

A quarterly publication from the AAAS Center for Science Diplomacy

Paul Arthur Berkman, “Stability and Peace in the Arctic Ocean through Science Diplomacy,” *Science & Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 2014). <http://www.sciencediplomacy.org/perspective/2014/stability-and-peace-in-arctic-ocean-through-science-diplomacy>.

This copy is for non-commercial use only. More articles, perspectives, editorials, and letters can be found at www.sciencediplomacy.org. SCIENCE & DIPLOMACY is published by the Center for Science Diplomacy of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world’s largest general scientific society.

Stability and Peace in the Arctic Ocean through Science Diplomacy

Paul Arthur Berkman

“HIGH north, low tensions” has been the mantra of diplomats, as coined by former Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre. After all, the Cold War is over and cooperation has been evolving in productive directions ever since for the North Polar region.

Lessons of the Arctic, such as those from the Antarctic, reveal science as a tool of diplomacy that creates bridges among nations and fosters stability in regions. It is well known that science is necessary for Earth system monitoring and assessment, especially as an essential gauge of change over time and space. Science also is a frequent determinant of public policy agendas and institutions, often for early warning about future events. However, even more than an immediate source of insight, invention, and commercial enterprise, science provides continuity in our global society with its evolving foundation of prior knowledge. These and other features of science diplomacy,¹ as a field of human endeavor, are relevant to our global future in the Arctic.

Building on the East-West breakthrough in the 1986 Reykjavik Summit, with his Murmansk speech in October 1987, Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev envisioned a shared path where “the community and interrelationship of the interests of our entire world is felt in the northern part of the globe, in the Arctic, perhaps more

than anywhere else.” Recognizing that “scientific exploration of the Arctic is of immense importance for the whole of mankind,” Gorbachev called for creation of a “joint Arctic Research Council.”

Emerging from his Murmansk speech, the International Arctic Science Committee was founded in 1990, followed by the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991, which revealed a “common future” among Arctic countries and peoples. Also involving the eight Arctic states,² the Barents-Euro Arctic Council and Standing Committee of the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region were formed in 1993 and 1994, respectively.

Eventually established in 1996, the Arctic Council breathed life into a circumpolar community of the eight states and six indigenous peoples’ organizations inhabiting the region north of the Arctic Circle. “As a high level forum,” the Arctic Council has become central in an institutional arena for the high north that includes the above organizations along with many others, starting with the 1920 Treaty Concerning the Archipelago of Spitsbergen. With its forty-two signatories, this treaty still stands as a beacon of peaceful development in the high north.

Together, the six scientific working groups of the Arctic Council are facilitating knowledge discovery and contributing to informed decisions about “common Arctic issues” of sustainable development and environmental protection. As a direct consequence of the Arctic Council, pan-Arctic agreements are being signed by all Arctic states, beginning with the 2011 search and rescue agreement and 2013 marine oil pollution response agreement. Interests of twelve non-Arctic states, including China and India, also are being accommodated as they are brought in as observers to the Arctic Council.

Moreover, the so-called Arctic Five⁵ coastal states are reaching territorial agreements. As noted in their 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, “sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in large areas of the Arctic Ocean” are being addressed cooperatively under the Law of the Sea, particularly with regard to “outer limits of the continental shelf.” This commitment includes the United States, even though it has not yet ratified the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Highlighting the cooperation, Russia and Norway signed an agreement in 2010 about Barents Sea resources, ending a dispute that had escaped their resolution for the previous four decades.

Winds Are Changing

The current crisis related to Ukraine has introduced global geopolitics into the Arctic unlike any world event since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Within weeks of the Crimea annexation, former U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton was linking the Arctic, Russia, and Ukraine, suggesting in a March 2014 speech in Montreal that “we need a united front,” as reported by the *Globe and Mail*. The following month, Canada, the current chair of the Arctic Council, boycotted the Arctic Council meeting in Moscow. Lines are being redrawn, which the May/June

2014 issue of *Foreign Affairs* reflected with its articles related to “The Return of Geopolitics.”

Such political posturing risks fueling the long-dormant “burning security issues” that Gorbachev warned of in the Arctic. Perhaps the world was arriving at this security intersection in any case, but for different reasons.

