**Political Processes in the Changing World**

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# Constructing the "New" Arctic: The Future of the Circumpolar North in a Changing Global Order

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**ABSTRACT.** *Like all spatially delimited regions in international society, the Arctic is socially constructed. Political and economic considerations play prominent roles as determinants of the region's boundaries, the identity of those states regarded as Arctic states, and the nature of the interactions between the Arctic and the outside world. From this perspective the recent history of the Arctic divides into two distinct periods: the late 1980s through 2007 and 2007 to the present. As the cold war faded, the Arctic became a peripheral region of declining importance in global political calculations. No one challenged the dominance of the eight Arctic states in regional affairs, and the Arctic Council focused on regional concerns relating to environmental protection and sustainable development. Today, by contrast, the 'new' Arctic is a focus of intense global interest, largely because climate change is proceeding more rapidly in this region than anywhere else on Earth with global consequences and because the increasing accessibility of the Arctic's natural resources has generated enhanced interest on the part of outside actors. As a result, Arctic issues have merged into global issues, making the region a prominent arena for the interplay of geopolitical forces. Cooperative arrangements established during the first period (e.g. the Arctic Council) may require adjustment to operate effectively in the 'new' Arctic. Treated as a case study, the Arctic story provides an illuminating lens through which to analyze the forces that shape thinking about the*

*nature of regions in international society and the role of cooperative arrangements at the regional level.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Arctic Council, Arctic 5, Arctic 8, non-Arctic states, Arctic region, diplomacy, foreign policy*

## Introduction

The Arctic is socially constructed, an important feature it shares with all other spatially delimited segments of the planet that practitioners and analysts treat as international regions or as distinct subsystems of the overarching Earth system. What I mean by this is that there is no objectively or ontologically correct way to delineate the boundaries of the Arctic or to differentiate between what is Arctic and what is non-Arctic, providing in the process an authoritative means for distinguishing between those states that are Arctic states and others that are non-Arctic states. It follows not only that we can expect to encounter disagreements among interested parties about the proper way to delimit the Arctic but also and crucially for present purposes that we should not be surprised to encounter shifts in the thinking of influential actors regarding such matters over the course of time.

Compared with regions like the Middle East, the Arctic is an easy case when it comes to the identification of regional boundaries. There is no real argument about the proposition that the Arctic's northern boundary is the North Pole, the northernmost point on the planet where the meridians of longitude converge to a single point. Nor is there much debate about the region's eastern and western boundaries. We are generally comfortable treating the Arctic as a circumpolar region, despite the fact that some find it useful in particular contexts to distinguish between the eastern Arctic and the western Arctic or to focus on particular parts of the Arctic, such as Fenno-Scandia or what has become known as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Thus, the Arctic forms a planetary cap with its peak located at $90^0$N and its southern boundary located at some unspecified and possibly variable lower latitude.

This is the easy part. But at this point, difficulties begin to arise. How can or should we determine the location of the Arctic's southern boundary? What terrestrial and marine areas constitute components of the Arctic region? How should we distinguish between Arctic states and non-Arctic states? What forces determine the answers to these questions at any given time, and are the answers likely to shift during the coming years? What consequences will different answers to these questions have in terms of policy?

I explore these issues in this article, paying particular attention to two formative periods in the recent history of the Arctic. First, I consider the immediate aftermath of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a period featuring the establishment of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991 followed by the Arctic Council (AC) in 1996. Second, I examine the period following the initial collapse of Arctic sea ice in 2007, a period marked by the rise of new initiatives regarding Arctic cooperation (e.g. the Arctic 5's Ilulissat Declaration, the International Maritime Organization's Polar Code, the 5+5 agreement on Central Arctic Ocean fisheries, the increasing prominence of bilateral initiatives) coupled with a concerted and ongoing effort to maintain the role of the Arctic Council as the preeminent institutional forum for addressing the international relations of the Arctic. In the process, I seek to shed light not only on the rise of what many have taken to calling the 'new' Arctic but also, more generally, on the complex political dynamics that shape the evolution of international regions.

