

BCS 100: Introduction to the Circumpolar North

University of the Arctic

MODULE 10: Geopolitics, Security and International Society

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Overview

The aim of this module is twofold: first to give an overview and basic information on geopolitics, security, international relations - particularly international cooperation - and the recent key changes as they pertain to the circumpolar North; and second, interrelations between the circumpolar North and international society, and how the region is seen in world politics.

The module describes the main categories of international actors (of the international system), and those of the circumpolar North, with their multi-functional interests at the early-21st century. The module also briefly presents how geopolitics has been present and is implemented in the circumpolar North. Next, the module presents the main paradigms and discourses on security and security studies, and how they are presented and implemented in the circumpolar North.

The module also describes both the main features of the Cold War geopolitics and international politics, and the main themes, or trends, of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations, particularly different categories and levels of international cooperation in the post-Cold War period. Similarly, the module describes and discusses the role of the circumpolar North and the possibilities to influence world politics and international society. Finally, the module describes and analyzes the recent multi-functional changes of circumpolar geopolitics, and recognizes what might be interpreted to be key indicators of the changing geopolitics of the early-21st century's North.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to:

1. Describe the main categories of international actors and key international actors of the circumpolar North.
2. Describe how geopolitics has been implemented in the circumpolar North.
3. Explain how different paradigms and discourses on security are presented and implemented in the circumpolar North.
4. Interpret the main themes or trends of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations in the post-Cold War period.
5. Analyze the role of the circumpolar North in world politics and international society.
6. Explain key indicators of the geopolitics of a changing North at the early 21st century.

Required Reading

Heininen, L. (2004) Circumpolar International Relations and Geopolitics. *AHDR (Arctic Human Development Report)*. Akureyri: Stefansson Arctic Institute, Iceland, pp. 207-225. 18pp.

Key Terms and Concepts

- Cold war
- Geopolitics
- Globalization
- International relations
- International society
- International systems
- Security
- World politics

Learning Materials

10.1. Introduction

The circumpolar North in the early-21st century—a region that was primarily a strategic **security** zone and a resource area in the Cold War period—has become a stable and peaceful area, resulting in a significant change in northern geopolitics. Both international relations and geopolitics are, however changing and giving rise to increasing geo-strategic importance of the circumpolar North and significant geopolitical, socio-economic and environmental changes in the region. To understand such changes, it is important to briefly define the circumpolar North, the Arctic, and the northernmost countries and regions of the globe.

- Geographically, the region consists of the Arctic Ocean with sub-seas and its two rim-lands with archipelagos, i.e. the Eurasian North and the northern-most coastal area of North America.
- Politically, the circumpolar North includes eight unified states, the so-called Arctic Eight: Canada, Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands as autonomous regions), Finland, Iceland, Norway with the archipelago of Svalbard, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the USA (Alaska).
- Legally, the region is divided by national borders of the Arctic Eight. In addition, there are the Faroe Islands and Greenland as autonomous regions under Danish rule, and Svalbard under the auspices of the international Treaty on Svalbard, governed by Norway.
- Geopolitically, the Circumpolar North consists of the northernmost peripheries of seven arctic states, and Iceland in its entirety, each with their own national interests and readiness to defend themselves based on sovereignty and national security interests. It is also a peaceful and innovative region with increasing international and inter-regional cooperation, and innovative political and legal arrangements based on the devolution of power. With respect to natural resources, it is a rich area with a high level of exploration and utilization as well as industrialization. Finally, the eight arctic states have well-educated and skilled peoples, and the cultural heritage and diversity of Indigenous and other northern peoples and nations.

10.2 International Actors

There is not an official list of international actors according to the literature on **International Relations** and International Politics. There are, however, major categories of international actors within the international community, such as the following:

- a. Unified or Nation-states, i.e. parliaments, governments and state organisations such as an army
- b. Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)
- c. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs)
- d. Sub-national governments, i.e. provinces/counties, municipalities, indigenous peoples organizations and civil organizations (in one state)
- e. Trans-national corporations (TNCs).

International Actors of the Circumpolar North at the Early-21st Century

The following section identifies and briefly describes key international actors that operate in the Circumpolar North, as well as major states and other actors outside the region but with relevant interest within the region.

a. Unified or Nation-States

All eight Arctic unified states of the Circumpolar North are included in this category. Additionally unified states from outside the region that have relevant interests within the region could be included. The Arctic Eight include the following:

Canada: a major coastal state of the Arctic Ocean with northern indigenous peoples, concerns regarding northern sovereignty, security surrounding an international sea route, and a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member and promoter of northern cooperation;

Denmark: a major coastal state of the Arctic Ocean through Greenland and the Faroe Islands (as autonomous regions), and a European Union (EU) and NATO member;

Finland: an Arctic state without access to the Arctic Ocean or other northern seas, yet with more interests within the Baltic Sea region and toward Russia; and an EU member;

Iceland: the only entirely arctic state and a major coastal state of the North Atlantic Ocean, with strong economic interests in northern seas, and a NATO member;

Norway: a major coastal state of the North Atlantic Ocean, and partly the Arctic Ocean, with strong national interests in the North, particularly the Barents Sea region having legal control on the archipelago of Svalbard, and a NATO member;

Russia, or the Russian Federation: a major coastal state of the Arctic Ocean, and the northernmost country of the world with high national, economic and geopolitical interests in the North;

Sweden: an arctic state without access to the Arctic Ocean or other northern seas, and high interests within the Baltic Sea region as a result of historical, strategic and economic interests, and an EU member;

USA: a global power with more worldwide interests, present in the North through Alaska, and a NATO member.

