



**Cooperation or conflict in the Arctic:
A Literature Review**

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ABSTRACT

Spill-over from the Ukrainian crisis is threatening an otherwise benign international state of affairs in the Arctic, raising once more the question of whether the Arctic is likely to be a scene for cooperation or conflict in the coming years? This question has defined much International Relations research on the Arctic region even before Ukraine. This working paper takes stock of the debates between two groups of researchers, which in the paper are named respectively “warners” and “reassurers”, and it argues that the field as a whole has generally become more optimistic regarding the Arctic since 2007. It argues that this optimism is due to the fact that developments in the Arctic since 2007 have generally tended to weaken the case of the “warners”. And while recent spill-over from the Ukrainian crisis to the Arctic in 2014 must certainly be seen as a step in the opposite direction, the damaging effects of the crisis need not be a game-changer.

The Arctic is changing. Slowly, but steadily, global warming is changing the rules in the region by transforming a harsh environment from inaccessible to a bit more open. In its wake, the arctic nations are slowly beginning to realize economic interests in the Arctic. Most important among these is the potential for increased resource extraction from the region as well as the opening of new commercial sea lanes. However, the new opportunities should not be overstated. Though the numbers in terms of potential resource quantities might be impressive, even a less inaccessible Arctic remains a tough place to do business. More than immediate concrete gains waiting to be grasped, the Arctic still has the most to offer in terms of hopes and expectations for future gains.

Nevertheless, the change in economic potential is still substantial and the question remains if such new interest will prompt cooperation or conflict? This question was especially “hot” in 2007 following Russia’s infamous flag-planting on the North Pole seabed, which stirred fears that a conflict over resources might erupt. In 2014, it has become hot once more, this time as a result of spill-over from the conflict between Russia and the West over Ukraine. And while the West was first hesitant to retaliate in the Arctic for Russian steps in Ukraine during 2014¹, that changed with the most recent rounds of Western sanctions, which also targeted oil ventures in the Russian Arctic. Such sanctions can potentially have serious long-term consequences, especially if they prove lengthy, as Russia has urgent need of Western technology, know-how and capital in order to be able to develop its Arctic resources (Keil 2013: p. 180). Nevertheless, conflict potential in the Arctic, even after Ukraine, should not be overstated.

While research on the ongoing crisis and its Arctic potential suffer from the well-known problem of trying to evaluate a moving target, trying to under-

¹ For some time Canada’s April 2014 decision to skip the next AC meeting in Moscow as a consequence of Ukraine (<http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2014/04/canada-skips-arctic-council-meeting-over-ukraine-16-04>) was the most visible example of Western retaliation for Ukraine in the Arctic.

stand the present state of affairs in the Arctic in the light of the Ukrainian crisis can still very much benefit from an understanding of the existing literature on Arctic conflict potential. It is the aim of this working paper to try to provide such an overview. This paper takes stock of the debates in the field prior to the Ukrainian crisis, lays out the arguments for and against viewing the Arctic as a conflict zone, and explains why most of the field has so far been relatively optimistic.

Before we begin, however, let me start out with a disclaimer. For reason of focus, as well as for linguistic reasons, this will be a review of only Western perspectives, acknowledging that things might look very different from Moscow or Beijing. Finally, the list comprised here is not exhaustive. Instead, I have tried to include the most well-known writers in the field while simultaneously trying to include representatives of the major views offered in literature on the Arctic.

THE DEBATES SINCE THE LATE 00s

Recent Western literature on the Arctic is not evenly divided on the issue of Arctic conflict potential. Rather, the vast majority of the field argues that prospects for cooperation in the Arctic are quite good. This is a rather different picture from the one often found in newspaper articles, especially in the period immediately following the Russian flag planting². This has to do with the fact that the media, in general, have liked to report trouble in the Arctic, more than researchers have. This is not to say that nothing could go wrong in the Arctic. The spill-over from Ukraine, in particular, remains the clearest threat to the continued peaceful development of the region. But based on a review of the literature, this paper argues that the region still has a lot less conflict potential than most other regions.