## The post-cold war Arctic

Few leading actors have established traditions of treating the Arctic as a distinct international region in the organizational arrangements they have developed to deal with issues involving cross-border or international relations. For example, the US Department of State, which has longstanding bureaus dealing with African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, European and Eurasian Affairs, and Near Eastern Affairs, assigns polar (both Arctic and Antarctic) affairs to the Bureau of Oceans, International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. A somewhat similar situation exists in the case of the Foreign Ministry of Russia where the Second European Department is responsible for handling Arctic issues that have international significance. Nor are these cases exceptional. Organizational arrangements in many states, which feature the assignment of issues to regional bureaus, routinely treat Arctic issues in a manner suggesting that they do not regard the Arctic as a distinct international region.[1]

In the 1980s, nevertheless, significant shifts in perspectives relating to the Arctic began to surface. A number of analysts began to develop a narrative focusing on the Arctic as a distinctive region with a policy agenda of its own. Gathering input from many sources pertaining to military, industrial, Indigenous, and environmental issues, for example, I published an article in the winter 1985/1986 issue of the prominent American journal *Foreign Policy* entitled "The Age of the Arctic" [*Young* 1985/1986; *Osherenko, Young* 1989]. At the time, some readers adopted the understandable view that this line of thinking reflected a more or less severe case of "localitis." But the proposition that it makes sense to treat the Arctic as a distinct region began to catch on in the following years.

Of particular importance, Mikhail Gorbachev, then both president of the Soviet Union and general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, delivered a speech on 1 October 1987 marking the award to the City of Murmansk of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star in which he called for treating the Arctic as a "zone of peace" and proposed a series of cooperative Arctic initiatives dealing with arms control, shipping, Indigenous peoples' issues, environmental protection, and science [*Gorbachev* 1987]. Simultaneously, the MacArthur Foundation, an influential American funding organization with a strong presence in Russia, announced the award of a major grant to support the creation and operation of what we called the Working Group on Arctic International Relations. This group, including both practitioners and analysts from the eight Arctic states, met regularly for a number of years, delving into issues of environmental protection and sustainable development in the Arctic and building a network of personal connections in the process [*Young* 1996]. Brian Mulroney, then Canada's Prime Minister, took another step in November 1989 with a speech in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) promoting the idea that conditions were favorable for new initiatives designed to promote international cooperation in the Arctic.

These developments set the stage for the launching in the later part of 1989 of what we now know as the Finnish Initiative, a diplomatic advance that triggered a process eventuating in the signing on 14 June 1991 in Rovaniemi, Finland of a

1 Of course, other agencies deal with internal matters in the individual Arctic states. In Russia, for example, there is a State Commission on the Arctic, and plans are underway to expand the remit of the Ministry of the Far East to create a Ministry of the Far East and Arctic. Various federal agencies, mostly located within the Department of the Interior, handle issues relating to public lands in Alaska. Canada has a separate department responsible for northern affairs.

Ministerial Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment coupled with the release of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy [*Young* 1998]. But this simple narrative obscures the fact that there were significant differences among the key players regarding both the delimitation of the Arctic and the appropriateness of treating the Arctic as a distinct international region in policy terms. Partly, this was a matter of differences regarding the identification of Arctic states and as a result the criteria for distinguishing between Arctic states and non-Arctic states. In part, it reflected substantial differences among the Arctic states regarding those parts of their realms to designate as Arctic. Both issues deserve additional commentary.

Many Soviet policymakers had long held the view that the term Arctic states should refer to the five states with coastlines bordering on the Arctic Ocean proper (Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Soviet Union, and the United States). This is the origin of what we often call the Arctic 5, a grouping of states that has taken the initiative on several occasions in the recent history of international cooperation in the Arctic. Yet Finland, a neutral state with a postwar history of well-crafted efforts to find safe and constructive pathways between the protagonists in the cold war, seized the initiative in 1989 launching the diplomatic process that led to the creation of the AEPS. It would have been awkward politically for the Soviet Union to spurn this initiative, especially in the wake of Gorbachev's call for Arctic cooperation. In any case, it turned out that the Soviet Union had a good deal to gain from engaging the western states in an effort to address a number of severe environmental problems in northwestern Russia (e.g. radioactive contamination and industrial pollution on the Kola Peninsula). A positive response to the Finnish Initiative made it more or less impossible to exclude Sweden, the other neutral state in northern Europe. For its part, Norway responded skeptically at first. But the Norwegians took an interest early on in promoting high quality environmental monitoring and assessment, an interest that soon morphed into strong support for the creation of what became the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) as a key element of the AEPS. On the strength of Mulroney's Leningrad speech, Canada found it easy to support the Finnish Initiative, though the Canadians soon emerged as strong supporters of the expansion of the remit of Arctic cooperation to include sustainable development as distinct from environmental protection. The US, viewing international affairs in global terms, took a limited interest in these developments at the outset. Still, American policymakers saw a chance to endow the initiative with a western flavor, supporting the inclusion of Iceland, so that five of the eight participating states would be NATO members. Thus was born the idea of the Arctic 8, a configuration emerging more from political considerations relating to the Finnish Initiative than from any profound vision of the Arctic as a distinct international region.