The Arctic Ocean is undergoing an environmental state-change, where the boundary conditions of the system are being altered. In fact—with the Arctic warming twice as fast as anywhere else on Earth—the Arctic Ocean is undergoing the largest environmental state-change on our planet. The surface of this maritime region surrounding the North Pole is being transformed from a sea-ice cap that has persisted for millennia (perhaps even hundreds of millennia) to a system with sea ice retreating and advancing seasonally.

Rather than projecting out to the mid-twenty-first century, it is clear that the Arctic Ocean already has crossed a threshold with open water during the summer and first-year sea ice during the winter covering more than 50 percent of its area. Of greater significance, the volume of Arctic sea ice has decreased more than 70 percent since the late 1970s.

With increasing accessibility in the Arctic Ocean, countries, along with multinational corporations such as ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell, are preparing to exploit the region’s enormous energy reserves, estimated to contain 30 percent of the world’s undiscovered gas and 13 percent of its undiscovered oil. Fisheries are opening to commercial harvesting without regulation, especially in areas of the high seas lacking any regional fisheries management organization. Arctic shipping routes are being established to supplement trade through the Panama and Suez Canals.

It is not a matter of waiting decades or even years for the Arctic Ocean to be completely ice-free during the summer. There is now a new Arctic Ocean, one that lacks a permanent sea-ice cap. Like removing the ceiling to a room, the fundamental shift in the surface boundary of the Arctic Ocean has created a new natural system with different dynamics than anything previously experienced by humans in the region.

Separate from the Ukraine situation, the environmental state-change in the Arctic Ocean is introducing inherent risks of political, economic, and cultural instabilities—which are at the heart of every security dialogue. Exposing security risks in the Arctic may be a good thing, but only if accompanied by inclusive solutions that both promote cooperation and prevent conflict.

Achieving International Stability

Leaving loose the elephant in the room, questions about conflict in the Arctic Ocean remain unattended. As a consequence, the associated community of states

and peoples lacks a shared understanding of expectations, capabilities, interests, and wills to foster lasting stability in the Arctic Ocean.

“Matters related to military security” are off the table for the Arctic Council. The council avoids even general considerations of security in the Arctic Ocean, as reflected by elimination of the security chapter from its second Arctic Human Development Report, which is due in 2014.

With all Arctic coastal states except Russia as members, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the only northern Atlantic organization without a remit in the Arctic Ocean. This position seems reasonable as long as NATO is seen by Russia as the “main external threat of war,” as stated in the 2010 Military Doctrine of Russia.

These positions made sense immediately after the Cold War, but decades of cooperation have followed and there now is capacity to project peace into the future for the Arctic Ocean. “Not all military capabilities are designed for force,”⁴ as affirmed for the Arctic Ocean in 2010 by then NATO supreme allied commander, Admiral James Stavridis.

Illustrating this point, in association with the Arctic Council, meetings among the chiefs of defense from all Arctic states began in 2012 with regard to their shared emergency responses in the Arctic Ocean. An opportunity to think about the Arctic more holistically is further revealed by the NATO Advanced Research Workshop “Environmental Security in the Arctic Ocean,” which the author chaired with Russian co-directorship in 2010 at the University of Cambridge. That workshop became the first formal dialogue between NATO and Russia regarding security issues in the Arctic Ocean.

Global recognition of the need for international stability is a necessary first step toward lasting peace in the maritime region bounded by North America, Europe, and Asia at the top of the Earth, where the interests of the entire international community are increasingly focused. The next step will involve implementing an inclusive venue for ongoing dialogue to prevent conflict as well as promote cooperation in the Arctic Ocean.

Cultivating Common Interests

International stability is inextricably linked to sustainable development, which already is acknowledged as a common Arctic issue to balance economic prosperity, environmental protection and social equity, taking into consideration the needs of present and future generations. Even more basic to stability in the Arctic Ocean is balancing national interests and common interests.

Although peace is the most basic foundation for international stability, the term was consciously rejected as a common Arctic issue when the Arctic Council was established. The fear then, as now, was that peace implies demilitarization. It was

only in 2009 that this term even began to appear in Arctic Council ministerial declarations.