Research into international relations and security in the Arctic can largely be organized along one clear dividing line: How optimistic is the author regarding the prospects for great power politics, militarization and, ultimately, armed conflict in the Arctic? Along these lines two groupings may be pointed out: The first, which I will name “the warners”³, presages possible political or even military conflict in the Arctic and advises the Arctic nations to prepare, in order to either avoid it or be ready for it. In contrast, the second group, which I name “the reassurers”, are much more optimistic, arguing instead that conflict is unlikely, and that the Arctic nations should consider themselves sufficiently safe from any imme-

diated threats and able to focus on strengthening their existing cooperation in the Arctic. To these two groups must of course be added a relatively large body of research, which falls in between or focusses on scenarios with varying degrees of optimism.

Now, let us consider each of the three positions in turn.

“The warners”

The Russian flag-planting made a good news story: The flag-planting itself was dramatic, taking place as it did miles below the surface of the sea. It represented a seeming challenge to the international status quo – one that, moreover, fitted existing narratives of an assertive Russia. This development spurred a lot of very pessimistic assessments regarding the security situation in the Arctic, primarily from American and Canadian academics.

Scott G. Borgerson (2008), a former Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Coast Guard, argues in an oft-quoted article in *Foreign Affairs*, 2008, titled “Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming” that the provocative Russian actions required a clear American answer, which should be formulated in a clear American arctic strategy. This should include an upgrade of especially the American icebreaker capabilities as well as US full scale diplomatic involvement in the region. First step in this regard could be a much belated ratification of the UNCLOS law of the seas, which would allow the US to include itself in the ongoing negotiations about norms and rules in the Arctic. Besides the flag-planting incident, Borgerson also points to provocative Russian bomber patrols. These moves were particularly dangerous for peace in the Arctic because the Arctic, according to Borgerson, lacks both in international norms and laws,

² Young 2009: p. 74

³ This group includes the group of researchers that has sometimes been referred to as “alarmist” (see for instance Young 2009: p. 81). I avoid the term in this paper, as I find it too politically loaded to the purpose of giving a fair overview of the literature on conflict potential in the Arctic.

represents a region where especially the US, but also the West as a whole, is deeply inferior to Russia in terms of Arctic-ready military capabilities, and represents a treasure trove in terms of resources. In the absence of new American initiatives, this toxic combination might lead to the region erupting in a mad armed dash for resources (Borgerson 2008: p. 65).

He was not alone in this view. Law professor Eric Posner (2007) argued in 2007 that in the rush for the Arctic international law was likely to matter little. Instead, Posner stressed, the defining factor would be how much power a nation was capable of projecting into the Arctic. And, because international law generally rewards nations that are able to enforce their sovereignty, it even tends to reinforce the importance of power (Posner 2007). As Russia is the key challenger in the Arctic, Posner recommends that the US and Canada work out a compromise regarding their disagreements over the legal nature of the Northwest Passage and focus on balancing Russia.

Rob Huebert (2010) acknowledges the conciliating dialog between the Arctic countries. However, he questions their sincerity and sets out to explore what he sees as a mismatch between state rhetoric and investment in Arctic military capabilities (Huebert 2010: pp. 2-5). On the basis of a run-through of the military build-ups in the five coastal states, he concludes that only Canada is not investing heavily in Arctic military capabilities. Denmark has been rebuilding its navy since 1988 (Huebert 2010: p. 10). Norway has invested in expensive AEGIS high intensity combat naval capabilities (Huebert 2010: p. 13). And Russia has launched a major naval program that includes the Arctic, while continuing to reassure the world that they have no aggressive intentions in the Arctic (Huebert 2010: p. 18). Finally, the US has recently made sure

that its newest submarines are Arctic capable in spite of earlier-conflicting statements that these submarines would lack such capability (Huebert 2010: p. 22). Huebert's analysis is very compelling, but suffers from a problem, acknowledged by Huebert himself, with regards to Russia: Namely that it is difficult to determine (barring the most obvious equipment such as heavy icebreakers) just how Arctic focused such new investments really are. Are countries simply modernizing their navies and then deciding to make that equipment Arctic capable just in case, or are they acquiring these capabilities primarily because of a perceived need in the Arctic? Certainly. As also pointed out by Huebert, the Danish frigates, for example, have seen use outside Arctic waters, such as off the coast of Somalia. In contrast to most of the other authors that I have labelled "warners" in this paper, Huebert does not see any obvious gain for any Arctic state engaging in a conflict over Arctic resources (Huebert 2010: p. 22-23). Instead, he focusses more on the dangers of a security dilemma style arms rush in the Arctic stemming from militarization. He uses the Danish-Canadian conflict over the worthless Hans Island as an example of this. And he also points to the Norwegian dilemma of having to choose between the risk of provoking the Russians through an arms buildup and the risk of being at the Russians' mercy if not building up arms in time (Huebert 2010: p. 23). In these two cases, however, one could ask whether the Hans Island conflict has ever reached the intensity required for real conflict and, thus, whether any conclusions regarding the future of the Arctic could be made on the basis of it? In fact, the Hans Island conflict has already come close to being solved in recent years. And, regarding the Norwegians, it seems unclear how important the rearmament can be said to be – not least consider-