Almost by default, this configuration carried over into the negotiations launched by the Canadians that culminated on 19 September 1996 in the adoption of the Ottawa Declaration on the Creation of the Arctic Council as the successor to the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy [*English* 2013]. In terms of participation, the most innovative feature of this transition was the formalization of the status of Indigenous peoples' organizations in the workings of the council. While the eight Arctic states are the members of the Arctic Council, six organizations representing Indigenous peoples now have the status of Permanent Participants and participate actively in virtually all aspects of the council's activities.

A striking feature of the development of the Arctic as an international region is that only Iceland among the Arctic 8 is located entirely within the region. A glance at Maps 1 and 2 will suffice to demonstrate that there is considerable variation in the approaches the eight members of the Arctic Council have adopted when it comes to delineating their Arctic realms. Canada and Russia are clearly the preeminent Arctic states measured in terms of the extent of the their territory treated as Arctic. For its part, Canada was content to draw a line at 60$^0$N, the boundary between the western provinces and the northern territories, with a deviation to 56$^0$N to include Nouveau Quebec (Nord-du-Quebec). But 60$^0$N runs close to Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki, a boundary that none of the Nordic states found appropriate in identifying areas for inclusion in the Arctic region. They preferred an approach designating their northern counties as the Arctic sectors of their national domains – Nordlund, Troms, and Finnmark in Norway; Norbotten and Västerbotten in Sweden, and Lapland in Finland. Among other things, this has given rise to a discussion concerning cultural and historical differences between the European Arctic (sometimes known as Fenno-Scandia) and the North American Arctic (including much of Alaska as well as Canada's northern territories (now including Nunavut, which did not exist as a separate territory in 1996). Some observers go so far as to assert that the idea of the Arctic as a distinct region is an artificial construct [*Keskitalo* 2004].

The approaches that the United States and the Russian Federation have taken in designating their respective segments of the Arctic suggest several additional observations of interest. In the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984, the US defined the American Arctic formally as the area located north of the Porcupine, Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers (the PYK line) together with the Aleutian Islands and the American sector of the Bering Sea [Arctic Research and Policy Act 1984]. There is little doubt that this approach to the delimitation of the American Arctic owes more to political considerations than to any relevant biophysical or socioeconomic considerations. Russian (and previously Soviet) policymakers, on the other hand, have often made a point of distinguishing between the Arctic and the North (sometimes referred to as the Subarctic). This distinction coincides roughly with the boundary between the treeless tundra and the forested taiga, though this has never been a particularly sharp line of demarcation in policy terms. Interestingly, the distribution of the land masses of the Northern Hemisphere is such that most of the area the Russian Federation now regards as Arctic lies north of the Arctic Circle [Ordinance of RF President 2017], while only the High Arctic in Canada and the northernmost segment of Alaska in the US are located north of circle. The effect of this geographical difference is to create a significant asymmetry between the North American Arctic and the Eurasian Arctic.

Denmark is an Arctic state solely by virtue of the fact that Greenland, the bulk of which lies north of the Arctic Circle and is often treated as High Arctic in biophysical terms, is part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Should Greenland become an independent state in the future (a development considered probable in some quarters), Denmark's status as an Arctic state would be difficult (perhaps impossible) to justify. The northernmost point of land in Iceland barely reaches the Arctic Circle. Nevertheless, Iceland is the only member of the Arctic Council whose territory lies wholly within the realm the council has delineated as it catchment area. The Faroe Islands, also part of the Kingdom of Denmark, are considered Arctic largely as a courtesy to Denmark, though it is fair to note that they do lie above 60$^0$N.

One observation emerging from this account is that the demarcation of the Arctic region embedded in both the structure and the practices of the AEPS and the AC is distinctly asymmetrical and in some respects sensitive to political considerations. Differences among the eight Arctic states regarding their treatment of the southern boundaries of the Arctic are particularly striking. Another observation is that statements on the part of British and Chinese policymakers to the effect that the United Kingdom enjoys "close proximity to the Arctic" and that China is a "near Arctic state" are not altogether far-fetched [Beyond the Ice 2018; China's Arctic Policy 2018]. No doubt these assertions are politically motivated and not intended to be taken too seriously. Still, it is worth noting that the Shetland Islands, the northernmost part of the United Kingdom, do lie above $60^0$N, and that Manchuria, the northernmost segment of China, stretches as far as $50–55^0$N and includes significant areas in which permafrost is present.

