disaster management (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010).

The European Union is given great salience in the document. Finland supports the EU request for observer’s status in the Arctic Council and wants the Union to take greater account of the Arctic in its various policy areas and to contribute more to the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010).

Iceland

Iceland is one of the eight Arctic Council states and the only one lying entirely within the Arctic boundary, according to the Council’s definition (Arctic Council). The Foreign Ministry published a report called Iceland in the High North in 2009, and even though it is not presented as a policy or strategy, this document is comparable to the policy papers published by the neighboring states.

The report states that the High North is a priority area in Iceland’s foreign policy and that cooperation with the other Arctic states is of great importance. The Arctic Council is seen as the most valuable forum for that cooperation. When it comes to security, the Icelandic government welcomes the increased interest that international organizations such as the UN, NATO and EU have taken in the region’s safety, as it is argued that these organizations have capabilities to increase global understanding in Arctic affairs, to coordinate cooperation and enhance capacity to respond to danger (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland, 2009).

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1 The author thanks Eliisa Kaloinen for valuable help with translations from Finnish.
Arctic security

The report claims there is a growing awareness that environmental, economic and security factors in the region all go hand in hand, and that sustainability is similarly connected to human factors such as culture and welfare. The importance of environmental security is emphasized, as it is argued that Icelanders depend on the sustainability of natural resources, both on land and sea, for their livelihood. Other matters of concern in the paper are search and rescue capabilities, which the Icelandic government feels need to be substantially increased given the rising number of ships in the area. Cultural security is indirectly mentioned by speaking of the importance of preserving the culture of the indigenous communities. Regarding hard security matters, Iceland emphasizes the changed security scenario after the Cold War, and that the likelihood of military conflicts in the region is very low (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland, 2009).

Norway

Norway published a strategy for the High North in 2006 where it recognizes the growing importance of the High North region for Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006).

The Norwegian Arctic strategy sets the goal of ensuring Norway’s presence in the region, which is defined as the most important strategic priority area in the forthcoming years. Norway hopes thereby to exercise its sovereignty and authority both credibly and consistently. The presence of armed forces is considered vital to meet national security needs as the army has a clearly defined leadership role in the chain of command and capacities that could be required in a case of emergency (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006).

Environmental protection is high on the list of priorities and the Norwegian government wants to have a leading role when it comes to monitoring climate change, pollution and the maritime environment. As trans-boundary environmental problems have become a serious concern in the region, international cooperation and joint coordination are said to be vital, for example through the Arctic Council. Norway also looks on energy issues as a security factor that is becoming more clearly defined in the security policy of states. In that sense cooperation with Russia is found to be of great importance, but this cooperation and good relations with Russia are also generally vital as it is the neighbour that Norway shares the Barents Sea with. In fact, Norway’s improving relationship with Russia after the Cold War is given a lot of weight in every section of the paper, and the continued development of that relationship is stated as a priority (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006).

Regarding human security, Norway’s intention is to safeguard the culture, traditions and livelihood of the indigenous peoples. The intention is also to increase stability by using a so-called “people to people” approach, creating opportunities for the peoples of the North to cooperate directly on health, education culture and other ‘soft’ human security issues. As an example, the Norwegian government wants to help Northern Russians to develop more expertise in health matters, and believes that by doing so the risk of disease on the Norwegian side of the border can also be reduced (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006).
Russia

Russia has the longest coastline bordering the region and published its national policy towards the Arctic in 2008. Among its general goals is to guarantee the national safety of Russia and the preservation of its role as a leading Arctic power. Four fundamental national interests are outlined in the policy. First of all, the use of the Russian federation Arctic Zone as a strategic resource base of the Russian Federation, helping to resolve social-economic development problems of the country. Secondly the preservation of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation. Thirdly the preservation of the unique ecological system of the Arctic, and fourthly the use of the Northern Sea Route as the exclusive transport route of the Russian Federation in the Arctic (The Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2008).

The Russian policy speaks much of security, both hard military security and the softer ecological or environmental security involving nature conservation, pollution monitoring and so on. Human security on the other hand is not mentioned as such, although it is said to be a strategic priority to improve the quality of life for the native people by modernizing social infrastructure including better educational and healthcare institutions. In regard to military defense it is considered necessary to guard the Russian border by guaranteeing a favorable operating regime in the Russian Arctic Zone and by developing means to resolve security- and defense issues. It is considered necessary to create capabilities in the Russian Federation Armed Forces and other units and agencies that can guarantee military security under the various scenarios of the military-political environment (The Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2008).