ing, as also noted by Huebert, that Norway will need American aid in such a case in any event. Nevertheless, Huebert's fundamental question remains: if everything in the Arctic is so peaceful, why then the build-up of new capabilities?

Some of the most hawkish within the "warners" camp are Ariel Cohen, Lajos F. Szaszdi and Jim Dolbow from the Heritage Foundation. They see the actions of Russia as part of a grand Russian scheme to take possession of the Arctic resources through a combination of military strength and bullying and, when it suits its interests, by paying lip service to international law (Cohen, Szaszdi and Dolbow 2008). They conclude, along lines similar to those of Borgerson, that increased US awareness of the Arctic is required and that new capabilities are needed – especially new icebreakers. However, they differ from Borgerson in their view on international law. From their perspective, ratification of UNCLOS is undesirable for limiting US freedom of action. Instead, the US should refrain from binding itself to UNCLOS and stick to Harry S. Truman's 1945 presidential statement 2667, stating that all resources found in the US continental shelf are the property of the US.

Common to these writers is their claim to a negative development in the Arctic that, while not necessarily leading to military conflict, could at least herald a return to more classic power politics in the region. The motivating factor behind future conflicts is, in the view of most of these authors, likely to be the fact that the Arctic is home to large quantities of especially petroleum resources (as much as 20% of world reserves), though for Huebert the military dynamics itself takes center stage. Common also to this group is the fact that most of the researchers do not focus much on resource extraction complications.

"The reassurers"

These views do not stand uncontested, however. One among the most important critics of the "warners" is Oran Young. He argues that the potential for conflict in the Arctic has been largely exaggerated. He notes, first, that the problems themselves are smaller than sometimes presented by the warners. Navigation in the straits is unlikely to become economically important for a foreseeable period. The resources in the contested areas in the Arctic are very hard to access and the conditions for their exploitation still largely speculative (Young 2009: pp. 74-75). Secondly, he argues that while the governance mechanisms in the Arctic certainly could and should be improved, we have no reason at this point to believe that such a task would be unsurmountable (Young 2009: pp.75, 77, 79-81). Consequently, Young remains fairly optimistic towards the future political development in the region.

Addressing the far more specific question of how to maintain sovereignty in the Arctic, Rob Macnab (2009) does not deal with the question of conflict potential in the Arctic directly, but nevertheless brings forth an important argument for the debate. Thus, in a 2009 article he takes as a point of departure Canadian PM Harper's assertion to use Arctic sovereignty immediately due to fear of otherwise losing it ("use it or lose it"). Macnab concludes that since Canada's claim to the Arctic has, *de jure*, been uncontested since 1930 (the year of a treaty between Canada and Norway; Macnab 2009: p. 4) the "use it or lose it" rhetoric of PM Harper "...might be a catchy political slogan, but in the end, nothing more than a canard that is being foisted upon the Canadian electorate." (Macnab 2009: p. 14).

He is not alone in this view. Thus, Kristin Bartenstein (2010) not only agrees with this point, but actually argues that the slogan

of “use it or lose it” may represent a greater danger to Canadian claims to the Northwest Passage than any inactivity in sovereignty use, because such rhetoric begs the question of whether Canada has in fact not considered the Northwest Passage internal waters previously (Bartenstein 2010: p. 73). Michael Byers (2009: p. 50) does consider the historical usage of the ice area of the Northwest Passage as a factor that strengthens Canada’s claim to the area. However, he also argues in a newer book that economic factors only very rarely matters in sea disputes, which are, legally speaking, fundamentally different from land disputes (Byers 2013: p. 28). Whereas land disputes can often take into account factors such as usage, sea disputes are mostly focusing on geographical and geomorphological factors anchored in existing land borders (Byers 2013: p. 69). If Byers is correct in this assessment, assertion of sovereignty is of lesser importance for maintaining and protecting a country’s sovereignty *de jure* (but of course not *de facto*) when compared to scientific investigations of opposite claims.