In the years following the creation of the AEPS in 1991 and the AC in 1996, there was little debate about the delimitation of the Arctic as an international region. The end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union had the effect of shifting attention away from the role of the Arctic as a theater for the deployment for strategic weapons, though it is worth noting that the Arctic Ocean has never lost its significance as a zone of operation for nuclear-powered submarines carrying sea-launched ballistic missiles. Despite the activities of the AEPS and the AC, the foreign ministries of the Arctic states did not proceed to create bureaus of Arctic Affairs. Some have argued that the absence of more intense debates about the delimitation of the Arctic during this time is testimony to the fact that the Arctic was regarded as a political periphery or at least not a part of any of the central arenas of international affairs during the 1990s and early 2000s. According to this line of thinking, events occurring in the outside world might have major impacts on the Arctic, but events occurring in the Arctic were not likely to make a big difference beyond the confines of the Arctic. Be that as it may, the Arctic 8 proceeded to operate the Arctic Council as a "high level forum" to "provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states," an arrangement that fostered the development of a distinct policy agenda for the region [Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council 1996].

## The 'new' Arctic

Whatever the merits of this perspective, recent developments have brought about a sea change in thinking about the nature of the Arctic as an international region and its role in international society. A number of factors have contributed to this development. But two stand out as particularly important. The impacts of climate change are unfolding more rapidly in the Arctic than anywhere else on the planet, and the operation of feedback mechanisms means that what happens in the Arctic can be counted on to have profound effects extending far beyond the confines of the region itself [*Wadhams* 2017; *Serreze* 2018]. At the same time, and somewhat ironically, the collapse of sea ice in the Arctic and the prospect of increased access to the region's extensive stores of natural resources have triggered a remarkable upwelling of interest in the Arctic among economic and political commentators [*Borgerson* 2008; *Anderson* 2009; *Howard* 2009; *Sale, Potapov* 2010]. In both cases, current developments are drawing attention to the importance of the links between what goes on in the Arctic and the broader currents of global affairs [Arctic Matters 2015].

It is possible that this rising tide of interest in the Arctic will crest and begin to

recede during the coming years. Nevertheless, we are witnessing today an extraordinary rise of interest in the Arctic in many quarters; the comforting logic of the Arctic as a peripheral region of interest to a limited number of states no longer applies. Among other things, this has stimulated the development and articulation of a range of new perspectives on the delimitation of the Arctic and the nature of the Arctic as a distinct region in international society. One result is the emergence of the concept of the 'new' Arctic, a phrase suggesting that the region has experienced or is now experiencing what scientists often refer to as a state change [*Anderson* 2009]. But what does this mean with regard to the evolution of the Arctic's role in international society? When did it occur, and what are the implications of this development for the political economy of this dynamic region? Do we need to develop innovative practices to achieve success in what the US National Science Foundation now refers to as "navigating the new Arctic" [Dear Colleague Letter 2018]?

The short answer to these questions is that the Arctic has experienced the impact of a stream of transformative events that have changed the status of the region from a peripheral area of comparatively little interest to those concerned with the great issues in world affairs to a focus of intense interest to those concerned with environmental, economic, and political issues on a global scale. There is no objective way to identify a specific date for the occurrence of this transition. But for purposes of analysis, it is reasonable to begin with the initial collapse of sea ice in the summer of 2007 followed by the rapid recession and thinning of sea ice now expected to lead to ice-free summers in the Arctic sometime during the next 2–3 decades. In an evocative phrase, some analysts have taken to speaking of the "death spiral" of the Arctic's sea ice [*Wadhams* 2017]. To some, this may seem like an esoteric perspective. But, in fact, its implications are momentous in global terms. The Arctic constitutes the leading edge with regard to the impacts of global climate change. What happens in the Arctic as a result of climate change will have profound global consequences [*Lenton et al.* 2008]. To take a single example, the melting of the Greenland ice sheet, an event that no longer seems far-fetched, would raise sea levels on a global scale by 6–7 meters.

