Policy Paper

New Management: Arctic Security and the Necessity of New Arctic Governance

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Introduction

We have more to blame on global warming than just rising seas or increases in severe weather. The Arctic, a once untouched landscape, is now at the forefront of geopolitical tensions. Due to the increase in overall global temperatures, the Arctic ice cap and the Greenland ice sheet are melting. The receding ice, once a formidable barrier to human activity, is giving way and countries around the world are keen to take advantage of the Arctic's ever more accessible sea lanes, and lucrative resources. Arctic states have increasingly found themselves in competition for these resources and regional politics, once known for their idyllic cooperation and communal sense of purpose, are now strained. The institutions made for a once exceptional Arctic are failing to adequately respond, and mounting pressure from countries beyond the traditional Arctic states, (the United Sates, Denmark, Russia, Canada, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland) in particular from China, has made management via current governance difficult. Thus, the question is not whether reform is needed, but how best to manage that reform. Conflicting views among the Arctic states regarding security and access have led to two immediate arguments. One advocating for stricter controls on Arctic access, in particular regarding China and rising non-Arctic states. While the other advocates for greater global cooperation and inclusion surrounding the Arctic, especially in light of climate change. Though China is undoubtedly a challenger to the current rules-based order, the Arctic nations have more to gain by cooperating with rising non-Arctic states such as China, than they do by excluding them. Exclusion will only increase what is already taking place, active efforts to subvert current governance and navigate outside of it (Doshi et al., 2021). Effort put forth to actively exclude nations from the Arctic, be it in the form of trade or security policies, will be effort wasted and effort that could have otherwise been used towards building stronger legally binding agreements. Agreements that are created through cooperation and inclusion, not exclusion.

Arctic Context: Warming Poles, Cooling Relations

On April 20th, 1968, Ralph Plaisted and his team became the first verified people to reach the North Pole by means of land, a full 57 years after the South Pole was first reached on foot (National Archives, 2022). Underscoring the tremendous difficulties of the Arctic's environment is the fact that no humans had ever made it successfully to the North Pole, without the aid of airplanes or airships, or by submarine until then. It is this same environment which has up until recently kept large scale regional securitization in check. The Arctic, simply put, has been too harsh for states to practically consider such policies (Gjørv et al., 2020). Given the Arctic's remote and inaccessible nature, it has always fostered, and in more cases than not, demanded political corporation between states for survival, rather than inspiring competition between them. Competition would require there to be something to compete over, and up until recently (advances in the energy sector and global warming have made resource extraction much more viable) there has not been. This aspect of the Arctic has led to the idea that military, political,

societal, and environmental concerns, though not absent from the Arctic, are far less pressing than those of the traditional and accessible political world (Gjørv et al., 2020).

This, however, does not mean that the Arctic has never been a region where securitization has taken place. During the 20th century with the rise of the Soviet Union, the Arctic's security relevance was witnessed firsthand. During the 2nd World War, the Arctic was a minor theatre of combat and with the advent of the Cold War the Arctic's relevance to global security only became clearer. Situated perfectly between the Soviet Union and North America, the Artic was the premier firing range for new long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons (Schaller and Sam-Aggrey, 2020). Even before the 20th century the Arctic's importance was not lost on the powers of the day. The 18th century British Empire repeatedly incentivized exploration for the discovery of a Northwest Passage. Such a passage, just as it would today, would allow for greater access to the West Coast of North America and greater access to Asia from Europe.

The Arctic's environment, as previously mentioned, has historically kept levels of securitization low. It is only recently that global warming and advances in technology have opened up the Arctic to competition, and future increases in global temperatures are only going to expand that access. Scarcity within the global economic system and the prospect of abundant natural resources has created intense interest in the region. Combined with increased interest, greater access to the Arctic has now made the region more susceptible to spillover from geopolitical crises abroad. All together the effects of a thawing Arctic have led to the cooling of cooperative relations and an increased anxiety regarding the current system of Arctic governance and its ability to manage current pressures.