Of course, this still leaves the Danish-Canadian matter of Hans Island. In a 2007 article Christopher Stevenson (2007) argues that an international legal ruling in this conflict, being over a land territory, might in fact take into account usage (Stevenson 2007: p. 273). So far, so good. However, Stevenson then proceeds to explain that Hans Island is mainly considered important because of the rights it would confer regarding the surrounding sea area (Stevenson 2007: p. 267-68), and even concludes with a warning to both states against allowing the case to go to international court, because a ruling could set a dangerous land rush in the Arctic into motion (Stevenson 2007: p. 274). Contrary to this assessment, however, Byers (2013: p. 11) points out that the Hans Island dispute

is in fact the only clearly land based territorial conflict in the Arctic and as such can hardly set much of a precedent. Furthermore, Byers argues that the Hans Island case has not been about sea territory since the Danish-Canadian 1973 agreement and that the two countries in fact jointly stated in 2005 that their dispute over Hans Island would have no effect on sea borders (Byers 2013: p. 14-15)⁴.

Timo Koivurova (2011) also attempts to challenge the “crisis in the Arctic” story from an international law perspective. Thus, Koivurova argues that the crisis story ignores the fact that international law is widely accepted and followed in the Arctic, also by Russia, (Koivurova 2011: p. 6) and that the Arctic is in fact one of the most peaceful regions in the world (Koivurova 2011: p. 4). The reason for this, says Koivurova, is simply that it is within all states’ interest to play by the rules in the Arctic because it gives them legitimacy as well as a sense of finality regarding their respective territorial claims (Koivurova 2011: p. 9). A rare cause of concern for Koivurova is if the national navies become more involved in the diplomacy in the Arctic in the future, because military zones of control have a tendency to create military spheres of influence that goes beyond mere exclusive economic rights and that may therefore have greater conflict potential (Koivurova 2011: p. 10).

Marlene Laruelle (2011) argues that legal developments have been quite positive in recent years, flagging the Norwegian-Russia agreement about the Barents Sea as particularly important in this regard (Laruelle 2011:

⁴ In this dispute the present author tends to side with Byers not least due to the sources used by the two authors for backing up their respective claims. Thus, Byers here builds on official statements from the countries involved while Sanderson builds these points at least partly on very loosely documented newspaper articles (Stevenson 2007 p. 267-68 & p. 273-74).

p. 28-30). She also points out, however, that the agreement, besides being an example of how far you can get through careful and pragmatic cooperation and negotiation, was just barely accepted on the Russian side against the wishes of many Russian MFA jurists (Laruelle 2011: p. 29). Regarding the sometimes harsh Russian rhetoric on the Arctic, Laruelle warns against attributing to it too much importance. In her view, one must differentiate between discourse and acts (Laruelle 2011: p. 32). Furthermore, she also points out that Russia's harsh discourse on the Arctic might also have an identity-building purpose directed primarily at a domestic audience (Laruelle 2011: p. 32).

Writing from a critical theory grounded perspective and inspired by Andrew Linklater, Annika Bergman Rosamond (2011) approaches the matter of the Arctic from several angles. Rosamond refutes the warners (or alarmists as she names them) on the grounds that Russia, the warners' chief troublemaker regarding multilateral diplomacy and peaceful development in the Arctic, does not have much interest in a conflict in the Arctic that could disrupt its commercial interests in the High North (Rosamond 2011: p. 42). Furthermore, she points out that in spite of Russia's flag planting beneath the North Pole as well as its, at times, aggressive rhetoric, the fact remains that Russia has also showed willingness to pursue peaceful solutions to its international disputes. This is not least evident in the, also previously mentioned, Russian-Norwegian 2010 settlement of the territorial dispute in the Barents Sea (Rosamond 2011: p. 41). The Ilulissat 2008 summit declaration, by which the five Arctic coastal states confirmed their commitment to solve their differences peacefully, is another example, though Rosamond criticizes the summit for not including Finland, Sweden and Iceland as well as import-

ant climate change NGOs and representatives from the indigenous populations (Rosamond 2011: p. 50). She also notes that the indigenous populations in the Arctic hold a peace potential that should not be ignored, due to the fact that they span national borders and thereby encourage a common Arctic identity that offers an alternative to national rivalry (Rosamond 2011: p. 35). From this standpoint she argues that states must resist alarmism and acknowledge joint responsibility to follow the rules – not just because following the rules is in their self-interests, but simply because it is the right thing to do (Rosamond 2011: p. 51).

