A Polar Mediterranean? Accessibility, Resources and Sovereignty in the Arctic Ocean

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Survey Article

Abstract

The Arctic Ocean has been described as undergoing a fundamental 'state change' – with particular reference to the loss of sea ice. Recent events suggest that the five coastal states (Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and the United States) and other stakeholders are fundamentally reconsidering their relationship with the Arctic Ocean. The prevailing governance of the Arctic Ocean is quite different to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean. The Arctic Ocean is not a global common and there is no equivalent to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty. If the Arctic Ocean is in a state of flux then it is due to three interlocking vectors: the role of science and technology in generating knowledge about the region (accessibility); international law and rights of coastal states (resources); and the role of domestic and international audiences (sovereignty).

In August 2007, the privately funded Arktika expedition, involving two mini-submersibles, descended the icy depths and in so doing provoked a cornucopia of newspaper headlines. The image of a Russian flag deposited on the seabed was visually arresting (Dodds, 2008, 2009; McCannon, 1995; Powell, 2008). While international lawyers (Benitah, 2007; Koivurova, 2009; Serdy, 2009) downplayed the incident, the then Canadian foreign minister, Peter Mackay, retorted: 'This isn't the 15th century. You can't go around the world and just plant flags and say "We're claiming this territory" ' (BBC, 2007). The Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, responded:

> I was amazed by my Canadian counterpart's statement that we are planting flags around. We're not throwing flags around. We just do what other discoverers did. The purpose of the expedition is not to stake whatever rights of Russia, but to prove that our shelf extends to the North Pole' (Kommersant, 2007).

While there is a rich tradition of explorers 'throwing flags around', the claim that 'our shelf extends to the North Pole' is key here.

The Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC) sets out how coastal states can acquire sovereign rights over the extended continental shelf. As Article 77 of the LOSC notes,

> The coastal State exercises over the continental shelf sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring it and exploiting its natural resources … The natural resources referred to in this Part consist of the mineral and other non-living resources of the seabed and subsoil together with living organisms belonging to sedentary species, that is to say, organisms which, at the harvestable stage, either are immobile on or under the seabed or are unable to move except in constant physical contact with the seabed or the subsoil (LOSC, 1994).

All five Arctic Ocean coastal states – Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States – have embarked on mapping projects designed to demarcate their extended or outer continental shelves (Benitah, 2007; Potts and Schofield, 2008). Under Article 76 of LOSC, states have to provide evidence to a UN body called the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), which then issues 'recommendations' (Dodds, 2010). While there is plenty of evidence of cooperative mapping between countries (e.g. Canada and the United States and Canada and Denmark), a submission deadline (2009) for materials to be sent to the CLCS encouraged febrile reporting. So if there was a 'race to the pole', it was related to this deadline and the need for coastal states to complete their demarcation exercises. The 2007 expedition was a follow-up exercise designed to provide further information relating to an earlier Russian submission to the CLCS in 2001. In 2002, the CLCS requested further evidence from the Russian authorities.

At about the same time as the Russian expedition, new satellite images of the North West Passage (NWP) revealed that it might be partially ice free during the latter part of the summer season (Chapman, 2009). Rising temperatures help to reduce and/or disrupt ice cover and in so doing heat up the Arctic Ocean itself as sunlight is no longer reflected off the ice. Onshore, warming temperatures undermine permafrost and not only disrupt infrastructure but also help to release methane as plant matter disintegrates via warming. Less sea ice cover in the winter season, moreover, imperils coastal communities and will generate, over time, a new generation of environmental refugees in some parts of the Arctic. Climate change scientists differ over predictions but some have argued that there is a real possibility of parts of the Arctic Ocean being free of ice in the summer season in the next decade or so. This in turn would not only lead to further warming of the Arctic but also encourage increased human activity including trans-Arctic shipping routes, fishing and hydrocarbon exploitation (Anderson, 2009; Ebinger and Zambetakis, 2009).