Arctic Governance: Perspectives

In 1996, the Ottawa Declaration established the Arctic's preeminent intergovernmental organization, the Arctic Council. Widely understood to be a forum for cooperation and special projects, the Council was never intended to serve geopolitical interest beyond promoting and facilitating cooperation (Simpton, 2023). Unfortunately, the Council, created during a time when the Arctic was still firmly intact, has increasingly been turned to as a resource for solving Arctic security issues. The Council's organizational structure, (separated into two unequal blocks, voting member states/Indigenous communities, and non-voting observer states), highlights how the organization was never meant to serve diplomatic purposes beyond serving states already interested in cooperation and already present in the Arctic (Exner-Pirot et al., 2019). Reform for these reasons is widely accepted as necessary, but what that reform looks like is still very much up in the air. Great power politics between Russia, the United States, and China have impacted the debate significantly.

Russia has the most to gain or lose from reform. Russia's Siberian coast accounts for 53% of all Arctic coastline and is the largest share held by any one country (Korchunov, 2023). Importantly, Russia's Arctic holds vast energy and mineral reserves that are worth trillions of

dollars. Control over this territory is vital to Russian President Vladimer Putin's goal of reestablishing Russia as a superpower. Arctic governance and the future shape it takes will have monumental consequences for Russia's Arctic, which Putin plans to open up for development. Unsurprisingly, Putin has already taken steps towards this by pressing Russia's territorial claims all the way to the North Pole and by warming relations with China, a country with an expressed interest in Arctic development and the funds to back it up (Simpton, 2023).

Chinese interests in the Arctic are much along the same lines as Russia's and both are oriented towards energy. With superpower aspirations, China needs a stable and abundant source of energy, and it needs to have significant control over the source of that energy. In the words of Rush Doshi, Alexis Dale-Huang, and Gaoqi Zhang, "China seeks to become a 'great polar power.'" (Doshi et al., 2021). Through becoming an Arctic power China hopes to gain greater energy autonomy and wider influence on the world stage. With pressure mounting for change and aspirations far beyond its current observer status on the Arctic council, China hopes and is actively positioning itself for greater Arctic influence (Doshi et al., 2021).

Opposed to greater Chinese and Russian influence is the United States which perceives both states as actively subverting the current rules-based order in favor of selfish power-seeking behavior. Russia in particular, with its aggression in Ukraine, has cast a long shadow over the Arctic and both Russia and China are viewed with suspicion by the United States. The perception of opposing world views and values has made the conflict a zero-sum game for the US which sees its long-established global influence being challenged. The United States wishes to maintain its influence over the Arctic in defense of its values and the world order it helped to create.

Showing the complexity of the situation, however, are the United States' allies, many of which belong to NATO and the Arctic Council. Though all generally allied against Russian aggression, each ally has its own Arctic policies and interests outside of the United States (Schaller and Sam-Aggrey, 2020). Many of them belong to independent organizations and pursue Arctic projects outside of their relationship to the United States. Unfortunately, however, because of tensions between the United States and China, many have been put in the unenviable position of being between the two great superpowers. All together this has cast the challenge of Arctic tension as a problem of great power competition, and not one for global cooperation.

Arctic Governance: To Include or Not to Include

To understand the importance of inclusion in the future of Arctic governance and the management of Arctic security, it must be understood that though there are countries like China that advocate for a more open Arctic, and others like the United States which pursue policies that limit the influence of non-Arctic states, each country regardless of opinion, desires a selfish combination of inclusion and exclusion that will benefit its interests. Going forward

with this assumption and other key reasons, inclusion as the proper form of management can be seen as the most effective means for securing the Arctic for generations to come.