Other unified states that have interests in, or are interested in the Arctic region, include France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) in Europe; and China, Japan, and India in Asia. Each of these countries acts as an observer in the region, and most of them are part of the Arctic Council. Consequently, they have a growing interest in many aspects of the North, including scientific research, particularly in IPY 2007-2009, energy, and transportation.

b. Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs)

The intergovernmental organizations that have strong interests in the circumpolar North are the Arctic Council (AC), Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic with its Standing Committee (SCPAR), and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Correspondingly, the United Nations (UN) and NATO, as well as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are present in the region, since all the Arctic states belong to these IGOs, although they do not have immediate strong interests or current tasks in the region. The situation might change quickly, however, and these IGOs might play a more important role in the region. For example, NATO is originally an organization for the North Atlantic region and thus is able to act and demonstrate in the region. Correspondingly, the UN has duties in the region through the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), signed in 1982, and the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

The EU is inextricably linked to the Arctic through the territories of its three member states, although Greenland no longer belongs to the Union (Commission of the European Communities 2008). The Northern Dimension policy adopted by the EU in 2000 put northern issues on the political agenda. Correspondingly, the new Northern Dimension of the European Union, adopted in November 2006 was meant to become a common policy of the EU, the Russian Federation, Iceland and Norway in North Europe (Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document 2006).

c. International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)

There are also several international non-governmental organizations active in the region, particularly Indigenous peoples' organizations, such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) and the Sámi Council. Environmental movements and organizations operating in the region include, for example, Greenpeace International and the World Wide Fund (WWF). Similarly, scientific and academic organizations include the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), the Northern Research Forum (NRF) and the University of the Arctic (UArctic).

d. Sub-National Governments

Sub-national governments, such as the Home Rule Government of Greenland and the Russian Association for Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), are very important, since they represent the citizens and civil societies, especially the Indigenous peoples, of the region. Consequently, such groups define many northern regions as their "homelands".

e. Trans-National Corporations (TNCs)

Finally, there are trans-national corporations, either global or international, with strong commercial interests in the utilization of natural resources, such as mining, oil and natural gas, fishery and forestry companies, and/or transportation of these resources. There is, however, a tendency that the influence of TNCs is decreasing, since state monopolies or state-dominated companies, such as Norwegian and Russian national oil companies, have

become stronger. National oil companies now control about 80% of the world's reserves (Robinson 2007).

10.3 Geopolitics in the North and Northern Geopolitics



Figure 1: Nuclear Submarine in Arctic Waters (

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:USS_Annapolis_ICEX.jpg Public Domain.
U.S. Department of Defense photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Tiffini M. Jones, U.S. Navy.

The circumpolar North has been described on a spectrum ranging from an external colonial point of view to an internal image of a homeland of peoples with unique identities. Classical geopolitics has been an important force in the circumpolar North, particularly in the 20th century, which brought first time warfare into northern regions and the beginning of Arctic militarization (see Figure 1). In classical **geopolitics** the North was seen as a reserve of natural resources and military space for sovereignty and **political security**, and economic interests of the Arctic states. The industrialized, militarized and divided circumpolar North of the Cold War, however, started to thaw in the late 1980s.

Consequently, the geopolitical situation significantly changed due to the end of the **Cold War**. There was a shift from the military tension and confrontation of the military blocs led by two superpowers to international cooperation in many civilian fields. Furthermore, a process of region building was started with national governments as major actors and new international actors, such as Indigenous peoples' organizations, environmental organizations and sub-national governments, introduced new geopolitical aspects among nations, regions and peoples. New political approaches emerged concerning more human-oriented issues, such as building human capital, societal responsibility and the politics of identity (Chaturvedi 2000).

This more human approach of geopolitics in the 1990s meant, on one hand, increased stability and decreased military tension, and, on the other, a broadening of international and inter-regional cooperation (Östreg 2008). Because of these developments, the circumpolar North has become a stable and peaceful area, which consequently, has resulted in a significant change in northern geopolitics (Heininen 2004).

While neither international relations nor geopolitics remain unaltered, the geo-strategic importance of the region is growing. Significant geopolitical, socio-economic and environmental changes are occurring with regard to sovereignty, international cooperation, resource utilization,

transportation of resources, **energy**, **security**, climate change and other global issues (e.g. Heininen 2008).

Schools of Geopolitical Thought

Main schools of, and discourses on, geopolitics include classical geopolitics, new geopolitics and critical geopolitics.

- Classical geopolitics emphasizes occupation and control of physical space and natural resources, as well as power politics of a state. A well-known example of discourses of classical geopolitics is the Heartland Theory by Halford Mackinder (e.g. 1904). There are also the resource models and the technology models of geopolitics.
- New geopolitics emphasizes the importance of actors and identities, such as Indigenous peoples and their cultures, instead of space. New geopolitics also recognizes the importance of geo-economics parallel to, or even instead of, geopolitics.
- Critical geopolitics was established due to a lack of politicization of physical space by classical geopolitics. This field of study emphasizes for example, the importance of social space and interrelations between knowledge and power (e.g. Newman 1998).