It is perhaps, therefore, apt to consider further what some have termed a 'state change' in the Arctic Ocean (Baev, 2007; Berkman and Young, 2009; Borgerson, 2008; Keskitalo, 2007; Young, 2009). This is a specific source of concern for those who live there and depend upon the marine ecosystems for their livelihoods, namely indigenous and First Nations communities. Arctic Ocean coastal states are reassessing their strategic priorities (see, for example, Prime Minister of Canada, 2008a, 2008b). Norway recently relocated its Operational Command Headquarters from Stavanger to north of the Arctic Circle close to Bodo, and Russia reaffirmed in 2009 that the Arctic was a 'strategic resource base'. Recently, there has been mounting evidence that other states and organisations such as Britain, China, NATO and the European Union are reviewing their options (Heininen, 2005; Heininen and Nicol, 2007). In January 2009, for example, NATO officials met in Iceland to consider the implications of sea ice loss in the Arctic Ocean. There is at present no NATO Arctic policy, but this may change in the future.

The Arctic Ocean is not a global common. There is no equivalent to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty and thus there is an uneasy tension between the sovereign rights and interests of the five Arctic coastal states and other parties, including indigenous groups and other states including China, Finland and the United Kingdom (Rothwell, 2008). The role of science and technology in generating knowledge about the region, the function of international law and the position of domestic and international audiences are critical drivers of present and future governance of the Arctic Ocean. And as the Arctic Ocean becomes more accessible, in particular as a consequence of sea ice thinning, so we will see the interplay between national sovereignty, resource rights, shipping routes and associated transit passage, minority rights and the effects of global warming brought into sharper relief. The concluding section outlines some of the enduring tensions facing those who seek to govern and manage the Arctic Ocean.

An accessible Arctic Ocean

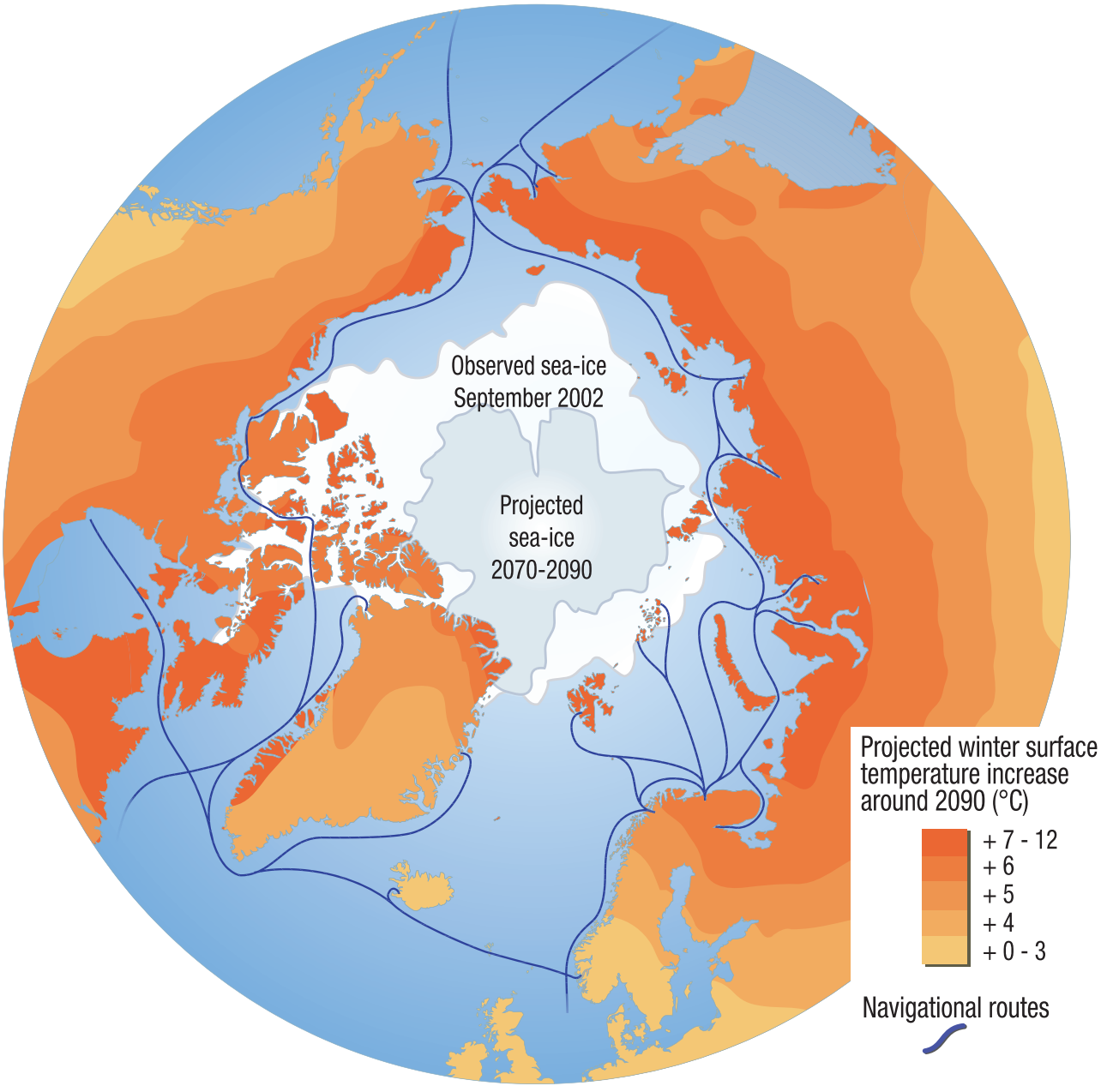
Climate scientists such as William Chapman at the University of Illinois are warning that the Arctic is changing and it is changing rapidly (Chapman, 2009; Figure 1). As Chapman notes,