The first key reason for inclusion is that exclusion will motivate countries to work outside the reformed framework of Arctic Governance and subvert it with alternative options. China has already hinted that it desires to do just this. Rush Doshi, Alexis Dale-Huang, and Gaoqi Zhang explain, "Several Chinese texts indicate frustration with Arctic mechanisms and concern that the country will be excluded from the region's resources… They also indicate an interest in pushing alternative Chinese governance concepts — in some cases to supplement and other cases to run outside the Arctic Council" (Doshi et al., 2021). China's exclusion from Arctic decision making has already caused it to consider going around the current system (Doshi et al., 2021). Though there can be no reasonable expectation that China will entirely play by its own rules, there are none-the-less two primary reasons why it and other countries should be included.

First, if a system of inclusion is established for all countries interested in the Arctic, they are less likely to be pulled in the direction of China, Russia, or the United States which could influence them by holding access to the Arctic in the form of support. Operating in the Arctic requires advanced technology and tremendous financial resources that few countries have (Gjørv et al., 2020). A greater number of countries included in Arctic affairs is a greater number of countries that could pool their resources together to operate in the Arctic free of attached strings. Open inclusion would also allow the United States, Canada, and Russia to get ahead of China brokering its own access to the Arctic outside of any established governance (Lanteigne, 2020).

Second, if a system of inclusion is established it will lead to wider levels of cooperation, more opportunities for the creation of legally binding agreements, and a wider sense of regional balance. Again, there is no reason to expect that China (or any country for that matter) will cooperate with reformed governance, but as the United Nations has proved, it is better to keep parties, even if they are not cooperative with each other, involved. Involvement leads to greater chances of dialogue, greater overall influence, and greater chances for the creation of legally binding agreements. Agreements like the 1994 UN Law of the Sea Convention and the 2018 multilateral Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean which already have more influence on Arctic governance then the Arctic Council does (Simpton, 2023).

Going beyond reasons for inclusion, there are also specific reasons why exclusion is more trouble than it is worth. As noted by Joshua Meltzer and Neena Shenai, there are many benefits to the United States/China economic relationship that are not fully appreciated (Meltzer and Shenai, 2019). Principally, China as a market for US exports, supports over 1.5 million American jobs and Chinese exports account for nearly 18% of all US imports (Department of Commerce, 2021). Deliberate Chinese exclusion from Arctic affairs will be perceived by China as another attempt to contain it and in addition to pushing China further towards Russia will most certainly

provoke retaliatory actions that could further damage U.S. and Chinese economic relations. Perceived exclusion could also risk the progress of future negotiations related to intellectual property and fair-trade practices which effect the United States economy far more then Chinese Arctic access (Lewis, 2018).

Not to be confused with appeasement, this reasoning is a simple calculation with outcome in mind. China has already invested a significant amount of resources, both financially and diplomatically into the Arctic (Doshi et al., 2021). As the Arctic gradually warms, China and other countries will slowly, with or without inclusion entrench themselves into Arctic politics (Lanteigne, 2020). The effort and resources to combat what has already been invested and what will be invested will take immense resources, resolve and effort on the part of those who seek to keep the Arctic exclusive. Purely based on the notion of having a desired outcome, the United States is much better off coordinating its efforts into developing an overall coherent China policy, rather than expending resources to reverse tremendous progress made by the Chinese (The Brookings Institute, 2017).

Finally, exclusion if applied broadly, will cost United States allies dearly in the form of reduced access to the Arctic, and potentially risk putting them under the increased influence of Russia or China who regardless of governance will seek out their own access to the region. On the other end of exclusion, if narrowly or selectively applied (i.e., certain countries get access and others do not) the legitimacy of the whole institution will be risked, compromising its ability to effectively tackle security challenges and create the space necessary for serious dialogue. A lack of legitimacy will drive countries away from current governance to seek out their own means of accessing the Arctic, giving countries like China and Russia further influence and chances to establish themselves as patrons of alternatives systems (Campbell and Doshi, 2021).