Geopolitics as Implemented in the Circumpolar North

The above-mentioned geopolitical schools of thought are implemented in the circumpolar North in several ways, such as the utilization of natural resources and military activities, self-determination of indigenous peoples and impacts to human security by climate change (see Table 1).

Table 1: Main Contents of Different Schools of Geopolitics and Their Implementations in the North

Model	Concerns	Examples
Classical geopolitics	Occupation and control of physical space and power politics of a state	Resource models Technology models
New geopolitics	Geo-economics, actors and identities	Indigenous peoples as actors, the Northern Dimension
Critical geopolitics	Politicization of physical space, importance of social space, interrelation between knowledge and power	Arctic images, uncertainty of climate change

Source: Data compiled by module author Lassi Heininen.

The implementation of concerns of the school of classical geopolitics in the North was traditionally done through the resource models and the technology models, such as industrialization and militarization. In the manifold growth in its geo-strategic importance, which the North has recently witnessed, we can find continuity of how in the North “space” has been utilized and treated as “non-political” in classical geopolitics. This geopolitical discourse is not totally absent; for example, based on The Economy of the North the total economic activity of the Arctic was in 2003 worth USD-PPP \$225 billion which came primarily from the tertiary sector (service industries) but the primary sector also played an important role (Duhaime et al 2006).

New geopolitics emphasizes indigenous peoples as international actors and the importance of their identities. Examples are northern region building with nations as major actors, the creation of a Northern Dimension policy by states, and IGOs as a more sophisticated method for state control or dominance.

Critical geopolitics has another approach to the “politicization” of space that is seen through the discourse on Arctic images, or internal and external images of the Arctic (e.g. Heininen 2007). Alternatively, different types of knowledge are recognized, and power and knowledge(s) are used when defining the impacts of climate change, such as uncertainty.

10.4 Security

Definitions, Paradigms and Discourses of Security

In the 21st century, there are many ways to understand, define and interpret **security** as well as what is meant by risk and threat. Additionally, it is important to understand the kinds of changes there might be with respect to the problem definition of security and its premises and paradigms (e.g. Heininen 2010a). A narrow traditional interpretation and definition of security refers to national, usually **military security** (Newcombe 1986) against threats and enemies coming from outside. In this definition of **traditional security**, a state is the main subject of security and the international system is seen as “anarchy” based on hegemonic competition between states (Waltz 1979). This concept of security also dominated the circumpolar North throughout the 20th century.

Learning Activity 1

Explain the main differences among the schools of geopolitical thought.

After several reports by the United Nations (e.g. Common Security 1982) and new discourses on interrelations between peace, development and the environment, the situation started to change. Other non-military points of view were discussed as security issues such as those pertaining to social, economic and environmental security (Buzan 1991: 363-374). Consequently, the notion of security was exposed to new content and the definition was widened toward a more human-oriented approach. As a result, **comprehensive security** emerged as a new interpretation emphasizing environmental or ecological aspects of security (e.g. Dalby 2002).

When defining **environmental** or **ecological security**, relevant hazardous environments, resource-based environmental conflicts, and nuclear safety are important. This new notion of security is based on interrelations between security and the environment (Galtung 1981). It was applied to northern regions and northern seas (e.g. Langlais 1995), particularly meaning environmental protection given the first field of multilateral cooperation between the Arctic states and the concern for nuclear safety. Finally, there were claims stating that the environmental security concept is of particular relevance to the Arctic, because of its vulnerable ecosystem (Östreg 1999).

Human security has a focus on human beings as individuals rather than a nation or society as a whole. It focuses on the everyday security of ordinary people as affected by pollution, climate change or the large-scale utilization of natural resources (Hoogensen 2005). The Canadian government first adopted the human security approach in the 1990s (Dwinedi et al. 2001). Correspondingly, **civil security** emphasizes human beings as citizens with rights and duties. The term “civility” has become a political concept based on an idea of a good polity of citizens, which in the circumpolar context might be interpreted as a kind of “Arctic community” (Griffiths 1993). Impacts of global warming are now perceived as security matters particularly with respect to such things as the concept of **food security** (Paci et al. 2004).

Another new dimension of security is **energy security**, which emphasizes a scarcity of fossil fuel especially that of oil, and the strategic role of energy in our modern world. If energy security traditionally meant security of supply and that of access to an energy source, a comprehensive definition also includes: security of transportation and other facilities; access to pipelines, storage facilities and a reserve for strategic internal use; investment security; environmental security; and finally an energy dialogue (Austvik 2006). Because of the strategic importance of hydrocarbons, energy security is closely related to traditional security concerns including internal defence and external conflicts, and is consequently seen in the use of terms such as “energy weapon” in world politics. This can lead to hotly contested disputes over borders (see Figure 2).