Still, “peace” is not used among all Arctic states in their national security policies for the Arctic. In fact, it remains to be seen whether Canada, in contrast to its Arctic foreign policies, will include “peace” in the 2015 Arctic Council ministerial declaration. If the Arctic states are too timid or nationalistic to openly discuss balance, stability, and peace when tensions are low, how will they possibly cooperate when conflicts arise?

The path forward is reflected by the Arctic states’ commitment to the Law of the Sea, which includes zones within as well as beyond sovereign jurisdictions. Even if continental shelf extensions were conferred all the way to the North Pole—unambiguously in the overlying water column—high seas still would exist beyond sovereign jurisdictions, where more than 160 nations have rights and responsibilities under international law.

Implications of the high seas surrounding the North Pole are just now entering front stage. At their February 2014 meeting in Nuuk, Greenland, the Arctic Five took the initiative “to prevent unregulated fishing in the central Arctic Ocean.” Whatever the international outcomes from this meeting, lessons will resonate from the high seas of the Arctic Ocean outward across our civilization on a planetary scale.

Statesmanship Is Required

At the moment, there is neither a forum nor leadership to foster lasting stability in the Arctic Ocean. To prepare for the 2016 Arctic heads of state meeting that is being considered in the United States on the twentieth anniversary of the Arctic Council, President Barack Obama has the option to inspire stability and peace for the Arctic across the twenty-first century and beyond.

Turning back the calendar only a few months to winter 2014 (remember the Sochi Olympics), Russia was seen in a different light. Since 2010, the Russian Geographical Society had been convening the “Arctic Forum for Dialogue,” first in Moscow then in Arkhangelsk in 2011 and in Salekhard in 2013. Each of these international gatherings in Russia involved scientists and diplomats as well as government administrators, commercial operators, advocates from nongovernmental organizations, and indigenous peoples.

Most prominent in the Arctic forums were the head-of-state presentations, stimulated by participation of Vladimir Putin initially as prime minister and most recently as president of the Russian Federation. President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson of Iceland, as the elder statesman of the Arctic, participated in all three forums. Prince Albert II of Monaco presented in 2010 and 2011. With invitations extended to all Arctic heads of state, President Sauli Niinistö of Finland also participated in 2013.

As a common interest, these heads of state all spoke of stability and peace in the Arctic, even if only for their national benefit. In each forum, it also was clear that the level of trust and cooperation in the Arctic had matured since the Cold War, signaling that international relationships in the Arctic are open and strong enough to deal with the more difficult issues of preventing conflict. To build on the earlier head-of-state engagements for the Arctic, Obama has the opportunity to convene a meeting with all other Arctic heads of state and act as a statesman who puts out the brushfires of the moment while planting seeds of hope and inspiration for the future.⁵

The challenge is to create a process of ongoing and inclusive dialogue about Arctic issues that have so far eluded shared consideration. With the Arctic, Obama must be brave enough to share the ‘coin of peace,’ promoting cooperation on one side and preventing conflict on the other. Historic perspectives and the roles of science diplomacy will help provide direction. However, to bear fruit in the interests of humankind, the political will for lasting stability and peace in the Arctic must come from all Arctic heads of state.

At the end of the day, peace must be established explicitly as a common interest among all states and peoples in the Arctic Ocean. As Gorbachev imagined a generation ago, “Let the North Pole be a Pole of Peace.” **SD**

Endnotes

1. Paul Arthur Berkman, Michael A. Lang, David W.H. Walton, and Oran R. Young, eds., *Science Diplomacy: Antarctica, Science, and the Governance of International Spaces* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2011).
2. Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States.
3. The Arctic coastal states of Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation, and the United States (excluding the island state of Iceland).
4. Paul Arthur Berkman, *Environmental Security in the Arctic Ocean: Promoting Cooperation and Preventing Conflict*, with a foreword by James Stavridis (London: Routledge, 2012).
5. Paul Arthur Berkman, “Preventing an Arctic Cold War,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/13/opinion/preventing-an-arctic-cold-war.html?_r=0.

This article is adapted from the invited speech on “The High North” to the 2013 NATO Maritime Commander’s Conference, The Challenge of Building and Sustaining Global Maritime Awareness, on November 20, 2013, in London. This paper is a contribution from the Arctic Options project (<http://arcticoptions.org>), supported by the National Science Foundation (Award No. 1263819).