> Seasonal minima of sea ice in the Arctic have declined about 40 per cent over the past several decades … While there has been notable loss of sea ice in the North Atlantic sector, the majority of the sea ice loss in the Arctic has been on the Pacific side where sea ice is typically thinner.

Sea ice drifts around the Arctic Ocean and is typically thicker in the Canadian Archipelago and Greenland compared to Siberia. The Northern Sea Route (NSR), along the northern Russian coastline, has been open for navigation for the last three to four years, and it would be expected that this Arctic sea route, as opposed to the North West Passage, would be open for longer periods over time (Bravo and Rees, 2006). The NWP will remain ice chocked in comparison. It is important to note that a Russian icebreaker accompanied a recent transit in 2009 by German-registered vessels (the Beluga Group) through the NSR. The two ice-strengthened heavy lift vessels were the first western-registered ships to traverse the NSR.

The thinning and even disappearance of sea ice in the Arctic Ocean raises both challenges and opportunities. For coastal states such as Canada, this is perhaps felt most keenly. During the cold war, Canada closely aligned itself to the United States and in so doing accepted the US military presence on its northern perimeters (Chaturvedi, 1996; Young, 1985). Deterring the Soviet threat was the key strategic priority. However, there was always a tension in the way that Canada was expected to accept and even facilitate the presence of its large neighbour in its Arctic waters. From the 1960s onwards, this was most obvious in the case of the NWP, which successive US governments consider to be an international strait and thus they reject Canadian claims that it is part of their 'internal waters'. The 1969 voyage of the SS *Manhattan* became a cause célèbre in the sense that it brought to the fore the competing interpretations of the legal status of the NWP. While the ship itself needed to be freed by a Canadian icebreaker, the voyage stimulated much discussion in Canada about Arctic sovereignty (Pharand, 2007). At one point, Inuit residents stopped the vessel and demanded that it seek permission to enter into Canadian territory. The end result was to persuade oil companies in Alaska that the transportation of oil was

Figure 1. Projected changes in the Arctic climate, 2090 – with shipping routes.



Source: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), 2004 Impacts of a Warming Arctic, designed by Hugo Ahlenius, UNEP/GRID-Arendal. See http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/projected-changes-in-the-arct ic-climate-2090-with-shipping-routes.
Note: The averages of the scenarios in the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) are presented in this figure, for the year 2090, with the surface temperatures over land, the size of the polar ice cap and the outer limits of permafrost. This map features shipping routes in addition – as the sea ice is decreasing, the potential for developing shipping in the Arctic increases.

better served by building a trans-state pipeline than by relying on icebreaking supertankers.