Sweden

Sweden is the only circumpolar state that has not yet published an Arctic policy. Therefore a speech given by minister for foreign affairs Carl Bildt at the Arctic Council in 2009 will be used in order to learn about Sweden’s positions in Arctic security matters.

In his speech Bildt (2009) emphasized the impact of climate change in the region, the changing living conditions and the importance of environmental protection. He also stressed that all the Arctic states shared responsibility to implement measures to temporarily slow the Arctic warming as well as to maintain peace and stability in the region. Regarding human security, he mentioned that the Swedish government had established a working group on Sami issues and would take the UN Human Rights Committee’s recommendations into consideration to determine what measures were needed.

Sweden wants to strengthen the Arctic Council, not least its political role. Also, as a member of the European Union, the Swedish government welcomes the EU’s application for observer status in the Council, and believes that it would increase the Commission’s understanding of Arctic matters and have impact on other EU policies (Bildt, 2009).

United States

In 2009 the White House published a presidential directive in order to establish US policy in the Arctic region.

The policy expresses a primary concern over sovereignty and security matters, as the US claims to have sovereign rights and both broad and fundamental national security interests in the region. The claimed interests are missile defense, deployment of sea and air systems, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, maritime security operations; ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight and preventing terrorist attacks, just to name some. When it comes to security matters the US is prepared to operate either independently or,
preferably, with others. The Arctic Council is considered to be of great importance, together with the participation and cooperation of all eight Arctic states. The policy includes a statement on the importance of environmental protection and sustainability, but does not directly refer to those factors as security related. Likewise, human security is not mentioned as such, but the involvement of indigenous peoples in decision-making is on the agenda as well as the importance of enhancing search and rescue capabilities (Bush, 2009).

Summary

Now that the policies of the circumpolar states have been analysed it is time to sum them up and make a comparison. For that purpose, the tables below show which Arctic states have formed a policy on different kinds of security. The first table shows only those states that have defined a security policy, but the second table also shows states that appear to have a relevant policy without relating it directly to the term “security”.

Table 1. States referring to the different security factors by using the term security

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<th>Traditional security</th>
<th>Environmental security</th>
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<td>USA</td>
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Table 2. State policies include different security factors without necessarily referring to them as security

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<tr>
<th></th>
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As becomes obvious by looking at the two tables above, the states don't always refer to security while discussing the different security aspects. There can be different reasons for them using the approach they choose, in some cases a particular security aspect may
simply not be relevant for the state in question. In other cases it may be deliberatly decided not to securitize\textsuperscript{2} a particular matter.

Conclusions and discussions

Even though the circumpolar states have developed new policies towards the Arctic not all mention all the potential security aspects as such. That is not to say, however, that indications cannot be found within the policies by reading between the lines. By discussing such matters as environmental protection, supporting the rights of indigenous peoples and exercising their sovereign rights, the states are indeed touching all three security aspects: traditional, environmental and human.

An interesting perspective is to wonder why the states put different labels on such factors as environmental protection and societal improvements. What some states label as a security, others discuss in a different context. In some cases the explanation might not be so hard to find, e.g. the difference between Finland and Iceland regarding human security. While Finland has a sizable indigenous population, Iceland has none. It is harder to determine why states such as the USA and Canada do not speak of environmental or human security by using the term security, and one might wonder if it has anything to do with them having other regional interests they value more.

In the case of the Arctic it so happens that two of the coastal states are also the former major rivals of the Cold War, Russia and the USA. Both of them still emphasize hard security. In the same context it is interesting to note the difference between the five coastal states and the three others in that the coastal states generally emphasize sovereignty and hard security in a much stronger way. Regarding the Arctic Council the states all claim to value it greatly and want it to gain increased leverage. At the same time their actions don’t always demonstrate that interest. It is understandable that the smaller states emphasize the Council, as it is the forum where they have equal rights as the larger states. In the case of the larger states that also claim to value the Arctic Council a great deal, it must be kept in mind that recent history shows that they can sideline the Council when they believe their interests are better served in that way. The three European Union member states, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, all speak in favor of the EU’s gaining observer status in the Arctic Council. They might believe that the EU would increase their influence, by backing them up in a more concrete way than is possible now.

\textsuperscript{2} Securitization: When authorities decide that a particular matter should be defined as an existential threat, and thereby be granted extraordinary measures, beyond the everyday politics (Cottee, 2007)
References