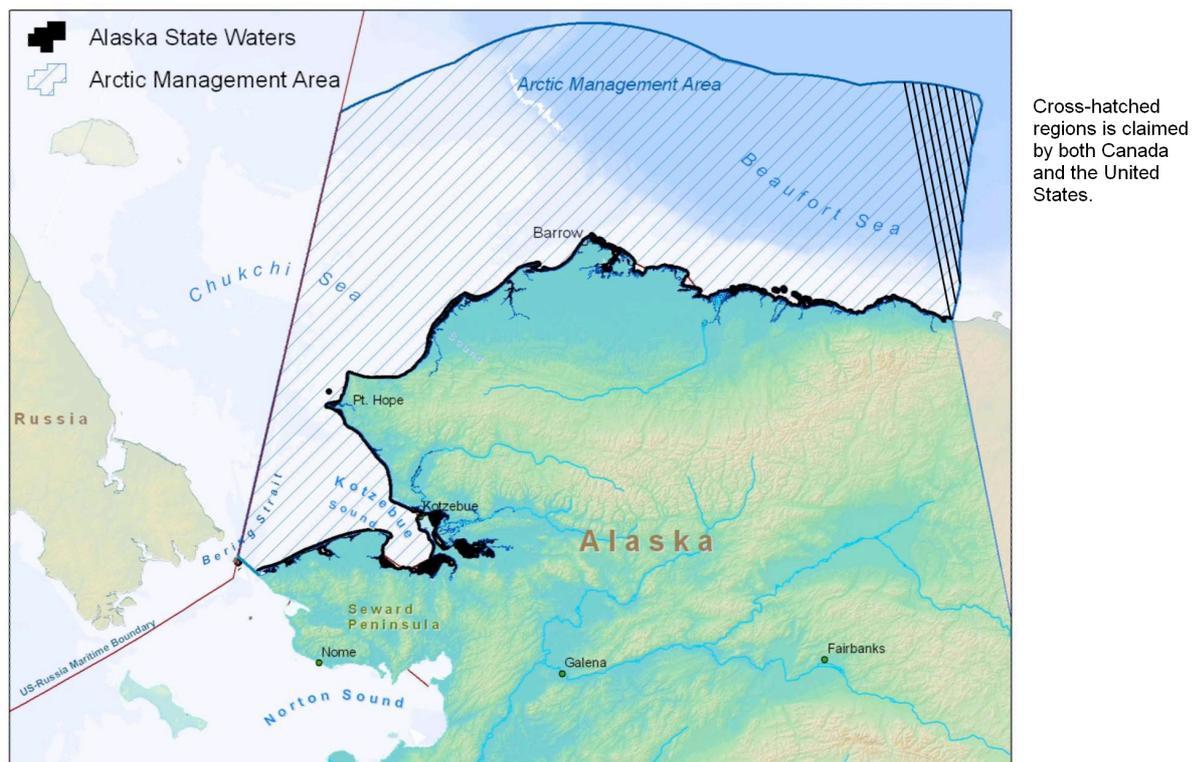


Figure 2: Contested Land in the Canadian and US Arctic

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Arctic_management_area_and_disputed_waters.jpg Public Domain.
 Author: Gary Locke.

Overall, security is not objective but relative, and can be interpreted as being related to almost everything (Westing 1989). The term “securitization” in security discourses, as defined by the Copenhagen School (a school that focuses on the social aspects of security), has meant that almost all issues are securitized (Buzan 1991). Security is, however, complex and still includes nationalistic and militaristic aspects (Deudney 1999). This is particularly the case with actual environmental problems and risks stemming from military activities (Häyrynen et al. 2002).

What is relevant in security discourses is the notion of who is being protected. This indicates that there are not only several actors we whom we are dealing but also that security is always socially constructed. This is a central point when, for example, we try to define **regional security**. The notion of regional security does not mean security of a group of like-minded countries, or that of a “security community” (Bailes et al. 2006). It means more security of a loose international region and its peoples and societies based on functional cooperation across national borders such as that seen in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

Security Paradigms and Discourses Present and Implemented in the Circumpolar North

Significant structural changes of the **international system** and its security environment in the 1990s have influenced and affected security of, and security matters in, the Circumpolar North. However, they have not changed the situation dramatically, particularly when dealing with traditional security. By the turn of the century, the military presence in the Arctic had contracted, and there was less tension, while increasing international cooperation on civilian and some military-related issues generated a greater sense of stability and cooperative security. The very meaning of security has, however, been extended since the Cold War period in discourses on (northern) security beyond traditional concerns with “military” threats to focus on environmental and societal problems such as pollution, health, cultural survival and freedom of expression. When looking at the Circumpolar North in the early 21st century it is possible to find some sort of dualism. On one hand, there has been a significant change towards a broader understanding of security, and on the other, the region has retained its high military-strategic significance, much due to its energy resources and new global sea routes.

Stages and Special Features of Security in the Circumpolar North

We can define three stages of the state of security in the Circumpolar North. Furthermore, five special features of northern securities at the turn of the 21st century are recognized. When we put these together, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the background and foundations by which to define northern security at the early 21st century (see Heininen 2010a).