Prevailing Arguments Against Arctic Inclusion

Perhaps the most compelling argument against greater Arctic inclusion is one that has already been stated. China has proven repeatedly that it is not above navigating outside of the moral and legal framework to achieve its ends. Internal repression, espionage, economic coercion, kidnapping, IP theft, and hostage diplomacy, to name a few, are some strategies that China has employed to further its own influence and power (Doshi et al., 2021). Even with more robust agreements and stronger governance there is no assurance that China's activities, which are already taking place in the Arctic will not continue. Unfortunately, the Arctic region already has significant security issues created by the presence of Russia and its own pursuit of power. Expanding Arctic involvement for these reasons may complicate matters rather than solve them and, in the end, may be counterproductive to the goal of greater security management.

Allowing Arctic governance to expand to non-Arctic states will also lead to inventible pressure within the United States led NATO alliance. Russia already significantly punches above its weight in the Arctic. Allowing more countries a say in Arctic affairs will lead to pressure from

U.S. allies for the United States to protect their interest from larger powers such as China, India, and Russia (Lanteigne, 2020). Furthermore, allowing countries greater access to Arctic decision-making will lead to shifts in the balance of Artic power creating unforeseeable asymmetries in Arctic relationships. With an already unpredictable nature and as difficult as is to manage with eight partners, it may be unwise from a US perspective to open up the Arctic to the rest of the world.

In addition to creating more tension and having little effect on illegal international activity, granting greater Arctic access, in particular granting greater Arctic access to China, will embolden future efforts by China and other countries alike to subvert legal governance. Chinese methods of coercion and illegal espionage will be interpreted as effective means of gaining and maintaining power. Instead, pressure in the form of stricter controls and trade agreements should be used to push back. In the words of James Andrew Lewis from the Center for Strategic & International Studies, “China will not change its behavior absent external pressure.” (Lewis, 2018). Granting China greater access without the pressure of concessions will be interpreted as weakness and embolden China to claim further privileges.

Policy Relevance and Conclusion

Arctic management affects every sphere of security. Be it military, political, societal, or environmental, nothing related to security is left untouched or unaffected in the context of the Arctic. The policy relevance of proper Arctic governance and management cannot be understated and is life and death for some. How the world chooses to manage the Arctic will affect the likelihood of future crises in the region and the way of life for those who call the region home. Arctic governance will also touch on global warming, and the billions of people who will be affected by it. As the Earth warms, the Arctic will have an increasingly greater impact on regional and global geopolitics. Greater interest will create greater tensions, and external pressure on the Arctic is expected to grow. The Arctic will be the next great region of Earth where superpowers will compete for influence. All combined this makes the Arctic one of the most pressing and relevant areas for policy study today.

In conclusion, the Arctic is a vast and uninhabited region that is quickly changing because of global warming. Rising temperatures are making the Arctic more accessible, and thus opening up the world to its abundant resources. With greater access, however, comes greater tension, as countries around the world recognize the opportunity that the Arctic presents. The current system of Arctic governance, created in the 1990s as a forum for coordinating special projects (mainly scientific) is ill-equipped to manage the increased interest that has come with global warming (Simpton, 2023). New inclusive governance, which addresses and recognizes the security threats posed by an accessible Arctic is needed. Global warming is not going to slow down anytime soon, and neither are the self- interests of countries like China and Russia who would seek to maximize their control of the Arctic. A proper system is needed to make sure the Arctic is protected, governed by law, and manageable.

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Blake Browning is a graduate student in International Relations and a professional staff member at Webster University, St. Louis, USA. He received his BA in International Business from Webster University in 2022. His areas of interest include economic security, international trade, Arctic security, and Arctic governance. His current research focuses on Artic governance as it relates to global warming and the geoeconomics effects of increased access to the Northern Sea Route. In addition to studying International Relations, Blake works in the Department of Advancement as a coordinator specializing in alumni relations and donor data.

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The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.