

“Arctic Exceptionalism” or “comprehensive security”? Understanding security in the Arctic

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Since Mikhail Gorbachev's icebreaking Murmansk speech in 1987, the Arctic has been considered to be an “exceptional” region of peace and cooperation in security studies. While acknowledging the relevance of this narrative, this article nevertheless argues the “Arctic exceptionalism” narrative is insufficient for understanding the complex security situation in the region. The lens of comprehensive security allows for an analysis of power that reveals which security narratives dominate, why, and who decides. After a brief description of the key elements associated with “Arctic Exceptionalism” and clarification of the terms “Arctic,” “security,” and “comprehensive security,” this article offers four core arguments against the dominance of the Arctic Exceptionalism narrative, and concludes that the comprehensive security approach provides a more nuanced and dynamic way of capturing the dynamic cooperative and competitive narratives of Arctic security today.

Introduction

The concept of *Arctic exceptionalism* has become an increasingly popular expression for describing the amenable security conditions in the Arctic, commencing with the well-known 1987 “zone of peace” speech made by then-General Secretary of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 1987). Although many leading scholars have supported and promoted the narrative of Arctic exceptionalism (AE), others have been more skeptical. In the following article, we acknowledge the relevance of this narrative, but nevertheless argue that it is not sufficient when attempting to understand security in the Arctic. This is because the narrative reifies a static security perception that relies on a narrow, exclusive, and depoliticised approach to security in the interest of perpetuating an exceptional image of cooperation in the region. Comprehensive security (CS) on the other hand, neither rejects processes of cooperation, nor denies areas of tension that foster increased perceptions of insecurity. Instead, it provides an analytical tool that exposes the ways in which security narratives in the region are complementary, or in competition, at a given time. Rather than fronting a condition of constant and virtually perpetual cooperation that depoliticises the power dynamics between differing security narratives, CS allows for an analysis of power that reveals which security narratives dominate, why, and who decides. Whereas AE is a narrative that

describes a selective condition of security, CS is an analytical approach to help better understand security perceptions in the Arctic, and how these are dynamic over time.

In this article, we first briefly describe key elements associated with AE as a security narrative. We then unpack some of the assumptions of AE by clarifying what we mean by “Arctic,” “security,” and “comprehensive security.” This follows with a discussion about “Arctic security” and if it is best understood through Arctic Exceptionalism or comprehensive security. We present four core arguments against the dominance of the AE term, and conclude that CS provides far more insights into the dynamics of Arctic security today.

Arctic Exceptionalism

Arctic Exceptionalism is a narrative which attempts to define how one can speak about security in the region. Although the states that make up the Arctic region have all been periodically engaged in violent conflict both within their own territories (for example, World War II) or in out-of-area operations, (most recently in Afghanistan)¹, since WWII direct conflict has not touched this region. This condition of peace is considered striking because two of the Arctic states - the United States and Russia (formerly, the USSR) – had been characterised as diametrically opposed global superpowers for almost half a century. These two Arctic states were central to the animosities of the Cold War and its various proxy conflicts that took place outside of their own state territories, namely within Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Fink, 2017). In the Arctic, however, they maintained a “negative peace”, (absence of violent conflict) whereby the region was a buffer zone between the superpowers during the Cold War. Thus, it was not difficult to foster cooperation in the region when tensions thawed at the end of the Cold War.

This state of relations has garnered the region many pacific monikers, including Gorbachev’s landmark proclamation that the Arctic be a “zone of peace” (Gorbachev, 1987), as well as its more recent label by Russia as a “territory of dialogue” (Tass, 2014), while in Norway it has been popularly characterised under the slogan, “High North, low tension” (Thune, 2013). Most poignantly, it has been branded as “exceptional.” The notion of “exceptional” describes the security condition as being in contrast to conditions in other parts of the world and/or in contrast to what is assumed as the normal state of international politics – violent conflict. To a degree it might also be extrapolated that the claim of *exceptionality* is a claim of superiority in this regard and that other countries or regions have something to learn from the Arctic (Heininen, 2019).