- a. The first stage, “Militarization of the Arctic,” covers more or less the first half of the 20th century. This was a period characterized by real warfare and included many deadly conflicts in the region, such as German submarine warfare against the Allies’ supply transports to Murmansk. Prior to this stage was the fact that state sovereignty had finally reached the northernmost regions of the globe, which together with advanced technology transferred these regions from frontiers and borderlands into controlled national borders.
- b. The second stage, “Military theatre,” covers most of the Cold War period. The Circumpolar North was transformed first “from a *military vacuum* prior to World War II, to a *military flank* in the 1950-1970 period and to a *military front* in the late 1980s” (Östreng 1999: 22). In the North there was a gradual military build-up as a response by one superpower to the military developments of the other superpower (Posen 1985). Nuclear weapons systems, particularly strategic nuclear submarines and bombers carrying nuclear bombs, from both the United States and the Soviet Union, were deployed into the region, and new maritime strategies of these superpowers were developed for the High North (Till 1987). In spite of an intensive arms race there were also arms control, conflict prevention and other negotiations arrangements between the two superpowers.
- c. In the third stage, the “Transition period,” based on the significant change in circumpolar geopolitics, the whole international traditional security system and military policy lost its importance in geopolitics and its visibility in international politics due to the growing importance of global economics, or geo-economics. In the Circumpolar North, these changes meant fewer military bases, radar stations and troops in fewer geographical places, and consequently less military tension and confrontation and more international cooperation and region building. In the region, there were also regional developments that had an effect on these changes, such as changes in economies, the political positions of northern indigenous peoples and a growing concern with the environment (Heininen et al. 1995; Östreng 1999). Furthermore, “northern security” was broadened by discourses on environmental security including nuclear safety given severe problems and risks, the Chernobyl accident, and the threat of nuclear submarines in northern seas. Overall, the third stage represents a transformation from military tension and confrontation into

international and inter-regional cooperation, whereby the Arctic states started to move towards more civilized forms of behaviour.

- d. The present situation at the early-21st century is the fourth stage, which consists of a combination of aspects of traditional security and comprehensive security as well as global problems and **globalization** with growing impacts to northern securities. Global problems being wide reaching and not respecting national borders can be defined to include security issues such as: proliferation of nuclear weapons; overpopulation, poverty and other problems related to the economy and development; scarcity of natural resources; pollution, climate change and environmental problems; refugees and human rights problems; diseases and pandemics; and other miscellaneous problems such as international crime, the threat of meteors, and space refuse (Hakovirta 1996). In spite of the end of the Cold War the Arctic has retained its high strategic significance in security and military-political matters for the key nuclear weapon powers: the United States and Russia. Furthermore, it has a significant military presence, since these sparsely-populated northern areas are strategically and politically suitable for the support of nuclear weapons systems, testing of weapons and military training (Heininen 2010a). In addition to military policy strategic energy resources are another reason for high geostrategic importance since in Alaska, Canada and Russia there are more than 400 oil and gas fields north of the Arctic Circle (USGS 2008). Alternatively, when taking into consideration impacts of climate change, those of long-range pollution and the utilization of energy resources and their transportation, the interpretation of comprehensive human and environmental security is a relevant alternative to defining security that includes peoples, societies and the environment.

Special Features of Northern Security

The first three stages in the development of **security** in the North can be used to highlight the special features of the various contemporary notions of northern security. All these features deal first with either the discourse on traditional security or that of comprehensive security; second, the environment; third, many of the peoples and societies, either directly or through environmental degradation; and fourth, while one of them, the technology models of geopolitics, is related to militarization (see Figure 3), most of the others represent alternative discourses on security. Finally, they manifest that interesting feature of security in the North exhibited in the early-21st century whereby there have emerged several types of northern securities (see Heininen 2010a).



Figure 3: Nuclear icebreaker, Yamal Commander on a National Science Foundation expedition

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icebreaker> Public Domain. Photo by National Science Foundation employee.

- a. From the point of view of classical geopolitics the militarization of the Arctic is based on an application of the technology models of geopolitics, which claim that if technology allows man to introduce the military into any geographical region, it will occur (Apunen 1991). At the same time, relations among technology, the environment and societies have become more important in modern societies due to more severe risks, much linked to the use of nuclear energy for military and civilian purposes. This has also been the case in the Circumpolar North due to nuclear submarines, radar stations and military testing sites. Here the technology models can be interpreted to be a legacy of the Cold War, since many technological developments are linked to the deployment of the military in the region during this period (Heininen 1994). The technological developments continue to impact the region today since there have been no real nuclear disarmament negotiations dealing with the north.
- b. Regarding *nuclear safety*, the environmental “awakening” starting in the 1960s, was raised and accelerated by images of environmental degradation from nuclear tests and dumped radioactive wastes, such as the lethal nuclear accidents of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 and the Komsomolets class submarine in the Norwegian Sea in 1989 (Heininen 1994). Especially important was the nuclear problem of the Barents Sea region with high-risk hotspots, such as the nuclear waste storage of the Russian Navy in the Andrejevan Bay, that symbolizes Russian environmental catastrophes and their socioeconomic impacts (AMAP 2002: 59-76; Heininen et al. 2002). The main risk of radioactive contamination from nuclear accidents in northern seas was taken seriously in the 1980s by Icelanders and by Norwegians living on the coast, and was the main reason for the anxiousness of the Icelandic government to act for environmental protection. Governments increasingly started to agree with these concerns and started international cooperation on environmental issues under the auspices of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) (Anonymous 1991) in general, and particularly for the cleaning-up of radioactive wastes, for example, through the Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (AMEC) among the United States, Norway and Russia in 1996.
- c. Behind nuclear safety is a much broader context meaning the close relationship between the environment and security, which is now universally recognized as relations among the environment, sustainable development and security. The environmental impact of weapons-oriented traditional security consists of all possible elements and aspects of the presence and activities by armies as they deal with nature, peoples and societies (Galtung 1981; Finger 1991). This relationship must deal with national security and is consequently sensitive, even taboo. This relationship is also global and thus a part of northern security due to the intensive military presence in the region. Examples include the crash of the US B-52 bomber in Thule, Greenland, in 1968; nuclear submarine accidents; pollution caused by the radar stations of the Distant Early Warning Line (DEW Line) in North America; and nuclear tests in Novaya Zemlya in the Russian North.
- d. As the environment also includes the entire human-built environment and peoples, northern residents have also been impacted by the military. This issue was definitely sensitive and secret for northern residents due to the geopolitical position of northern peripheries as the front of the Cold War competition by the two superpowers (e.g. Cronenwett 2001). Although the issue is little known or discussed, it is possible to say that northern peoples and communities, especially indigenous peoples, have been victims of the “military machines” of the two superpowers, and therefore have had to adapt. Among numerous examples of this is the Thule US air base in Greenland, where the Inughuit had to leave their traditional land and living area as decided by a secret agreement between the US and Danish governments (Brösted et al. 1985).

