

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL IN REGIONAL COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper delves into the nature and development of the Arctic Council as a regional organization that deals with members' integration. The paper adopted the secondary research instrument for data collection. Findings show that The Arctic Council is not a treaty-based international organization but rather an international forum that operates on the basis of consensus, echoing the peaceful and cooperative nature of the Arctic Region. Areas of focus addressed by the council include Arctic peoples, safeguarding Arctic biodiversity, the Arctic in a changing climate, cooperation for a sustainable Arctic Ocean, addressing pollution, and preventing and responding to emergencies. The paper concludes that the Arctic Council has proved to be an important forum for increased mutual understanding and cooperation in the circumpolar area and has provided a major contribution into the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic. The paper recommends that member states should continue to strictly adhere to the principles of the council and support all programs initiated by the council in order to further achieve the desired goals of the council.

KEY-WORDS: Arctic Council; Pollution; Development; integration; indigenous people; cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

The Arctic Council is the leading international forum for addressing issues relating to the Arctic. It was created in September 1996, following a series of meetings initiated by Finland in 1989. Its founding document is the Ottawa Declaration of September 19, 1996, a joint declaration (not a treaty) signed by representatives of the eight Arctic states. The declaration states that the council is established as a high-level forum to among other things, provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. The council describes itself on its website as the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic

States, Arctic Indigenous peoples, and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. The State Department describes the council as the preeminent intergovernmental forum for addressing issues related to the Arctic Region.

The Arctic Council is not a treaty-based international organization but rather an international forum that operates on the basis of consensus, echoing the peaceful and cooperative nature of the Arctic Region. Areas of focus addressed by the council include Arctic peoples, safeguarding Arctic biodiversity, the Arctic in a changing climate, cooperation for a sustainable Arctic Ocean, addressing pollution, and preventing and responding to emergencies. The Ottawa Declaration states explicitly that the Arctic Council should not deal with matters related to military security. Hence, this study will briefly examine the history, structure, objective, functions, achievement, and challenges of the Arctic Council.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Geographically the Arctic is the area north of the Arctic Circle (66° 33'N) encompassing the five Nordic states, Russia, Canada, and the USA, all of which possess Arctic territories. For long the Circumpolar North was associated with polar exploration and attempts to document the distinctiveness of its landmass, fauna and flora. The map below shows the geographical position of the Arctic and the states that are situated in the region (Clive and David, 1982).

During the Cold War the geopolitical situation in the Arctic was caught up in the overall bipolar tension between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During this period, militarization determined the character of the Arctic to such an extent that it was used by some observers as a way of distinguishing the Arctic from the Antarctic (Palosaari and Möller, 2003: 259). Clive and David (1982), for example, pointed to the potential threat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) posed by operations carried out by the Soviet Northern Fleet in the North Atlantic in the early 1980s.

Furthermore, in their edited volume *Northern Waters*, published in 1986, the same authors provide a collection of 4 chapters that all address the security situation in the Circumpolar North in the 1980s, by focusing either on matters relating to hard security concerns or issues of resource exploitation etc., many of which seem oddly familiar to contemporary observers of Arctic affairs (Archer and Scrivener, 1986). During this period there were fewer attempts to institutionalize the region or to take account of the specific needs of local indigenous and other populations (Palosaari and Möller, 2003: 259). In the late 1970s the Arctic was given a great deal of attention because of the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the North. In the 1980s the two superpowers started to explore ways of reducing the rivalry between them, which was facilitated by the rise to power of a reform-communist Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev delivered a key speech in Murmansk in 1987 in which he envisaged the Arctic as potentially the site of an immense potential of nuclear destruction concentrated aboard submarines and surface ships that affects the political climate of the entire world and can be detonated by an accidental political-military conflict in any other region of the world.' However, he also stressed that 'contemporary civilization could permit us to make the Arctic habitable for the benefit of the national economies and other human interests of the near-Arctic states, for Europe and the entire international community. To achieve this, security problems that have accumulated in the area should be resolved above all. Let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace. Let the North Pole be a pole of peace' (Gorbachev, 1987: 4-5).