The economic and political implications of these developments are profound, especially when coupled with other major developments in the realm of global geopolitics. Increases in the accessibility of the Arctic have triggered rising interest in exploiting the region's natural resources, which include an estimated 30% of the world's recoverable reserves of natural gas [*Gautier et al.* 2009]. Many anticipate rapid growth in commercial shipping in the Arctic, certainly in the form of destinational shipping focused on transporting the Arctic's natural resources to southern markets and potentially in the form of through traffic featuring container ships transporting a wide variety of goods between Asian and European markets. Credible sources have begun to speak of the prospect that the next fifteen years will see the investment of $1 trillion in various forms of infrastructure needed to realize the economic potential of the Arctic [*Roston* 2016].

Nor is the region immune to the impacts of the forces of geopolitics. The growing desire of Russia's leaders for acknowledgement of the country's reemergence as a great power coupled with reactions to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 has precipitated growing East-West tensions in the Arctic. The rise of China to the status of a global power is introducing new complications into the political dynamics of the Arctic. This has led to notable developments of a specific nature, such as the major stake China has taken in the devel-

opment of the Port of Sabetta as a terminal for the shipment of liquid natural gas from northern Russia to southern markets and the rise of Chinese interest in the potential of the Northern Sea Route as a commercial shipping corridor. More generally, China and Russia have developed closer relations in the wake of the 2014 crisis, and China has declared formally that the "polar silk road" will be treated as one of three major arms of what the Chinese call the Belt and Road Initiative [*Liu* 2018]. In short, the Arctic is no longer a peripheral region with regard to the dynamics of economic and political relations. One important consequence of these developments is that the Arctic agenda is merging into the global agenda with regard to issues ranging from environmental protection to economic development and political security.

It is easy to get carried away by this line of thinking. Hazardous conditions regarding both resource development and shipping will not disappear from the Arctic anytime soon. The Northern Sea Route is not about to rival the Suez Canal Route, even under the most expansive or optimistic assumptions. Producing and delivering the Arctic's hydrocarbons to southern markets will remain an expensive proposition. The growth of hydraulic fracturing has altered the global balance of supply and demand regarding fossil fuels and nature gas in particular. Above all, the emergence of competitively priced alternative energy sources (e.g. wind, solar) could easily eventuate in a situation in which large reserves of oil and gas remain stranded in the Arctic.

It would be a mistake to assume that East-West tensions will give rise to a new cold war in the Arctic during the foreseeable future. Nor is the continued growth of China's influence in the high latitudes a foregone conclusion, despite the growing prevalence of expansive projections regarding the Chinese presence in the Arctic and the geopolitical restructuring associated with the unfolding of the Belt and Road Initiative. Without doubt, the Arctic is being drawn progressively into the dynamics of global affairs. Yet in another decade, our thinking about the links between the Arctic as an international region and the global system may seem radically different from our thinking about these links today.

What has happened in recent years is catalyzing important shifts in our thinking about the nature of the Arctic as an international region and more specifically about the role of the Arctic Council as the principal international forum for addressing transboundary concerns in the region. Despite the efforts of the Arctic 8 to persuade all those interested in the Arctic that "[t]he Arctic Council has become the preeminent high-level forum of the Arctic region and we have made this region into an area of unique international cooperation" [Vision for the Arctic 2013], many things are occurring in the Arctic that are not centered on the activities of the council and that raise important questions regarding how we should organize our thinking about the Arctic as an international region. Some of these developments feature initiatives among smaller groups of states, including bilateral measures in several cases. Others involve activities centered on other international forums that are not dependent on the efforts of the Arctic Council, though the links between the activities of the council and the initiatives of other forums are worth noting in some cases. Both these developments merit careful consideration in any effort to understand the implications of the idea of the 'new' Arctic.

Notable to begin with are recurrent initiatives on the part of the Arctic 5, justified (at least implicitly) on the basis of the assertion that it makes sense for some purposes to treat the Arctic as a region encompassing the Arctic Ocean coupled with the coastal zones surrounding this ocean. In 2008, for instance, the five coastal states gathered in Ilulissat, Greenland and issued a declaration asserting their preeminent