If it was widely accepted as an international strait then users would have certain rights to transit passage and thus not need the formal consent of the Canadian authorities. Since 2006, the Harper government has prioritised the Canadian Arctic and advocated enhanced investment in military, scientific and infrastructural-led developments

(Byers, 2009). Harper has spoken of his determination 'to take action to vigorously protect our Arctic sovereignty as international interest in the region increases' (Government of Canada, 2009; Harper, 2007). The Canada *First Defence Strategy* (Prime Minister of Canada, 2008a) reiterates this:

> The government recognizes the challenges Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic could face in the future. In the coming years, sovereignty and security challenges will become more pressing as the impact of climate change leads to enhanced activity throughout the region. The defence of Canada's sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity in the Arctic remains a top priority for the government. The Canadian First Defence Strategy contends that the country's northern flank is exposed to a host of possibilities, ranging from terrorist attacks on energy infrastructure to illegal immigration and even 'foreign encroachments on Canada's natural resources' (Prime Minister of Canada, 2008a, p. 6).

Security organisations such as NATO, encouraged by Iceland and Norway, are reviewing the possible implications of the enhanced accessibility of the Arctic Ocean. In January 2009, NATO members gathered in Iceland to consider the changing maritime domain in the Arctic. In February–March 2010, Norwegian and NATO forces including the UK participated in a cold weather exercise called Cold Response. Organised since 2006, these exercises have used a range of scenarios including one involving resource-led conflict in the Arctic Ocean. US forces have also participated in these cold weather exercises.

The 2009 US National Security Presidential Directive and Homeland Security Presidential Directive, issued in the last days of the Bush administration, was the first major assessment of the Arctic since 1994. As with other assessments it remarks upon the accessibility of the Arctic Ocean and the potential for new threats to materialise. As the Directive notes, 'The United States also has fundamental homeland security interests in preventing terrorist attacks and mitigating those criminal or hostile acts that could increase the United States vulnerability to terrorism in the Arctic region' (White House, 2009). Much to the disappointment of Canadian observers, it also reaffirms the US position that the NWP is an international strait, where rights to transit passage prevail.

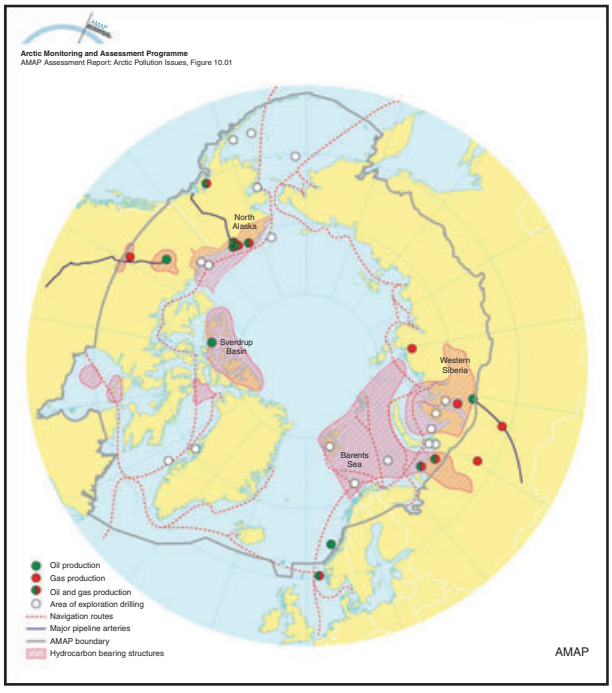
A resource-rich Arctic Ocean

Alongside concerns pertaining to diminishing sea ice cover and enhanced accessibility, the resource potential of the Arctic has been high on the policy-making agenda (see Figure 2). The diminishing of a formidable physical barrier to exploitation in offshore areas and the facilitation of ship-based movement of hydrocarbon resources have loomed large in these discussions (Howard, 2009; Sale and Potapov, 2010). Improvements in shipping and pipeline-based technology are opening up new vistas; ice-strengthened vessels are already moving liquefied natural gas (LNG) from northern Norway to markets in Europe and North America, while in terms of energy development projects, multinational companies such as BP and Shell have purchased exploration blocks in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas off the Alaskan coastline.

The reason for such interest lies in the undiscovered potential of Arctic-based hydrocarbons. In its Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal, the US Geological Survey (USGS) reported that there is substantial undiscovered oil and gas potential (USGS, 2009). The majority of this potential is believed to be found offshore (84 per cent) and may involve up to 90 billion barrels of oil and 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Much of the potential is believed to lie in waters less than 500 metres deep. These are estimates and undiscovered potential does not imply that all of this will even be discovered, let alone exploited. Exploitation will inevitably depend on global demand, pricing, extraction/processing and transportation costs to markets (Bradshaw, 2010). The undiscovered potential for natural gas is probably the most noteworthy and could represent something in the order of 30 per cent of global undiscovered gas. Russia's offshore potential is particularly noteworthy in the Arctic. The fact that much of this potential is located offshore is significant but at the same time the report notes that it lies in the main in the uncontested jurisdictions of the five Arctic coastal states.