Similarly, due to nuclear test sites in Novaya Zemlya, the Nenets had to leave their traditional hunting and fishing area and move onto the mainland. Yet another example is

the construction of the DEW Line, causing sudden industrialisation of a remote region populated by hunting and trapping people and environmental degradation through the introduction of toxic substances and radioactive wastes. The introduction of such military presence, and the negative externalities that resulted, have been a contentious and controversial issue among northern peoples. However, armies are also seen to have brought benefits in the way of development to northern peripheries, such as jobs, necessary services, and flight routes inside the northern peripheries (e.g. Gaup 1990).

- e. There are also many multi-functional impacts of climate change, such as melting sea ice and glaciers. This climate change remains a real problem for many coastal settlements due to erosion, melting permafrost and building instability, and in the longer-term, rising sea levels (ACIA 2004). Climate change entails for the Arctic, a sort of dualism as the rapid warming of the climate also brings benefits, such as new sea transportation routes in the Arctic Ocean and its sub-seas, and easier access to natural resources. Finally, climate change is a new relevant factor for environmental and human securities as well national security and sovereignty.

In summary, the stages and special features of security in the Circumpolar North show that the region was first militarized, and then influenced by a significant geopolitical change leading to a decrease in military tension. Enhanced security was accompanied by an increased concern for environmental degradation and nuclear safety, and hence, the human aspects of security. The former militaristic approach is typically traditional focusing on national security of the Arctic states, whereas the latter more human approach indicates that there has increasingly been a broader understanding of security and what it means to society and the environment.

10.5 Circumpolar Geopolitics and International Relations

Significant Geopolitical Change: From Confrontation to Cooperation

The transformation from the confrontation of the Cold War period into wide international cooperation in the 1990s, inspired by the Murmansk Speech of the then Soviet President Gorbachev (1987), was the first significant change in circumpolar geopolitics and international relations. It started a type of “boom” in international cooperation. The transformation was mostly due to significant geopolitical and geo-economic changes of the international system, but also to reforms in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. This development emphasized the importance of cooperation across national borders to foster common and comprehensive political security and to promote human development and democracy. This meant a change from high tension and confrontation into trans-boundary cooperation and stability, which can be interpreted and described several ways; for example, the endeavour of the post Cold War world society has been promoted through the sets of interrelated processes of “civilianization,” “regionalization” and “mobilization” (Østreng 2008).

As a result, in the post-Cold War era there is a new institutional landscape based on wide international, mostly multilateral, cooperation in and for the Circumpolar North with intergovernmental organizations such as the Arctic Council (Anonymous 1996) and non-state actors. Second, the Circumpolar North is now a stable and peaceful region without wars and armed conflicts, or even reasons for serious conflicts, with the exception of some asymmetric environmental conflicts.

Main Themes of Circumpolar Geopolitics and International Relations in the Post-Cold War Period

Stated in the *Arctic Human Development Report* the main themes or trends of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations in the early 21st century are first, the increasing circumpolar cooperation by indigenous peoples' organizations and sub-national governments; second, region building with states as major actors; and third, a new kind of relationship between the Circumpolar North and the outside world, demonstrating that the North has relevance in world politics (Heininen 2004).

These themes include new kinds of processes, such as region-building and the establishment of new organizations like the Arctic Council, devolution of power and high activity of indigenous peoples' organizations, growing academic and scientific cooperation as well as concern for the environment by civil societies. Furthermore, northern peoples' organizations have become international actors with their own agendas like the influence of the epistemic community in the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) shows (e.g. Meakin et al. 2004). This is mostly based on "connectivity", which has also been interpreted to mean that the Circumpolar North can be defined as an international distinctive region, as well as the ability of northern peoples and communities to develop "innovative political and legal arrangements that meet the needs of the residents of the Circumpolar North without rupturing the larger political systems in which the region is embedded" (Young et al. 2004: 18-19 and 237). All in all, each of the themes indicates and reflects a significant change, and putting them together makes the picture more complicated and multi-functional than used to be the case in the colonial days, or during the era of classical geopolitics.