role in addressing issues of Arctic governance, committing themselves to handling Arctic matters peacefully under the guidelines established in the prevailing law of the sea, and opposing any idea of negotiating a comprehensive Arctic Treaty analogous to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty [*Rahbek-Clemmensen, Thomasen* 2018]. The Arctic 5 did not invite Finland, Iceland, and Sweden or the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council to join this gathering, a matter of considerable concern to supporters of the Arctic Council as the preeminent forum for addressing issues of governance in the Arctic. A subsequent gathering of the Arctic 5 on the margins of the 2010 G8 meeting in Canada failed to produce any significant results, leading many to infer that this threat to the preeminence of the Arctic Council had passed. Yet the conception of the Arctic region embedded in the activities of the Arctic 5 refuses to die. Recently, for example, the Arctic 5 have taken the lead in dealing with issues relating to potential fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean [*Young* 2016; *Vylegzhanin, Young, Berkman* forthcoming]. In July 2015, the five coastal states issued a declaration calling for a moratorium on commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean until such time as the marine systems of the central Arctic are understood well enough to provide a basis for sustainable management of any fisheries that may arise in the area. Similarly, the coastal states will take the lead in efforts to resolve differences regarding the delimitation of jurisdiction over the seabed in the Arctic Ocean, appealing to the provisions of Art. 76 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the process.

In some ways more important from the point of view of the future of the Arctic as an international region is the rise of bilateral arrangements linking Arctic and non-Arctic actors regarding specific projects. Consider the Yamal LNG Project as a prominent case in point. Novatek, a privately owned Russian corporation, holds 50.1% of the shares in this project. But France's Total (20%), the China National Petroleum Company (20%), and the Chinese Silk Road Fund (9.9%) hold the remaining shares. Additional complexity arises from the fact that Gazprom, a state-controlled Russian corporation, holds 9.9% of the shares of Novatek. State-of-the-art icebreaking LNG tankers, built in Korea and owned/operated by Asian enterprises (e.g. China's COSCO, a state-owned enterprise) have begun to transport gas from the Yamal LNG Project to both Asian and European markets. Meanwhile, the Russian government has invested heavily in the construction of the new Port of Sabetta on the Yamal Peninsula where the gas is liquefied and loaded onto the tankers. Given the tangled ownership structure of the key players in this project, it is apparent that public policies in addition to private calculations are key determinants of the trajectory of this development. At this writing, plans are unfolding for Arctic LNG 2 designed to expand this project into adjacent areas to the east. Current projections anticipate a combined production of 55 million tons per year from LNG 1 and 2 by 2030.

Nor is the case of Yamal natural gas exceptional in this regard. China, acting largely through initiatives on the part of various state-owned enterprises, has been particularly active in exploring opportunities for involvement in the development of the Arctic's natural resources. Current prospects, at various stages of maturation, include the shipment of Alaska's sizable known reserves of natural gas to Asian markets, the initiation of largescale mining operations in Greenland, a transshipment facility located on the east coast of Iceland, and a rail line linking Rovaniemi in northern Finland to Kirkenes on the Barents Sea coast of Norway. Both the economic and the political merits and the environmental impacts of all these initiatives are subject

to vigorous debate. How specific initiatives will play out in practice is hard to forecast at this time. But what is striking in the context of this discussion is the fact that they all would have the effect of knitting together the Arctic and the outside world in a manner that dilutes the ideas that the Arctic is a distinct region with a policy agenda of its own and that the Arctic Council is the preeminent forum for the treatment of Arctic issues.

Conversely, multilateral arrangements, providing opportunities for non-Arctic states to participate and proceeding in a manner that is not subject to control by the Arctic Council, have become increasingly prominent in addressing issues of governance in the Arctic, shaping our perceptions of the 'new' Arctic in the process. Several concrete examples will serve to convey a sense of the significance of this development.

Although the Arctic Council has taken a strong interest in issues relating to commercial shipping, the action regarding measures to regulate Arctic shipping has shifted in recent years to the International Maritime Organization, a specialized agency of the United Nations open to membership on the part of all interested states. Drawing on pre-existing voluntary guidelines, the IMO acted in 2014–2016 to adopt a mandatory Polar Code dealing with matters of safety and pollution relating to the operation of commercial ships in Arctic waters [International Code for Ships 2016]. The provisions of the code entered into force on 1 January 2017 mainly in the form of a series of legally binding amendments to the 1974 Safety of Life at Sea Convention, the 1978 International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeking for Mariners, and the 1973–1978 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. Covering cargo ships over 500 gross tons and all passenger ships (but not fishing vessels), the Polar Code is a positive development, though focused efforts are already underway to strengthen the provisions of the code regarding matters like emissions of black carbon, the combustion and carriage of heavy fuel oils, and the extension of the code to cover fishing vessels and private yachts. The important point in the context of this discussion, however, centers on what we may treat as the globalization of the Arctic. As the Arctic becomes more intimately connected to global processes, our sense of the Arctic as a distinct region with a policy agenda of its own becomes increasingly blurry.