Kristian Åtland (2011) also warns against exaggerating the probability of conflict in the Arctic. Thus, he points out that even though Russia has been rearming in the North in recent years, the Russian capabilities are still far below Cold War levels (Åtland 2011: p. 273). In fact, Åtland argues, if one wants to understand Russia's actions in the Arctic one should focus not so much on military factors as on economic factors. Both from a Russian national interests perspective, where dwindling petroleum resources elsewhere in Russia make the unhindered extraction of petroleum resources from the Russian Arctic a prime concern (Åtland 2011: p. 268-71), but also due to the fact that powerful Russian companies have their own vested interests in "business as usual" in the Arctic (Åtland 2011: p. 273).

Michael Byers (2013) argues that conflict is unlikely both because politicians themselves view the conflict potential as low (Byers 2013: p. 248) and because the climate itself and the challenges it represents in terms of surveillance and patrolling discourages conflict and promotes cooperation (Byers 2013: p. 249). This has also been reflected in the actions of states and he points out the strengthening of the Arctic Council (Byers 2013: p. 252-53)

and its passing of the 2011 Search and Rescue agreements as visible examples of this (Byers 2013: p. 277). Furthermore, good behavior in the Arctic does not only include Russia in most cases (Byers 2013: p. 251-254), but also China, which is increasing its focus on the Arctic in recent years and has, so far, largely acted according to international rules and norms in the Arctic (Byers 2013: p. 254-55). Finally, Byers points out that the greatest threat to all Arctic states might not even interstate conflict, but rather one that stems from various non-state actors ranging from organized crime to terrorists (Byers 2013: p. 261). For this reason also, Byers' analysis seems particularly centered on the great common interests that the Arctic states have in cooperation rather than conflict. For Byers, the Arctic is therefore not a likely scene for conflict, but rather the opposite. If international cooperation with a basis in international law cannot be achieved in the Arctic where so many tendencies work in its favor, it is hard to imagine it having much potential anywhere else (Byers in <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/squeeze-putin-but-the-arctic-is-not-ukraine/article18348971/>).

Peter Hough (2013) argues that the slow but steady growth of power of the Arctic institutions shows that nations can overcome their instinctive resistance to cooperation (Hough 2013: p. 116-17). Interest towards the Arctic is certainly growing and resources become easily accessible due to global warming. But Hough stresses that recent development in the Arctic has been largely positive – not least due to the fact that the Arctic is sparsely populated, has only relatively minor border disputes, and (re)appeared on the international radar at a time when a legal framework for handling many of the conflicts already existed. Not only has cooperation between the Arctic states been both constructive and

widespread, but NGOs as well as the indigenous groups in the Arctic have also been given a seat at the table (Hough 2013: p. 137-39).

Kathrin Keil (2013) focusses primarily on the conflict potential of oil and gas in the Arctic. Based on a simple estimate of both the quantity of oil and gas to be found in the Russian sector, as well as on an analysis of the relative importance of the Arctic resources for the Russian economy, she concludes that Russia has, by far, the greatest intrinsic interest in the Arctic (Keil 2013: p. 166). Furthermore, this largely remains the case even if one expands the focus on the Arctic to include the constructivist variable of identity, since Russia also on that parameter very much considers itself an Arctic nation (Keil 2013: p. 169-170). On this basis, Russia is unlikely to initiate moves that jeopardize what they already have in the Arctic. The one plausible scenario for conflict outlined by Keil, is that of a conflict between the Russian state and Western oil and gas companies. Here, Keil argues, Russia is likely to be faced with a dilemma: either to try to keep the foreign nationals out in order to maximize Russian control or to allow them in and thereby get access to the capital and expertise so urgently needed to fully develop the Russian Arctic resources (Keil 2013: p. 180). It is, however, extremely unlikely, in Keil's view, that it will lead to inter-state conflict. Naturally, events in 2014 have turned this problem somewhat on its head, by reshaping the question into being also about how much Russia is willing to do to have the sanctions on its cooperation with Western oil firms in the Arctic lifted.