The speech was very timely and could be viewed as a response to the wider environmental and security concerns of the late 1980s. Keskitalo (2007: 195) has nonetheless argued that Gorbachev's speech should also be seen as part of the greater efforts on the part of the USSR to 'develop its offshore industry in the Barents Sea without having to turn directly to the USA. Gorbachev's ideas about 'human interests' and a 'zone of peace' remain central to contemporary debates on Arctic security, not the least as a way of ensuring that national economic and security interests are not maximized at the expense of human interests. What is more, Gorbachev's speech inspired new ideas about environmental protection, which in turn resulted in the non-binding Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) signed by the eight Arctic states in 5 1991 (Palosaari and Möller, 2003: 255).

Out of the AEPS emerged the idea of an Arctic Council, which was established in 1996. It was a distinctively Canadian initiative evolving out of the country's longstanding geopolitical interest in the Arctic region and as a response to the needs of its indigenous communities. Adding a distinct popular dimension to multilateral Arctic policies revealed an initial willingness to address security challenges to the High North on a broad basis involving both government actors and civilian groups and is perhaps one of the key lessons from the period. Indeed, it remains an effective way of creating a zone of peace in the Arctic area since new forms of political community rest upon popular support as well as state driven initiatives, rather than narrowly defined national interests alone. Below the attempts on the part of Arctic states to further their collaborative efforts in the Circumpolar North are examined, followed by an assessment of the key challenges to such multilateral undertakings (Palosaari and Möller, 2003: 255).

The Aftermath of the Cold War In the aftermath of the Cold War there was a great deal of momentum for change, with new forms of regionalism and governance emerging that captured the optimism of the period. The idea of a new post-Cold War world order based upon multilateralism and international cooperation, the re-entry of former communist states on to the world stage and the subsequent plans to enlarge the European Union (EU) and NATO added to this optimism. In the 1990s several new regional initiatives were launched, including the AC, the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) to name a few. This period in global politics was also one of disintegration, with violent conflict and genocide spreading rapidly in places like the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The Arctic area was not subjected to such tragedy quite the opposite the end of the Cold War led to new thinking on how to integrate the Arctic states further through various institutional structures. Hence, despite having 'lost its prominent military position' in the early 1990s, the Arctic did not enter a period of 'demarginalization' because several regional initiatives were put in place to avoid this (Palosaari and Möller, 2003: 255). The Arctic was envisaged as an area requiring multiple layers of integration and governance involving different kinds of actors ranging from national governments to indigenous communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopts the theory of international development cooperation as developed by Lauri (1990) and other scholars. The theory emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. In the discourses of development cooperation, Lauri (1990) believes that, there are two major variables that affect cooperation which are (Sheriff, Bibi and Abdulkarim, 2021): (a) In cooperation, there is a common goal, toward which the interaction is oriented, and which is shared by the actors, (b) In assistance, there may be common goals, but the very action of giving aid is oriented towards helping the other part to realize his/her own goals (Sheriff, Bibi and Abdulkarim, 2021).

It the Arctic Council therefore, it should be understood that the council was established to integrate members in order to achieve cooperation objectives and the goals of integration. In this process assistance is not eliminated just as in European integration other partners such as Greece and Italy have been assisted to maintain tracks within the cooperation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The arctic council has been associated with the Canadian government's attempt to place the Arctic at the center of its foreign policy and global politics in general. The arctic council was established on the 19th of September 1996 in the Canadian capital Ottawa to replace the AEPS. It was to act as a high-level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States (Arctic Council, 2007:1). Through the establishment of the arctic council, Arctic states indicated their commitment to governance and new forms of international cooperation by establishing a new body for intergovernmental relations, though stopping short of supranational arrangements such as those defining European integration (Arctic Council, 1996).. What defines the EU is that a few numbers of the decision-making powers are delegated to institutions such as the European Commission and Parliament in the case of the arctic council individual members retain those powers. In signing the Declaration on the Establishment of the arctic council, the member-state governments affirmed their commitment includes the following: the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic, as well as acknowledging their capacity to impact positively upon the Arctic, sustainable development in the Arctic region, including economic, social development and improving people's health conditions and the protection of the Arctic environment (Arctic Council, 1996).

Ideas about grounding decisions within the traditional knowledge of the indigenous people of the Arctic and promoting cooperative activities to address Arctic issues as well as full consultation with and the involvement of indigenous people and their communities (Arctic Council, 1996:1) penetrate every level of the Arctic Council machinery. The member states were determined early in the process to involve indigenous people in both their deliberations and the implementation of concrete policies that affect local communities. And as has been argued above, ensuring that policy networks are not closed, but open and democratic, is central to successful processes of governance.