10.6 Circumpolar North in World Politics and International Society

The Circumpolar North, or the Arctic, is not often and has not for a long time, been mentioned or considered in the context of world politics, because politically the region is not really an entity, but is divided into eight parts separated by national borders. The Circumpolar North became known worldwide during first half of the 20th century, when expeditions of explorers went to the North Pole. It has increasingly been incorporated into world politics since the Second World War, especially in the Cold War period. In the post-Cold War era the North is again playing an important role in world politics, but now in quite a different context: The first example is the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears¹, which was signed in 1973. And, the second example is the international negotiation process on the new international sea law with the final result of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), signed in 1982.

Learning Activity 2

Explain the primary interrelated processes of re-conceptualization of national security after the end of the Cold War.

At the turn of the 21st century, as a stable, peaceful and advanced region, the Circumpolar North has seen positive developments within the northern hemisphere as well as in world politics. Furthermore, the region has real contributions to give to **international society** but will require political will and mutual agreement by key international actors. The following points of view include relevant potential factors that may increase the role and influence of the North in world politics and make the region more interesting from the point of view of the rest of the world in the near future (see Heininen 2005; Heininen 2010b):

¹ See: <http://www.bearbiology.com/iba/bearcons/pbtreaty.html>

- Geopolitical point of view: As discussed earlier the Circumpolar North is a highly strategic area for the military, especially first, as a bastion area for the strategic nuclear submarines with ballistic missiles (SSBNs) and other sea-based nuclear weapons; second, as a sparsely-populated area for military training and testing; and third, as deployed areas for silos and radars of the US National Missile Defence (NMD) system. Likewise, the rich energy resources of the region emphasize the importance of the resource models of geopolitics. A big part of the annual gross production of the Arctic Region already goes to the South to meet energy needs of developed countries, and likely even more will go in the future, as it is estimated that hydrocarbons consist of the most important source of energy for most modern societies.
- Scientific point of view: Another way of understanding the North has been as a “laboratory” or “workshop” for new scientific information and knowledge, such as the impacts of climate change and the development of new technologies for storage and clean-up of nuclear waste.
- Diversity of life: The Circumpolar North is a distinct component of the diversity of nature. Not only does it have great environmental and biological diversity but also it is diverse in the human dimension given many different Indigenous peoples, communities, customs and their special regional dynamics. This point of view is based upon the belief that diversity is valuable, and worth supporting and preserving.
- Stability: The Circumpolar North is not overtly plagued by any one big regional or global problem, such as war or military crisis, a lack of fresh water, hunger, absolute poverty or international terrorism, and could be described and analysed as one of the most peaceful regions in the world today. Consequently, the region as a whole, or even some of its sub-regions like the Nordic Region, has the potential to become a model for non-violent methods of governance. An example is the Nordic Peace exercise based on Nordic cooperation and Nordic values (e.g. Archer 2003).
- Innovation: In the Circumpolar North there are innovations in governance and co-management as well as political and legal arrangements such as the devolution of power (Bankes 2004), which hold potential for other regions. This is due to traditional knowledge, education, and higher education and innovation, as well as flexibility and resilience of Northern communities (e.g. Aarseth et al. 2004). Furthermore, the North appears to be active, fresh and innovative in international cooperation, a characteristic that has been manifested for example, by pan-Arctic cross-border cooperation and region building. Consequently, the North can be seen as a driving force for a new kind of governance and politics in the current geopolitical era.

In spite of these points of view, and the interpretation of the Arctic as a distinctive region, the cold reality is that the Circumpolar North is not an international actor, but a geographical region with borders and societies, even nations, divided among eight unified states. Nor is the Circumpolar North a political entity with political unity or power, and economic power, but rather a small population lacking capital and having no power centres in a traditional sense. Alternatively, in the international system, which does not include an active international society, there is limited space for these kinds of positive points of view coming from actors who, like Northern populations, are not strong state-actors or unified intergovernmental actors.

10.7 The Changing North of the Early 21st Century

Generally, the Circumpolar North of the early-21st century is not isolated, but closely integrated into the current world of **globalization** and part of the international system. Furthermore, the region has become economically, culturally and politically globalized and influenced by several global problems and flows of globalization. There is also growing worldwide economic and political interest in and toward the northernmost regions of the globe, particularly for the region's rich energy resources such as oil and gas on the shelves of the northern seas, and visions of new global, trans-arctic sea routes. There are rough estimates claiming that between 20-25% of the world's undiscovered oil and natural gas resources, (approximately 90 million barrels of oil and 1 669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas) exists on the shelf of the Arctic Ocean (USGS 2008). Although, there are interpretations (e.g. Borgerson 2008; Beary 2008) to call this a "race" for the Arctic and its resources, there is neither a traditional race on natural resources nor imperial hegemonic competition, because of the stable geopolitical state of the region, and the strict regulations on northern seas by UNCLOS. This also means there is respect for UNCLOS and other international treaties by the five littoral states of the Arctic Ocean (see Anonymous 2008).