The location of this undiscovered potential matters greatly. In terms of attracting foreign investment and the involvement of energy companies such as BP and Shell, the absence of jurisdictional conflict is important. While the Russian expedition and flag-planting episode was considered to be akin to a latter-day 'scramble for resources', this is wide of the mark (Howard, 2009). Such assertions not only misunderstand the legal and technical nature of outer continental shelf delimitation (there is no 'scramble' on the part of coastal states) but also overestimate the resource potential of the central Arctic Ocean. However, areas closer to onshore territories are not without considerable challenges. Ice, even if it is thinning during the Arctic summer season, still represents a major physical challenge. Ice flows and formations can disrupt shipping, damage pipelines and interfere with offshore surveying. Melting permafrost and winter storms continue to disrupt overland infrastructure and coastal communities. The Hibernia field development east of Canada's Newfoundland is illustrative of the kind of technological arrangements needed to harvest oil and gas in ice-filled waters. Operating in waters only 80 metres in depth, there is an elaborate system in place to monitor and protect the rig from icebergs, sea ice and even rogue waves. Exploiting and transporting offshore

Figure 2. Major areas of oil and gas development and potential development in the Arctic, and major shipping routes and possible new routes through Arctic waters.



Source: AAR Figure 10.1, designed by Philippe Rekacewicz and Emmanuelle Bournay (GRID-Arendal). See http://www.amap.no/mapsgraphics/go/graphic/major-areas-of-oil-and-gas-development-and-potential-development-in-the-arctic-and-major-shipping-ro#metainfo.

oil and gas from the Arctic will remain expensive and technologically challenging for some time to come.

The energy potential of the Arctic zone is sufficiently significant to be of interest to the five Arctic coastal states and nationalised oil companies (NOC) such as ROSNEFT and independent oil companies (IOC) such as Shell and BP. Likewise in the case of gas, NOC such as GAZPROM are major operators and already manage Arctic fields in the Yamal Peninsula and the giant Shtokman development, which might come on stream in 2015. The Shtokman field in the Barents Sea is considered to be particularly challenging given the harsh environment. From Russia's perspective, however, intensifying Arctic-based gas sources makes strategic sense given that Central Asian suppliers such as Turkmenistan have recently developed a pipeline with China. For the first time ever, Turkmen gas is being transported to China without transiting through Russia. It is not clear if Turkmenistan could meet any increase in Russian demand following a deal with China to supply nearly 50 per cent of its current consumption of natural gas.

Thus far, Russia has no offshore Arctic hydrocarbon activities and established onshore operations involve areas such as the Timan-Pechora region. In the Yamal Peninsula, gas extraction occurs alongside the Yamburg field. Russia's oil shipping operations in the Arctic are noteworthy, and Arctic ports and terminals such as Murmansk and Vitino facilitate the shipment of oil and other related products. Supported by the world's largest icebreaker fleet of 28 vessels, oil-related traffic transits the Barents Sea for markets in North America and Europe. In the future, the country will prepare facilities for liquefied natural gas exports, and the launching of the world's first icebreaking tanker in December 2009 hints only too clearly that the current government considers the offshore Arctic to be a major zone of hydrocarbon development. While Russia would have the dual advantage of potentially being less dependent on transit countries in continental Europe and strategic waterways such as those involving the Black Sea to the south of the country, it remains a challenging operating environment.

Another major coastal state, Norway, is also deeply involved in major oil and gas operations within the high north. The Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea have witnessed increased gas production in recent years, reaching nearly 100 billion cubic metres in 2009. A major export facility is to be found at the Snow White gas liquefaction plant in Arctic Norway (established in 2007) and this is linked via an underground pipeline to a gas field in the middle of the Barents Sea. The field is believed to contain 8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and the successful laying of a pipeline on a seabed scarred by ice was a major technological achievement. This development currently exports close to 80 billion cubic feet of LNG, which is subsequently shipped to markets in southern Europe and the US. StatoilHydro, which is approximately 60 per cent owned by the Norwegian state, is the largest offshore Arctic operator and has been pivotal in the implementation of the Snow White project.