The framing of this state of affairs as “exceptional”, though, owes much to the timing and the context under which Arctic regional relations were institutionalized. The advances made in Arctic cooperation took place in the 1990s, when global optimism about peace in general was high. At this time, UN member states reevaluated narrow security definitions, proposing to widen and deepen our understanding with the now-familiar concept of human security (UNDP, 1994; Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2017). In general, therefore, there was a political willingness to consider alternative conceptions of security that encouraged more cooperation.

The basic elements of AE maintain that the region is “detached from global political dynamics and thus characterized primarily as...an apolitical space of regional governance, functional co-operation, and peaceful co-existence” (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015: 5). Cooperation has been based on common interests “in areas of low politics” (Heininen, 2019: 221), such as environmental protection, the promotion of Indigenous governance and knowledge, increasing connectivity

across the region, scientific research, and economic development. Exner-Pirot and Murray (2017) contend that relations are exceptional because they were deliberately negotiated to be so, through the cooperative framework of institutions, through which states “have endeavored, implicitly, to compartmentalize relations there” (51). The term ‘compartmentalization’ is significant here because it reveals that the AE narrative comes with a caveat - Arctic actors discuss only those issues of common interest at the regional level. Actors, dominated by state-actors, can talk about everything *except* contentious issues, not least military security. Unlike AE, a comprehensive security approach brings the contentious back in, and allows the analyst to weigh the power of different security narratives in relation to each other within the regional context.

Unpacking the “Arctic”

The term itself, *Arctic exceptionalism*, makes two assumptions – that the “Arctic” can be considered a cohesive region about which general conclusions about security can be made, and that one such general conclusion is that this entire region is exceptional from other regions. As a security narrative, AE requires that we unpack what we mean by security, as well as how it might be understood in the Arctic context.

To understand an exceptional security status of a particular region necessitates understanding what this region is, or supposed to be. “There is nothing intuitively obvious about the idea of treating the Arctic as a distinct region” (Young & Einarsson, 2004: 17). The region has been defined in a variety of ways, including the well-known geographic boundary of the Arctic Circle at 66° 33’ north of the equator. However, there are also biophysical (i.e., treeline extent), climatological, (i.e., locations experiencing “Arctic-like” conditions), and functional (i.e., military planning) definitions (Tamnes & Offerdal, 2014). Within international relations and security theories the region does not conform to standard definitions, since ‘regions’ are traditionally bounded by the contiguous borders of states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Hoogensen, 2005). Geographically, the “Arctic” contains the northernmost parts of eight sovereign states, all of which have their capitals located outside of what is considered Arctic.² Only five of these states share their northern coasts with the Arctic Ocean.

The region is thus less one that is geographically contiguous, than one that is awkwardly connected by relative proximity to the geographical North Pole, generally colder temperatures (which nevertheless vary significantly), combined with, until recently, a historical marginalisation of their northern extremities (including peoples) by their southern capitals. If not for the evolving post-Cold War political will, it should hardly be called a region at all (Rovaniemi Declaration, 1991; Arctic Council, 1996). That political will is reflected in the “social/political” definition of the region as provided by the 2004 *Arctic Human Development Report*. It illustrates both the human as well as geographical diversity across the region, and encompasses many of the important human and environmental challenges relevant to, and still shared by, the northernmost part of the globe. Thus, the Arctic is:

“all of Alaska, Canada North of 60°N together with northern Quebec and Labrador, all of Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland, and the northernmost counties of Norway, Sweden and Finland... [and in Russia,] the Murmansk Oblast, the Nenets, YamaloNenets, Taimyr, and Chukotka autonomus okrugs, Vorkuta City in the Komi Republic, Norilsk and Igarka in Krasnoyarsky Kray, and those

parts of the Sakha Republic whose boundaries lie closest to the Arctic Circle” (Young & Einarsson, 2004: 17-18).