Similar remarks are in order regarding the governance of fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean [*Vylegzhanin, Young, Berkman* forthcoming]. The CAO, encompassing roughly 2.8 million square kilometers, is high seas in the sense that it lies beyond the seaward boundary of the jurisdiction of any of the coastal states. No sooner had the Arctic 5 issued their July 2015 declaration regarding fishing in the CAO than other signatories to the Convention on the Law of the Sea began to push back, pointing out that the waters of the CAO are high seas and disputing the authority of the Arctic 5 to make decisions about such matters. This gave rise to the so-called 5+5 negotiations in which the coastal states have worked with China, Iceland, Japan, Korea, and the European Union to develop the terms of an agreement dealing with potential fishing in the CAO. Although it has not entered into force as of this writing, the resultant agreement envisions a regime in which commercial fishing activities in the CAO are to be prohibited for at least 16 years while the parties engage in a concerted and collaborative effort to improve the scientific knowledge base needed to manage any eventual fisheries in this area on a sustainable basis [Meeting on High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean 2017]. For present purposes, the significance of this initiative lies in the fact that the Arctic is not a region controlled

exclusively by the Arctic 5 or the Arctic 8. Under the provisions of prevailing international law, so-called non-Arctic states have a right to participate in the development of governance systems dealing with Central Arctic Ocean resources. One interesting implication of this observation is that any agreement arising from ongoing multilateral negotiations on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, intended to take the form of an implementing agreement to the law of the sea convention, will apply to the CAO as well as areas of high seas in other parts of the world ocean. Other significant developments pertain to issues of climate change and the establishment of scientific priorities. During the 2015–2017 US chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the Obama Administration launched two Arctic initiatives explicitly framed in such a way as to take place outside the confines of the council. The August 2015 Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement and Resilience (GLACIER) brought together policymakers from 19 countries and the European Union in an effort to showcase the dramatic impacts of climate change in the Arctic in a manner intended to spur efforts to promote progress toward the acceptance of ambitious provisions for inclusion in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement [Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic 2015]. Then, in September 2016, the US hosted science ministers from 25 governments and the European Union in a science ministerial to set priorities and advance scientific research on Arctic topics [Fact Sheet 2016]. A second Arctic science ministerial, co-hosted by the European Commission, Finland, and Germany took place in Berlin at the end of October 2018. A reasonable expectation is that such gatherings will continue to occur at more or less regular intervals in the future. From the perspective of this discussion of the 'new' Arctic, the important thing to notice about these developments is that they blur the distinction between Arctic states and non-Arctic states, conveying a sense that the links between the Arctic and the rest of international society have become so tight that it is no longer easy to tell where the Arctic treated as a distinct international region leaves off and the rest of international society begins. One implication of these developments is that it may no longer make sense to expect that we can formulate well-defined boundary conditions delineating the Arctic as a distinct region in international society.

## What future for the Arctic region?

What are the implications of this analysis for the future of the Arctic region and more generally for our understanding of the role of spatially-delimited segments of the planet treated as international regions with policy agendas of their own? Turning first to the second part of this question, it seems clear that international society is becoming an increasingly complex and tightly-coupled system [*Young* 2017]. The phenomenon known as telecoupling is giving rise to a condition that many of us now refer to as hyperconnectivity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Arctic. While the Arctic is not itself a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts of climate change are unfolding more rapidly and more dramatically in the Arctic than anywhere else on the planet [*Serreze* 2018]. Feedback mechanisms ensure that developments in the Arctic will have major planetary effects [Arctic Matters 2015]. Open water has a much lower albedo than sea ice; melting permafrost is likely to release significant quantities of methane into the atmosphere, the erosion of the Greenland ice sheet will affect sea levels on a global scale. Hyperconnectivity is also apparent when it comes to socioeconomic developments in the Arctic.

The recession and thinning of sea ice attributable to climate change is making the Arctic more accessible, opening up prospects for exploiting the Arctic's natural resources, and making increased use of Arctic shipping routes feasible. Yet the attractiveness of these options is tied to a range of global forces, including world market prices for oil and gas, the rise of renewable energy options, the availability of alternative shipping routes, and the stability of the global trade system. More generally, the digital revolution and the onset of what many now refer to as the 4th industrial revolution may have profound consequences for the value of the Arctic's natural resources [*Schwab* 2016]. Increasingly, these links are making it difficult for policymakers to categorize issues, separating out a distinct subset of issues to be treated as region-specific issues and addressed through regional governance systems like the Arctic Council.