In other areas of the Arctic, indigenous populations may not oppose future hydrocarbon development (Nuttall, 2008). In Greenland, for example, the population of 56,000 (90 per cent of whom are of indigenous descent) are pushing for further autonomy from Denmark. Following Home Rule provisions dating from the late 1970s, a November 2008 referendum confirmed that a large majority favour further recognition, including a review of Denmark's control of subsoil resources and control over the seabed off Greenland. For pro-independence campaigners, the prospect of oil and gas revenue generation is critical to diminishing the ties with Denmark, which currently offers a block grant of around $500 million per year. Mineral extraction alongside tourism is considered to be far more promising than traditional industries such as fishing. Under a new law, Greenland is hoping to gain control over all its resources so that it can take over self-government and offset any new revenue generation against the Danish block grant.

Whatever the future level of hydrocarbon development in the Arctic, most of the hydrocarbon potential identified by the USGS lies largely in the uncontested waters of the five

coastal states or onshore. Indigenous communities around the Arctic are both supportive and opposed to further hydrocarbon development. While it is recognised that hydrocarbons are a primary driver of global climate change, oil, gas and other resources such as uranium and zinc provide both revenue streams and employment opportunities for northern communities. In Canada, for example, the self-governing territory of Nunavut with a population of 30,000 is eager to reduce its dependency on federal subsidies. Resource-related activities such as the Jericho diamond mine project, which were expected to generate new revenue opportunities, have been moderately successful. The Jericho mine closed in 2008 after being open for only two years. Patricia Cochran, then chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), advised indigenous communities in the Arctic not only to protect their traditional lifestyles where possible but also, if they were going to pin their hopes on resource activities, to ensure that they extracted as much financial advantage from these ventures as possible. Oil and gas wells dry up and mines eventually become exhausted. The Canadian government has neither ratified nor voted in favour of the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169 or the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, both of which contain important articles on resource ownership (Bankes, 2009; United Nations, 2007).

Arctic Ocean sovereignty

In the last few years, the five Arctic Ocean coastal states have all taken steps individually and collectively to secure their interests (see Figure 3). Arctic sovereignty has traditionally been an extremely important element in Canadian, Norwegian and Russian politics and is strongly connected to public discourses on national identity and sense of purpose (for example Grace, 2001; McCannon, 1995). Successive Canadian governments, for instance, have sought to manage and protect national interests pertaining to Arctic waters, islands including the disputed Hans Island with Denmark/Greenland, maritime boundaries involving disputed areas in the Beaufort Sea and, finally, the status of the NWP itself. The March 2010 Speech from the Throne reaffirmed the government's commitment to 'vigorously defend Canada's Arctic sovereignty' (Government of Canada, 2010).

The Russian government in the last few years has also brought Arctic sovereignty to the fore. In March 2009, the Security Council of the Russian Federation announced the 'Foundations of the Russian Federation national policy in the Arctic until 2020 and beyond'. This document reaffirmed that the role of the Arctic zone as a strategic resource base alongside the NSR is identified as vital to Russia's sovereign interests. This zone needs to be protected and the Russian Federation (RF) proposed that a dedicated Arctic group of forces would be created. Patrolling Arctic sea routes and the monitoring of international maritime traffic was judged to be a priority. By 2020, the Arctic zone would be the main strategic base for the RF.