This definition illustrates how the “Arctic” region is divided by borders, languages, ethnicities, and political systems across eight states, all of which impact security perceptions (Hoogensen, 2005; Padrtová, 2017). Distinguishing an “Arctic security” as the collective or combined security of a collection of parts of states becomes difficult. The centres of power, (capital cities and/or centres of government) are located in the non-Arctic parts of these states. Furthermore, in many cases the states’ “Arctic” identity is not dominant or a primary policy issue area. As such, it is difficult to distinguish “Arctic” security from the general national interests of the states in question. For example, the increasing deployment of military capabilities in the Russian North may have less to do with the Arctic than with a general interest to protect national security as a whole. How do we then conceptualise “Arctic security,” exceptional or otherwise?

Unpacking security

The concept of security has a long history, during much of which it focused on the individual (Rothschild, 1995). Security, or *securitas*, was positively oriented; it described a state of calm - free of fear, anxiety, or anger. It invoked “feelings of safety and stability, routines or rather, security of expectations, whereby we can count on certain things for our future, that which we most value, upon which we can build capacity” (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2012: 842). The development of the security concept has involved multiple actors, ranging from individuals and, eventually, to the state (state and non-state actors). It simultaneously embodies values, (that which is to be secure), ranging from the material (physical well-being) to the immaterial (identity), and employs practices or methods in which security is created (Wolfers, 1952; Rothschild, 1995). In general, the values relevant to security are those values that are relevant to our survival *over time*. Mere day-to-day survival is not the equivalent of security; it could even indicate the opposite of security as either individual or state is in a constant, precarious, insecure condition. However, “survival” in combination with “actors”, “values”, “practices” and “time” (future) – gives insights into how “freedom from worry” is achieved (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2017). Together, they inform the role of actors and what they are able to do or affect in a given context, while they pursue approaches and opportunities to ensure security.

Though the above describes security in general terms, “classic” or “traditonal” security employs a more narrow understanding of the term. From the time of the Napoleonic Wars until the end of the Cold War, a more restrictive, ahistorical conception of security dominated – state security. In this invocation, the scope was transferred from individuals or communities to the security of the state as both the sole object of security (that which should be securitised) as well as securitising actor (Walt, 1991). The state’s (actor) highest priority is protecting its own existence (value) through the use of military force (practice). This narrow conception of security formed the backbone of security studies as a discipline after the Second World War and was preeminent during the Cold War. However, its domination was increasingly contested prior to the end of the Cold War, particularly by arguments for environmental security (Heininen, 2014; Greaves, 2016).

The end of the Cold War allowed more room for those conceptual contestations to manoeuvre, including attempts to understand regional security as Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) (Lake & Morgan, 1997; Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Padrtová, 2020). This approach is heavily state-centric

however, and does not adequately address deterritorialised security perceptions such as environmental or economic security (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 75). This approach also struggled to acknowledge the Arctic as a region (Hoogensen, 2005), though this was subsequently addressed in later works by other scholars (Padrtová, 2017). Thus an increasing number of security scholars argued for a broader approach to security, which more explicitly included multiple actors and multiple contexts and in which the relationships between survival, values, practices, and time could be better understood. This zeitgeist gave rise to multiple conceptions, notably environmental, energy, economic, societal (community/identity) and human security. In these conceptions of security the actors, values, and practices often differ and the long-term survival of one, at times, may be perceived to contradict the survival of another (for example state and human security, or environmental and economic security) (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2017). When seen as a combination of overlapping security processes, it is possible to understand security as a comprehensive and dynamic process where security conceptions may build upon and strengthen each other or expose competing priorities.