STRUCTURE OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The formal structure of the Arctic Council is outlined in the Ottawa Declaration. Understanding the infrastructure of this unique organization will hopefully clarify how their work is done and why finding their publications can be a bit of a detective hunt. There are three categories of participants: States, Permanent Participants, and Observers. Decisions are by consensus of the eight Arctic States in consultation with the Permanent Participants (Arctic Council, 1996). The eight states whose ministers meet every two years include Canada, Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. Each state appoints a Senior Arctic Official (SAO). The SAOs meet every six months and direct the work of the Council on a day-to-day basis. In addition to the eight members, there is a chair of the SAO from the country currently chairing the Council. The current SAO Chair is Patrick Borbey from Canada (Arctic Council, 2021). Indigenous peoples living in these eight countries are represented as Permanent Participants. The Ottawa Declaration recognized the role of traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the collective understanding of the circumpolar Arctic and committed to the well-being of the inhabitants of the region. The three Indigenous

organizations involved with AEPS efforts, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council, and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), are mentioned as providing valuable support in the development of the Arctic Council. Currently, there are six Permanent Participants: the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council, the RAIPON the Arctic Athabaskan Council, the Guich in Council International, and the Aleut International Association. One extremely positive outcome of Permanent Participants having a seat at the table is the focus this brings to the needs and views of Indigenous Arctic residents, particularly issues concerning sustainable development. Permanent Participants can suggest projects and their members participate in the working groups. An Indigenous Peoples Secretariat was established in 1994 and this office became part of the Arctic Council framework. Their work is to relay documents and reports between the Permanent Participants and the Council, and it's Working Groups and they provide coordination for the Indigenous peoples' organizations 8 to meet with each other and participate in the Arctic Council Working Groups. Observer status is open to non-Arctic states and others. The expectation is that these states and organizations will contribute their knowledge and expertise in multiple ways to the work of the Arctic Council. The current list of observers is on the Arctic Council website (<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers>). The permanent Arctic Council Secretariat opened its doors on 3 June 2013 in Tromsø, Norway. Although having a single administrative base will help smooth the transition between chairmanships that rotate every two years, another reason for its establishment is the need to communicate the findings of the working groups to citizens of the Arctic and to other countries. The primary functions for this office are communication, administration, and translation. The Arctic Council's working groups are staffed with scientists, researchers, and other experts concerned about issues of immense import to people living in the North. Librarians would be welcomed as contributors to working group activities of the arctic council (Arctic Council, 1996).

OBJECTIVES OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The contemporary policy objectives of the AC are many and diverse, although most of them can in one way or another be linked with climate change. On 29 April 2009 the Arctic states gathered in Tromsø, where they agreed on several number of key priorities, including climate change, support for the Polar Year (scientific research in the polar regions), the Arctic marine environment, human health, and human development, energy, biodiversity, and the administration of the Arctic Council (Arctic Council, 2009: 1-8). They also issued the Tromsø Declaration expressing their strong commitment to the Arctic environment and protecting the Arctic against potentially irreversible impacts of anthropogenic climate change and recognizing the danger of such things as black carbon, methane and tropospheric ozone precursors and their impact on the Arctic climate. Furthermore, the Arctic ministers called for an effective global response to climate change rather than unilateral responses while emphasizing that indigenous people in the Arctic should take a leading role to use best available traditional and scientific knowledge to help understand and adapt to challenges related to climate change (Arctic Council, 1996).

The Senior Arctic Officials Report of 2010 echoed the 2009 message on climate change by emphasizing the need to find common solutions to issues of climate change and natural resources, as well as ensuring the active involvement of indigenous populations in key decision-making procedures (Arctic Council, 2010). The Arctic Council has also affirmed its support for the establishment of a Task Force (TF) to develop and complete negotiation by the next Ministerial meeting in 2011 of an international instrument on cooperation on search and rescue (SAR) operations in the Arctic (Arctic Council, 2010: 7). This commitment came into effect on 12 May 2011 when the Arctic Ministers for Foreign Affairs signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of

Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue as a way of responding to accidents in the Circumpolar North. The agreement is seen as a major step forward in the Arctic integrationist process, since it is the first legally binding agreement negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011:1).

The Arctic Council states have hitherto refrained from entering into legally binding agreements, preferring a much looser form of cooperation. On the institutional level, the Arctic Council has recently decided to establish a secretariat to enable it to become a more effective regional institution in the future (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011:1). This could be seen as the Arctic Council attempt to transform itself from a loose institution into a more formal one in an effort to raise its profile on the international stage in particular, since this has been linked with a move towards the adoption of a legally binding decision on the Arctic SAR Task Force.