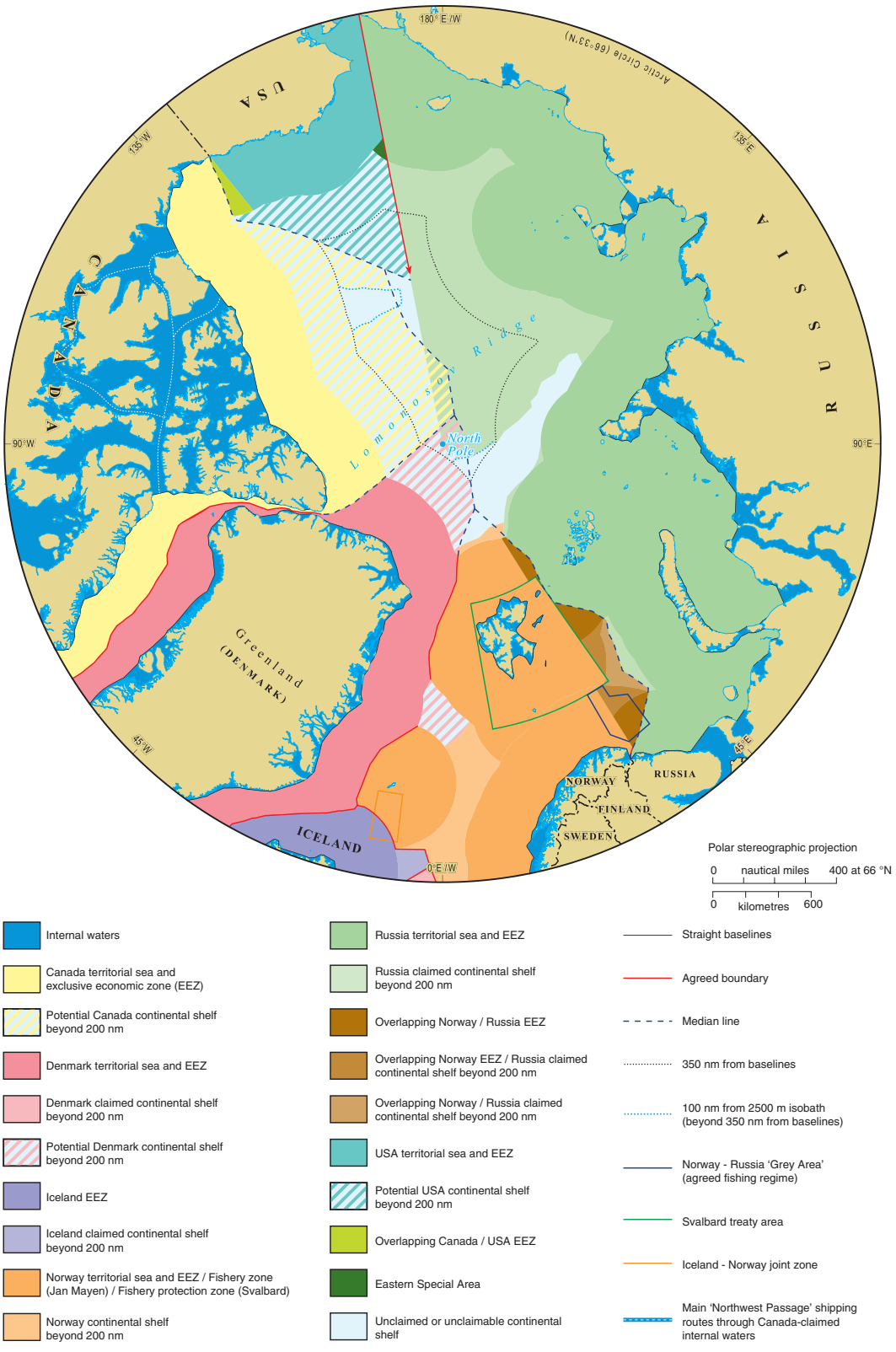
Regionally speaking, the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration is probably the most important development pertaining to the five Arctic Ocean coastal states and the settlement of overlapping extended continental shelves (Denmark Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). In May 2008, representatives of the five coastal states met in Greenland and declared that they were committed to resolving any overlapping claims in the Arctic region and that the 'law of the sea' provided a legal framework for such resolution. Critically, the reference here is to the 'law of the sea' and not the LOSC, in recognition of the fact that the United States is not a party to the LOSC. The 'law of the sea' refers to customary international law, which applies to all states. The Arctic five also affirmed their status as 'environmental stewards' and thus outlined their intention to work together in areas such as environmental monitoring and disaster response. At the time, this was a controversial declaration in the sense that it appeared to mark a stark divide between the five coastal states and others such as Finland, Iceland and Sweden. All eight states are permanent members of the Arctic Council, the most significant soft law intergovernmental forum for the promotion of cooperation in the Arctic, and some analysts have raised questions as to its long-term efficacy (for example, Koivurova, 2010).