Comprehensive security

Comprehensive security is a theoretical approach that takes into consideration the perspectives 1) of multiple actors (state and non-state), 2) at multiple levels (local, national, regional, and global), and 3) across the spectrum of security topics including, among others, traditional state/military, economic, environmental, societal, and human security issues. By examining these multiple perspectives simultaneously, it is possible for the analyst to assess how security perspectives are articulated for the region, by whom, and why.

Unlike “Arctic Exceptionalism”, comprehensive security is, in and of itself, not particularly “Arctic”. Rather than aligning itself to a particular region, it is a theoretical approach that attempts to reveal the dynamic processes and tensions around security perceptions within a given context. In this sense, the Arctic provides a context that illustrates well how comprehensive security (CS) can be understood. The Arctic experience with negotiating multiple and, at times, competing security perspectives is useful for both regional as well as global security analyses. In this section we briefly explore the origins of CS, then how it has been defined and employed in non-Arctic contexts. In the next section on Arctic security we build further upon some more recent works that have focused on CS in the Arctic (Heininen, 2014; Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2020).

Discussions about CS commenced with the widening debates about the complexity of security by the early 1990s. Although its origin has been popularly linked to the Copenhagen School (Heininen, 2014), David Dewitt locates the advent of comprehensive, or “overall,” security in Japan, where it was created as an alternative to the militarily dominated concept of national security (Dewitt, 1994). For its part, the Copenhagen School acknowledged the relevance of a comprehensive security analysis, “requiring that one take particular care to investigate how the regional level mediates the interplay between states and the international system as a whole” (Buzan, 1991: 158). It also acknowledged the Japanese approach – credited with the coining of the CS term – “to influence positively the overall international environment, to cope unilaterally with threats, and to act in solidarity with ‘countries sharing the same ideals and interests’” (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 173).

CS did not replace militarized security perspectives in Japan. Rather, it “was meant to give a new and wider basis for Japan’s international role and to rationalise its defence effort” (Dewitt, 1994:

2). The CS approach included multiple levels from the domestic and bilateral to the regional and global (ibid: 3), reflecting the relevance of multiple state and non-state actors to understanding security. Japan's neighbouring states – part of the ASEAN region – defined CS as an inward-looking understanding of security that minimised a focus on military aspects of security and emphasised the importance of “economic and social development, political stability and a sense of nationalism” (ibid). Indeed, the CS perspective considered stability and prosperity as crucial to the overall resilience of a society and to the ASEAN region itself, since each “part” (or state) in the region strengthened itself internally, which contributed to the strength of the greater whole of the region.

Drawing from the Balkan context, Dritëro Arifi argued that CS operates “from the state aspect to local context” (Arifi, 2011: 21). Threats can be local as well as transnational, transcending the boundaries of traditional national security approaches and emphasising the relevance of multiple actors. The focus on political stability, economic growth and prosperity, and social harmony promoted an approach to security that found its roots within society, from the bottom-up. CS is an inclusive, but difficult concept to grasp, particularly with respect to a region, as each “part” may operationalize and balance the different factors (actors, values, practices, survival, time) relevant to security in different ways. How do these converge to provide an overall security perspective? Do these perspectives always converge or is there conflict between perspectives?

The CS approach “recognises the continuing problems associated with military conflict, but argues that other factors also increasingly threaten the survivability and coherence of the state, but not only the state” (Dewitt, 1994: 9). It is simultaneously more than a state-based, national security with a regional and global applicability, but emanating from and/or relevant to the local community (Arifi, 2011). However, while recognizing the interlinkages between different security perspectives, CS does not claim the ability to reconcile multiple security perspectives. As seen below, CS has been further developed drawing from the Arctic context, including a stronger emphasis on human security, and reflective of the relevance of multiple, non-state actor security perspectives.

Arctic Exceptionalism = Arctic security?