THE OPERATION OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The operational running of the Arctic Council is the responsibility of the state that holds the chairmanship. Denmark held the chairmanship between 2009 and 2011 and Sweden took over this role on 12 May 2011. The rotating chairmanship gives each state a sense of equal status within the Arctic Council regardless of size. As noted previously, the Arctic Council operates on an intergovernmental basis since decisions are taken by consensus, thus giving the ultimate decision-making powers to the governments of the individual member states. An AC secretariat was established in Tromsø in 2007 to support the 10 Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish chairmanships spanning from 2006 to 2012, but this was more of an ad-hoc arrangement rather than a permanent feature of the AC. However, as has been noted above, the AC foreign ministers recently agreed on the establishment of a permanent secretariat to enable the AC to become more effective as a regional institution in the future (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011: 1).

It is conceivable that such a body will add clout to the Arctic Council in global politics more broadly by demonstrating a higher level of commitment to Arctic cooperation on the part of its members. The ministerial meetings of the Arctic Council take place biennially, which does not seem that often. However, the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) meet every six months in the country hosting the AC (SAO, 2011). Their reports are very thorough and serve to prepare for the biennial meetings. For example, their 2010 report deals with number of issue areas related to natural resources, climate change and the situation of indigenous peoples (SAO, 2010).

In order to improve the distribution of AC news to a global audience, the SAO decided in 2010 to establish 'a contact group to work intersessional on the issue of communication and outreach' for the purpose of strengthening the Arctic Council voice and to ensure that its members speak with one voice (Arctic Council 2010:3-4). This is an attempt to deal with the issue of 'information concerning the AC's initiatives and success not reaching a wider audience, that is the Arctic Council has a good story to tell but word is not getting out (Arctic Council, 2011: 3). Collective efforts to promote joint communications and outward-looking activities could also be seen as significant pillars in the building of an Arctic community and identity. The work of the Arctic Council is divided into six different working groups, each of which focus on monitoring, assessing, and preventing pollution in the Arctic, climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, emergency preparedness and prevention in addition to the living conditions of the Arctic residents (Arctic Council, undated). As already noted none of the working group deals with military security issues, which is a conscious decision to avoid unnecessary disagreements emerging among the member states.

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL'S NORMATIVE POWER

The power of the Arctic Council is normative a term associated with Roskilde Professor Ian Manners and used by him to describe and analyze the international identity of the European Union. It is adopted here because, like the EU, the Arctic Council shapes the ideational direction of Arctic policy and what is considered to be 'normal' in Arctic relations (Manners, 2002, 2008). The Arctic Council lacks the legal reinforcement mechanisms that many other international and regional organizations have at their disposal. This arrangement ensures that states with different foreign-policy outlooks are able to come together and collaborate around a common set of objectives without compromising their national interests or legislative power. However, as noted above, in May 2011 the Arctic Foreign Ministers nonetheless entered into a legally binding agreement on 'search and rescue efforts', which could be seen as their attempt to firm up their collective commitment to Arctic cooperation and governance (Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2011).

The Arctic Council is nonetheless based on a much looser form of regional governance than, for example, the European Union, and questions of high politics do not figure on its policy agenda. As opposed to the European Union, the Arctic Council member states do not conduct open debates on military security and have hitherto not demonstrated any willingness to commit themselves to multilateral cooperation in that field. It is nonetheless interesting to observe that the Arctic Security Public Opinion Survey, commissioned by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation and the Canada Centre for Global Security Studies at the Munk School of Global Affairs (2011: 13-19) found that a surprisingly high number of randomly selected respondents in the eight Arctic states were in favor of military security and peace building being included in the work of the Arctic Council. However, the Arctic states do not seem to wish to move in this direction, opting instead for policy cooperation in non-military areas.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