Perhaps the most surprising inclusion among the reassurers are the newer writings of Scott Borgerson. Interestingly, it seems that Borgerson has changed his 2008 view regarding the Arctic in recent years. Thus, in a 2013 article, "The coming Arctic Boom",

Borgerson argues that the predictions regarding rising tensions that he himself predicted back in 2008 have indeed not fallen out true. Borgerson argues that this is due to the fact that the crisis mood of the late 00s spurred actors into taking positive steps to resolve difficulties and disagreements in the Arctic. Ultimately, "a shared interest in profit has triumphed the instinct to compete over territory" (Borgerson 2013). Thus, since 2008 Arctic institutions have been strengthened. UNCLOS has managed to become the guiding law of the Arctic even without US recognition. Borgerson sees the 2008 Ilulissat summit as a turning point in this regard. Thus, here the five Arctic states with Arctic coastlines, including the US and Russia, managed to reach an understanding with each other to solve their Arctic disputes using international law such as UNCLOS. Furthermore, Borgerson argues, some of the thorniest issues among the Arctic states, such as the long standing Norwegian-Russia disagreements in the Barents Sea, have been resolved, and, in 2011, the Arctic nations have managed to use the Arctic Council to sign a legally binding treaty for the first time since its inception: namely the previously mentioned 2011 search and rescue agreement.

"The inbetweeners"

Naturally, when attempting to divide a research field into two differing camps one usually ends up with a considerable portion of research that falls in between, and which tries to transcend and move beyond the two poles of the debate by incorporating views from both camps. Such an endeavor almost always entails some sort of tradeoff, usually in the form of giving up some degree of theoretical parsimony and ontological clarity for increased explanatory power. International

relations in the Arctic is no exception and the field has a considerable number of scholars who either opt for rather moderate conclusions or do not limit themselves to one by building different scenarios for the future.

One of the most up-to-date "inbetweeners" is Christian Le Miere and Jeffrey Mazo's *Arctic Opening* (2013). Miere and Mazo agrees with the reassurers on several key points. Thus, they agree that Russia is the most probable source of instability, but also the country with the highest interest in a stable Arctic (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 97-98). This is perhaps not surprising since Russia holds the vast majority of especially expected gas finds in the Arctic (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 48). Russian rearmament in the Arctic has, furthermore, been relatively modest and mostly a consequence of the extent to which its preexisting Arctic navy has suffered significant decay since the end of the Cold War (Miere and Mazo 2013: pp. 84-87). They also see the resource potential as relatively modest, due to problems of extraction (Miere and Mazo 2013: pp. 51-52), and they stress the fact that 90-95 % of the most important resource types in the Arctic, oil and gas, have already been divided (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 54). Finally, they also agree that disputes in the Arctic have so far been relatively benign (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 35) and that the Arctic has better prospects for this to continue in the years to come than many other regions in the world (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 154).

Nevertheless, they do stress a number of challenges to the region. First of all, the Arctic region has very little in terms of formal institutions for security issues. Secondly, though the economic potential of the Arctic is less than the sheer volume of its resources might suggest, it is still real, and it cannot be ruled out that even the modest resources still not divided in the Arctic might be enough to fuel

conflict (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 72). Thirdly, even though the Arctic coastal states have few real reasons for conflict in the Arctic, one still cannot rule out that domestic opinion in one or more of the Arctic countries can create problems where none would otherwise exist (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 154). In particular, this is a danger in Russia, the US and Canada, while less of a potential problem in Norway and Denmark. Finally, there is the always existing risk that conflicts elsewhere might spill over into the Arctic (Miere and Mazo 2013: p. 127) – a warning that seems to gain relevance when considering recent spill-over from Ukraine.

Nikolaj Petersen (2009) also focusses on different indicators that might turn the Arctic into a zone of either relative cooperation or conflict. Among the arguments in favor of expecting increased cooperation in the Arctic is the need to cooperate on joint transnational issues like oil spills and weather and ice services. Thus, the fact that each Arctic country's resources in the Arctic are likely to be strained, will make cooperation necessary also from a fiscal perspective. Another argument is the involvement of non-coastal states in pushing the coastal states to give over more influence over the Arctic to international institutions. Finally, Petersen stresses that it is the basic interest of all five coastal states to avoid costly conflict (Petersen 2009: p. 64). However, on the other hand Petersen also warns against the long-term risk of conflict emanating from national sovereignty considerations regarding maritime traffic through the passages, still unresolved issues regarding exclusive economic zones as well as the ever-present danger of spill-over from extra-regional conflict between the Arctic nations (Petersen 2009: pp. 65-66). Regarding the short term, Petersen notes that Canada has been stepping up its rhetoric while Russia

has been acting almost schizophrenically in recent years, swinging from hard line talk to emphasis on international cooperation in the Arctic. He also notes, however, that Putin's principal advisors have a reputation for being hardliners (Petersen 2009: pp. 47-48).