At the same time, it seems unlikely that the world's foreign ministries will abandon the practice of organizing their work along regional lines, making use of bureaus to deal with European Affairs, African affairs, North American affairs, and so forth. In this sense, it may make sense to highlight the idea of the Arctic as a distinct region, calling attention to a suite of issues that are particularly important to the welfare of Arctic residents, including Indigenous peoples for whom the Arctic is an ancestral homeland. From this perspective, the framers of the 1996 Ottawa Declaration may have got it right in providing the council with a mandate to address issues of environmental protection and sustainable development but not issues of legal jurisdiction or national security. Environment protection highlights a concern for the impacts of pollutants originating outside the Arctic, including persistent organic pollutants, ozone depleting substances, and heavy metals as well as emissions of greenhouse gases. Sustainable development remains somewhat ill-defined as framework for the formulation of innovative policies. Nevertheless, issues of environmental protection and sustainable development are prominent concerns in the Arctic, and the Arctic Council has played a role of considerable importance in identifying emerging issues in these realms, framing them for consideration on policy agendas, and moving them far enough toward the head of the policy queue in international venues to gain the attention of busy policymakers [*Stone* 2015].

A more fundamental question is whether ongoing geopolitical and geoeconomic developments will necessitate fundamental adjustments in existing governance arrangements for the Arctic and in the Arctic Council in particular. Inertia favors the continuation of the status quo, especially in an era in which the United States is looking inward and showing little interest in innovation in the realm of international governance systems. Yet the economic importance of the Arctic's natural resources to Russia and the rising roles of China and the European Union in addressing Arctic issues suggest that there is a disconnect between the emerging lines of influence regarding Arctic affairs and the character of the institutional arrangements for the region put in place during the 1990s. Among other things, it is becoming abundantly clear that the status of 'observer' in the Arctic Council will not satisfy influential states like China, intergovernmental bodies like the European Union, and nonstate actors like the leading players in the energy industry. Unless the Arctic Council demonstrates an ability to adjust to these changing realities, we can expect that major players will bypass the council in favor of bilateral or other multilateral venues in addressing a growing range of issues. Under the circumstances, hopeful pronouncements to the effect that the Arctic Council is the "preeminent high level forum of the Arctic Region" and

that it has presided over the emergence of the region as an "area of unique international cooperation" are in danger of being overtaken by events [Vision for the Arctic 2013].

Still, it would be a mistake to dismiss the relevance of the Arctic Council too quickly. The most significant roles the council plays center on what policy analysts call agenda formation [*Kingdon* 1995]. In specific cases, these roles encompasses providing early warning regarding emerging issues, developing narratives spelling out appropriate ways to think about such issues, and drawing the significance of these issues to the attention of those who have the capacity to set agendas in various forums. Since its establishment in 1996, the council has made a difference in seeding discussions of issues important to the Arctic in other venues and serving as a coordinator or integrator of the efforts of others in the increasingly dense regime complex for the Arctic [*Young* 2012]. Consider the case of the 2004 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment as an example of the first of these roles and the efforts of the council to meld considerations of shipping, marine biodiversity, and marine pollution in thinking about sustainable development as an example of the latter role.

Can the Arctic Council continue to play roles of this sort as we move deeper into the Anthropocene? The answer to this question depends on the ability of the council to adjust agilely to changing circumstances, responding in an innovative manner to newly emerging Arctic issues and engaging those actors that need to be included in any serious effort to address these issues. The necessary adjustments may require revisiting some of the constitutive features of the Arctic Council elaborated in the 1996 Ottawa Declaration. Such adjustments are never easy; they call for political actions that go well beyond the realm of technical measures. It is impossible to predict how successful the Arctic Council will be in meeting this challenge in the coming years. But one basis for hope resides in the fact that the Ottawa Declaration is not an internationally legally binding instrument. If there is sufficient political will to reach agreement on appropriate adjustments in some of the constitutive provisions of the council, the process of moving forward need not get bogged down in the complexities of negotiating amendments to legally binding instruments and taking the (often protracted) steps needed to make the changes enter into force legally. The idea that informal institutions, exemplified by the case of the Arctic Council, may have significant advantages in a hyperconnected world subject to rapid and far-reaching changes constitutes a topic that merits serious consideration as we address the challenges of the Anthropocene.

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