Key Indicators of a Changing North

At the early-21st century a significant and rapid level of environmental, geoeconomic and geopolitical change is occurring in the North, and the region has recently witnessed tremendous growth in its geo-strategic importance (e.g. Heininen 2008).

This change is just beginning and is not yet easy to analyze. Therefore, examine the following geopolitical factors/dynamics and relevant causal phenomena regarded among key indicators of this ongoing multi-functional change (see Table 2):

Table 2: The Changing Geo-Politics of the North: Main Indicators

Factors / Dynamics	Phenomena
a. National sovereignty	Physical space
b. Military presence	National security, power
c. Utilization of natural resources and new claims	Resource models, jurisdiction
d. Strategic (energy) resources	Energy security
e. Transportation	Logistics
f. Technological development	Modernization, faith in technology
g. Global (security) problems	Globalization, world order (models)
h. Flows of globalization	Geo-economics
i. International cooperation and dialogue (dialogue building)	Integration, governance
j. Education, science and traditional knowledge	Human capital, interdisciplinary study, interplay
k. Climate change	Uncertainty, epistemic community

Source: Data compiled by module author [Lassi Heininen](#).

The following list explains the ongoing and varied changes listed in the table.

- a. National sovereignty is seen to be endangered by climate change in some of the littoral states of the Arctic Ocean, and is often used as an excuse to expand executive economic zones.

- b. Military presence is there for the defence of sovereignty and national security of the states including all aspects of normal national defence and routine patrolling, weapons testing and military training, and deployment of radar stations. This does not necessarily mean that “the Arctic could descend into armed conflict” (Borgerson 2008) as has been speculated.
- c. The utilization of natural resources has high strategic importance given untapped rich natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas.
- d. Consequently, energy security is an important factor, since it is assumed to be “securitized” and provides the basis of many relations between major powers. Consequently, because energy security is a global phenomenon, the North is becoming highly strategic in world politics and geo-economics.
- e. Following from the growing utilization of energy resources there is a growing need for transportation and the infrastructure for transportation, such as northern sea routes. This includes existing routes and those that are planned or under development.
- f. Technology is an important factor because the mainstream thinking is that an advanced, new kind of cold climate technology will solve emerging problems. Here the irony is that at the same time climate change helps to overcome challenges of nature, such as navigating through sea ice, and “conquering” the North Pole, it creates bigger challenges such as that of maintaining and developing (new) infrastructure in melting permafrost.
- g. As an indicator of the impacts of globalization in the North, there are new global security and environmental problems creating major challenges and risks to communities.
- h. There are also the flows of globalization, such as flows of raw materials and consumer goods, as well as tourists who influence northern environments and northern communities.
- i. The current institutionalized international cooperation between governments, mostly multilateral, is the most fundamental human response to these new challenges. This includes, for example, cooperation within the Arctic Council, between Indigenous peoples, and between civil societies.
- j. Science and traditional knowledge and how they are interrelated in education are contributing to new discourse on geopolitics. For example, the educational and research activities of the Northern Research Forum and the University of the Arctic often combine western scientific perspectives with traditional knowledge.
- k. Climate change with its multi-faceted impacts is a significant factor (Heininen 2008b) in changing northern geopolitics, and particularly by including “uncertainty” in the discourse within societies, politics and governance of the region.

In summary, all these factors, which we recognize to be relevant, have been discussed and studied separately or as a small group, rather than collectively. These factors together define the challenges we will face, first in the Circumpolar North and later globally, and are relevant geopolitically. Consequently, we need to discuss these factors as key indicators of change in the North, and use them to build a holistic picture from which to formulate policy and adapt over the coming decades.

Study Questions

1. Describe key international actors of the Circumpolar North at the early 21st century based on the main categories of international actors (of the international system). Include information from the Required Reading by Heininen.
2. Describe two different kinds of implementation of geopolitics in two countries of the Circumpolar North based on Table 1.
3. Explain how different paradigms and discourses on security are presented and implemented in the Circumpolar North.
4. Examine the three main themes of circumpolar geopolitics and international relations at the early 21st century. What kind of trends are they? Include information from the Required Reading by Heininen.
5. Discuss the different interpretations of, and contributions to, international cooperation and security in the Circumpolar North along the lines of challenges of change as outlined in Table 2.
6. Select three indicators of change in the Circumpolar North from Table 2, and explain how they together affect geopolitics in your country.

Glossary

Cold War (period): a special kind of historical period of the international system, i.e. a bi-polar world, with political, ideological, economic, cultural and military competition between the superpowers of the Soviet Union and the USA without active warfare.

Geopolitics: the study of the effects of economic geography on the powers of the state and the relationships between a nation and the rest of the world.

Globalization: the integration and connection of economic, political and cultural activities across the world.

International relations: represents the study of foreign affairs and global issues among states within the international system.

International Society: a group of states, and leaders of states, which are interconnected by common norms and rules and consciously have some common interests and/or values.

International System: the modern international system, which is based on sovereign unified or nation-states and their contacts and interrelations, and which according to the realist school of IR, is fundamentally anarchic, and often dominated by hegemonic competition between states.

Security: refers to many types of risk management to ensure against future failure. In the context of the Circumpolar North, this could pertain to military and safety issues, food, resources, economies, and culture, for example.

World politics: the study of international governments and other political units in a global context.

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