Katarzyna Zysk (2011) mostly downplays the probability for conflict in the Arctic on materialist grounds, though remains divided on perceptual factors. The materialist factors are especially likely to form a robust basis for cooperation if one considers the short term, where there has been a tendency in the media to vastly overplay the time horizon of a coming economic boom in the Arctic (Zysk 2011: p. 91). Thus, while Zysk does acknowledge the region's great resource potential, she argues that the relatively slow development - as compared to some media presentations - in the Arctic will give time for the Arctic states to work things out peacefully (Zysk 2011: p. 117). Regarding Russia, the most often brought forth potential troublemaker in the Arctic, she argues that the materialist factors decidedly speak against Russia as an Arctic source of instability. Thus, Zysk focusses on the fact that most oil and gas is believed to be found in the Russian sector (Zysk 2011: p. 97), and Russia has a need to get these resources made ready for extraction as its traditional oil and gas reserves begin to empty. Russia, therefore, has a clear interest in keeping conflict in the Arctic to a minimum (Zysk 2011: p. 108). However, regarding the more perceptual factors, she also argues that the presence of military forces in itself can create problems. This is especially relevant due to the fact that Russian policy-makers still regard NATO and the US with considerable mistrust and therefore are quick to see any Western military deployment as directed against Russia. Evidence of this, she argues, can be seen in the Russian focus on the Arctic

as a military challenge rather than as a military opportunity to be exploited. Thus, Russia fears that with the opening up of the Arctic the naval power of the West might be projected into the Russian High North, where the environment previously denied anything but submarines (Zysk 2011: p. 111). This is a problem, which requires cooperation between all Arctic parties to solve.

Heather A. Conley et al. (2012) write from an American perspective and argue that while Russian-Western disagreements in the Arctic are very real and could lead to conflict (p. 11), there are many ways to avoid it. Like most American authors, they argue that a much stronger American involvement in the Arctic is needed in this regard (p. 20-27). They see some new developments in this direction, especially with regards to updating the US Arctic regional military command structure, but insist that especially American weakness in terms of icebreaker capability will remain a serious problem for the US for years to come (p. 26-27). Besides the need for increased US focus on the Arctic, Conley et al. also argue for the construction of a new security regime in the Arctic to deal with the mistrust between Russia, who still see US and NATO as a threat to Russian security interests, and the West, who are concerned by the Russian naval buildup in the Arctic (p. 34). In serving to help mitigate these tensions, Conley et al. suggest the establishment of an Arctic Coast Guard Forum, as the various coast guards remain at the forefront of maintaining national jurisdiction in the Arctic for many Arctic nations (p. 37-40).

Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen, Esben Salling Larsen, and Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen (2012) deal with the future of the Arctic in terms of scenarios. They argue that peaceful development requiring only a “coastguard response” of their country of study, Denmark, is at the

moment the most probable scenario (Rahbek-Clemmensen, Larsen, Vedby Rasmussen 2012: pp. 35-38, see p. 3 for English summary). In this scenario, conflict can happen due to incompatible clashes of interests, but they are likely to be rare due to the overarching interest of all the coastal states to maintain the status quo from which all parties benefit. In a second scenario they argue that we might still see crisis management being the predominant challenge. This scenario differs most significantly from the first scenario by assuming a lack of trust between the Arctic actors, meaning that institutions are less likely to be able to provide answers to national challenges in the region, making national capabilities more important to maintain (Rahbek-Clemmensen, Larsen, Vedby Rasmussen 2012: pp. 45-47, see p. 3 for English resume). Finally, they operate with a less likely scenario of confrontation. In this scenario they assume that the rise of China and a general confrontation between the US and China can produce a spill-over to the Arctic, which may remilitarize the region and make small states once again depend heavily on security guarantees from larger powers. In this scenario the primary instigator of instability is, thus, not Russia, which they predict will then merely play the role of balancer between the US and China (Rahbek-Clemmensen, Larsen, Vedby Rasmussen 2012: pp. 50-53, see p. 3 for English resume).