Some of the contributions of the Arctic council include the followings

- i. **Safeguarding Arctic Biodiversity.** The Arctic is often perceived as a harsh environment. But difficult living conditions have given rise to unique ecosystems in the far North. Some of the most iconic species in the world are endemic to the Arctic, such as the polar bear, walrus, narwhal, snowy owl and Arctic fox. But the Arctic also contains thousands of lesser-known species, often remarkably adapted to survive in extreme cold and highly variable climatic conditions. In all, the Arctic is home to more than 21,000 known species of highly cold-adapted mammals, birds, fish, invertebrates, plants and fungi and microbe species. This extensive biodiversity provides essential services and values to people. They provide not only food, but the everyday context and basis for social identity, cultural survival, and spiritual life. Extremes of cold and seasonality and limited accessibility have kept human influence low, allowing ecological processes to function largely undisturbed. But climate change and an increasing demand for Arctic resources are driving a new era of human activity with subsequent consequences for Arctic biodiversity. Ever since its establishment, environmental protection has been at the core of the work of the Arctic Council. In the Council's founding document, the Ottawa Declaration, the eight Arctic States affirmed their commitment to protect the Arctic environment and healthy ecosystems, to maintain Arctic biodiversity, to conserve and enable sustainable use of natural

- resources. It does so through defined actions based on scientific recommendations in areas related to life on land, in the sea and in the air, managing Arctic marine ecosystems, mainstreaming biodiversity.
- ii. Cooperation for a Sustainable Arctic Ocean With sea ice covers shrinking. The Arctic Ocean has taken center stage in global discussions related to climate change and economic opportunities. While open waters may bring new opportunities to the region, increasing accessibility to the High North also presents risks for Arctic inhabitants and ecosystems, including through oil spills and shipping accidents.
 - iii. The Arctic States hold a responsibility to safeguard the future, the development of the region and to develop models for stewardship of the marine environment. This requires both a better understanding of the drivers and effects altering the Arctic marine environment and enhanced cooperation amongst the Arctic States, local inhabitants, external actors, and international legal frameworks.
 - iv. To protect the Arctic marine environment and counteract possible detrimental effects of climate change and pollution. The Arctic States have recognized the need to work together closely and they do so on a wide range of marine issues. These include issues related to marine pollution, sustainable shipping practices, search and rescue operations and marine cooperation. Preventing and Responding to Emergencies. The Arctic is an environmentally sensitive area with an extreme climate characterized by low temperatures, winter-time darkness, snow, ice, and permafrost. Harsh conditions and the sparse and limited amount of infrastructure in much of the Arctic increase risks, impacts and hinder response activities. Actions for prevention, preparedness and response must be carefully pre-planned and adapted to the conditions and remoteness of the Arctic to maximize the use of available resources.
 - v. Accordingly, international cooperation in this area is of vital importance. Increased shipping, exploration activities, intensifying wildfire seasons these are some of the threats to the Arctic environment, people, and animals that the Working Groups of the Arctic Council address. Their work contributes to international agreements, sets guidelines and frameworks, creates best practices, and fosters collaboration across borders and international organizations. Their efforts focus on oil spills, search and rescue, wildfires, and risk assessments.
 - vi. Addressing Pollution. While most regions of the Arctic are far removed from large, industrialized areas, the environment in the high North carries the traces of human-induced pollution from soot to plastics, from methane to pesticides. To an extent, pollutants originate in the Arctic for example through wood combustion or oil and gas flaring. Yet, many contaminants are transported over long distances, traveling to the high latitudes via rivers, oceans, and the air where they can have far reaching negative impacts on the environment and human health. Several of the Arctic Council's Working Groups are closely monitoring and addressing the impacts of pollutants and contaminants on the Arctic ecosystems. In addition, the Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane analyzes and assesses progress towards the reduction of black carbon and methane emissions across the Arctic and beyond. Arctic Council work has raised awareness on the serious implications of pollution in the Arctic and contributed to both national actions and international conventions. Key topics include mercury, persistent organic pollutants, black carbon, methane, marine litter, and waste management.

CONCLUSION

The Arctic states have reached broad agreement on the significance of furthering global governance in the area of climate change and other policy fields, which suggests that it is premature to depict the Arctic as a region exclusively tainted by national interests narrowly defined. On the contrary, for the past decade the Arctic Council has proved to be an important forum for increased mutual understanding and cooperation in the circumpolar area and has provided a major contribution into the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic. Nonetheless we can argue that although the Arctic Council is an all-inclusive institution, it has a weak structure which means that Arctic issues run an inherent risk of being caught in geopolitical logics applied by great powers and cannot project attention to all the issues within its jurisdiction. As has been noted above, the power of the Arctic Council is normative and ideational rather than a matter of power politics and as such ensures the possibility of reaching a broad consensus on potentially difficult issues. Member states should continue to strictly adhere to the principles of the council and support all programs initiated by the council in order to further achieve the desired goals of the council.

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