The wider significance of the 2008 Declaration needs to be acknowledged. Other actors and interested parties reacted against an apparent attempt by the five coastal states to secure their sovereign presence in the Arctic. Two examples are worth noting. The decision by the European Parliament in 2008 to advance an EU Arctic agenda is indicative of the rising interest in the region and its potential, including resources and navigational opportunities (European Parliament, 2008). The EU has reaffirmed its understanding of the Arctic as a common space, which is of considerable importance to individual member states such as Denmark and Finland but also the wider membership as well. The second involved the reaction of the ICC, which issued in 2009 a 'Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic'; this asserted the right to be consulted in any international negotiations pertaining to sovereignty (Inuit Circumpolar Council, 2009). This has an added saliency when one considers how states such as Canada routinely invoke the importance of indigenous peoples in cementing their sovereign claims on the basis of long-term occupation and use of land. It is also worth noting that indigenous peoples and organisations such as the ICC and Sami Council are permanent participants in the Arctic Council and were critical in shaping major initiatives such as the 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

Conclusions

The Canadian geographer Viljamur Stefansson once claimed that the Arctic Ocean would one day transmogrify into a

Figure 3. Maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic region.



Source: International Boundaries Research Unit, Durham University.

polar Mediterranean (Stefansson, 1921). His prediction is now being realised, albeit gradually (ACIA, 2005). Issues pertaining to accessibility, resources and sovereignty are placing heightened pressures on the governance structures addressing the Arctic Ocean. Following the end of the cold war, there have been a number of important initiatives to improve cooperation between the major Arctic states. The Arctic Council, created in 1996, was the most notable innovation even if it remains a soft law institution that does not produce legally binding obligations for its members (Koivurova, 2008, 2010). The Arctic Council simply does not discuss military matters and nuclear-powered submarines continue to patrol polar waters. What is noteworthy is that countries such as Britain have observer status and China and South Korea with their ad hoc observer status are eager to enhance their individual and collective standing within the Arctic Council. Observers such as Britain have articulated energy, climate change, navigational and resource-related interests, even if a formal Arctic strategy does not exist.

What is unclear is how the Arctic Council will continue to coexist in a new era of profound change in the Arctic Ocean. On the one hand, the five coastal states have sought to consolidate their influence and articulate common interests with regard to maritime claims and sovereignty. But there are also important differences within that select group such as disagreements between Canada and the United States over the status of the NWP and maritime boundaries involving, inter alia, the Barents and Beaufort Seas. The US, of course, has still not acceded to the LOSC. On the other hand, there is mounting evidence that other parties including China, the European Union and indigenous organisations will continue to promote their visions for the Arctic. While this does not imply that conflict is likely, it does provide a reminder that the future status of the Arctic Ocean is contested. This is perhaps manifested in increased investment being devoted by Arctic coastal states to their national territories and maritime jurisdictions; all five have released national security strategies relevant to the Arctic.

Enhanced accessibility to the Arctic Ocean will carry with it particular managerial challenges, especially in the areas of resource management and trans-Arctic shipping. The 2009 Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment, released by the Arctic Council, highlighted the environmental risks posed, ranging from accidental oil spills to the impact of noise on whale migratory routes via activities such as shipping and hydrocarbon exploitation (Arctic Council, 2009). Some progress has been made with regard to shipping standards and safety. In 2002, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) issued 'guidelines' for polar shipping and in December 2009 the IMO assembly adopted a polar code, which now applies to both Polar Regions. Article 234 of the Law of the Sea Convention, moreover, allows for coastal states to introduce further pollution prevention measures in ice-filled seas, an opportunity of which Canada availed itself.

Finally, there is a danger that Arctic cooperation will increasingly be divided between the five Arctic Ocean coastal states and others including Arctic Council members, permanent participants and observers. While the Arctic five were swift to deflect such concern after their Ilulissat Declaration, the March 2010 meeting of the coastal states revealed signs of tension. Hosted by the Canadian government, it was notable for the fact that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was publicly critical of the decision to exclude others from the discussion including indigenous communities. The Canadian foreign minister, Lawrence Cannon, was then forced to issue a public statement reaffirming the importance of the Arctic Council and that the meeting was in no way intended to denigrate this institution or its membership. The timing of this apparent spat was unfortunate in the sense that it coincided with a Canadian government decision to remove its troops from Afghanistan in 2011. However, it is also a timely reminder that there are a large number of Arctic Ocean stakeholders and the list goes well beyond merely Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States. And this is likely to continue.

Note

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