CONCLUSION

One way of organizing the literature on international relations in the Arctic into different camps is to center on the question of conflict potential. As a field, however, it is not as divided today as it was even a few years ago. It will be interesting to see whether the ongoing

Ukrainian crisis might change that. Up until the crisis, the warners had yet to see many of their predictions come true, and the reassurers have become much more reaffirmed in their thesis that conflict in the Arctic is not only avoidable, but even unlikely. This has largely been due to the positive development in the Arctic in recent years across a large array of topics, substantial enough to make researchers like Borgerson shift position.

Most of these positive developments still matter after Ukraine. First and foremost in this development is the strengthened position of the Arctic Council, which has been steadily growing in influence to the point where even the US, which has otherwise traditionally not given the council much priority, now also send Cabinet level participants to its meetings. And the Arctic Council managed in 2011 to actually deliver a legally binding treaty on search and rescue in the Arctic. However, other fora have also begun to emerge and have proven to be important. One such example is the conceptualization of the Arctic Five. Thus, the meeting of the Arctic Five at Ilulissat in 2008 is crucial because the five coastal states here confirmed their desire to resolve their disputes in the Arctic peacefully with negotiation and application of international law. It has not been merely words. The agreement between Norway and Russia regarding the Barents Sea stands as perhaps the most significant example of this. The reasons for these positive developments are many, but most likely states simply have a lot more to gain from cooperation in the Arctic than from conflict. Thus, the environment poses challenges not easily solved by a single state and will make armed conflict both difficult and expensive, and regional stability is close to a prerequisite for the extraction of resources in the first place. Furthermore, most of the Arctic is thinly populated with

few minorities across borders save for the indigenous population, which might actually help facilitate cooperation rather than be a source of instability. And, finally, the late opening of the Arctic has given institutions the chance to develop. Contrary to what one might sometimes hear in the media, the development of resource extraction in the Arctic has been only tentative, even if it has been picking up speed in recent years.

Naturally, however, this does not mean that the warners can't find empirical support for *their* arguments as well, with Ukraine bringing the dangers of spill-over to the very forefront of risks to Arctic stability. Presently, it is still too soon to tell if the sanctions against Russia in the Arctic will cause significant long-term damage to cooperation. However, the fact that the *intraregional* challenges of the region have, by and large, proved remarkably manageable in recent years, gives ground to continued optimism, even after Ukraine, and suggests that the regional dynamics might well be able to withstand some spill-over – especially if the sanctions do not turn out to take on a permanent nature. This is especially visible if we consider the question of natural resources. Thus, the gradually more extractable resources in the Arctic might not necessarily destabilize the region and might even be a stabilizing factor. A reason for this is the fact that the best places to search for resources are not located within the few remaining contested areas – most significantly in the Russian parts of the Arctic. This is important since it points to Russia, the main troublemaker in the warners' conflict scenarios, as the state with the biggest interest in both the status quo and in securing the peaceful environment needed to utilize Arctic resources.

Nevertheless, the warners have two important intraregional points. First, that national pride over the Arctic mobilized for domestic

political reasons in each of the Arctic nations might in time grow to be a danger to stability in the Arctic. Secondly, that the Arctic is undergoing a (re)militarization in recent years and even if this should mostly be seen in the context of reestablishing once lost Arctic capabilities allowed to deteriorate in recent time, there is an inherent risk that more military might in the Arctic may lead to misunderstandings and, in the worst case scenario, fuel a security dilemma spiral – especially in an international climate like the present one, marked by spill-over from Ukraine to the Arctic.

So where does this leave us? This paper largely finds the arguments raised by the as-surers to be most potent at this time and most in line with recent developments in the Arctic – even after the onset of the Ukrainian crisis. Nevertheless, the warners certainly still have a case. Conflict could happen in the Arctic, especially as a result of spill-over. However, most of the likely reasons for such a conflict are not Arctic-specific. Militarization still has a long way to go and spill-over and domestic politics can fuel conflict anywhere, not only in the Arctic. This paper, therefore, tends to agree with Michael Byers' framing of the Arctic as a best case for international cooperation. If they can't make it here, they can't make it anywhere.

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