The term *Arctic security* has been utilized primarily as a shorthand for state security or geopolitics in the Arctic region. It has traditionally been linked to the state security of the individual states with Arctic territory. Although the Arctic has experienced little violent conflict, it played a strategic geopolitical role during the Cold War era “because of its position between the hostile superpowers and its potential wartime role as a corridor for a nuclear strategic exchange” (Tamnes & Offerdal, 2014: 13). After the Cold War, it became important for Arctic states to ensure that this area remained conflict-free even if, as “global” states, they experienced conflict with each other in other regions of the world.

Evidencing this priority, in 1991 the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) was signed by representatives of the governments of the eight Arctic states at the First Ministerial Conference on the Protection of the Arctic Environment (Rovaniemi Declaration, 1991). This was soon followed by the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, when “institutionalized, intergovernmental Arctic cooperation began” (Heininen, 2019: 221). It was designed as “[a] high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and

interaction among the Arctic states, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants” (Arctic Council, 1996), primarily in matters of environmental protection and sustainable development. But it also explicitly committed to “not deal with matters related to military security” (ibid). Thus far this commitment continues, albeit it not completely unchallenged in the background of deliberations in the Arctic Council (Hoogensen Gjørsv, Lanteigne & Sam-Aggrey, 2020). Military security is explicitly excluded from entering into discussions at the Arctic Council, although military experts have been included on discussions of search and rescue issues (Bailes, 2013). Extractive industries such as petroleum industries – reflecting economic and energy security perspectives of Arctic states – are, if not specifically excluded, very carefully addressed so as to not contravene energy and economic security interests of the Arctic states (which at the same time challenges environmental security).

Comprehensive security in the Arctic region

Security in the Arctic region is complex, involving human-made and earth-made boundaries (Tamnes & Offerdal, 2014). For our purposes, we combine the CS concept as articulated by Lassi Heininen (2014) with an increased emphasis on the human security dimension (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2014; 2016; 2020). In Heininen’s definition of comprehensive Arctic security, “...military security is still very relevant, as is regional security due to impacts of climate change, energy security meaning both access to, and import and export of, oil and natural gas, and also environmental security due to oil transportation, nuclear accidents and impacts of climate change” (Heininen, 2014: 47). These varying security perspectives can, but do not always, complement each other. Heininen (2014) argued for the application of CS to the Arctic region “so as to include the perspectives of human beings, societies and regions, rather than just states” (38). He takes the concept further than the Japanese iteration by explicitly noting the significant role of both human and environmental security perspectives in an Arctic CS constellation:

“Implementation of comprehensive security requires consideration of practical issues pertaining to an individual’s life, such as ensuring shelter, good health, social and economic well-being, as well as life in peace without conflict, war and violence. In addition however, comprehensive security also includes more immaterial values like political freedom, democracy, human rights and freedom from a range of threats and risks, such as disasters, pollution and other environmental problems, hunger and starvation, diseases or other illness and terrorism. It can also be interpreted to include cultural survival, freedom of expression and security of communication....this extended definition and comprehensive interpretation of security is based on the idea that there are a vast number of threats and risks to national security, besides traditional military threats, trans-border crime and international terrorism” (ibid: 40-41).

Hoogensen Gjørsv (2014) notes, however, that the tensions that follow the human security concept in the Arctic depend on who has the power to define human insecurity in a particular context. Human security has been operationalised through the lens of state security, focusing on perceived threats *by* individuals or communities *to* the state. State efforts to improve human security have been understood as “virtuous imperialism” whereby the state dictates who is insecure and by which means this will be addressed, for the purposes of state security (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2014). Hoogensen Gjørsv et al. (2016) note that a more inclusive, participatory approach to security has also developed in the Arctic context, and can be understood as being “achieved when individuals

and/or multiple actors have the freedom to identify risks and threats to their well-being and values, the opportunity to articulate these threats to other actors, and the capacity to determine ways to end, mitigate or adapt to those risks and threats either individually or in concert with other actors.” (Hoogensen Gjørv et al., 2016: 186). Human security, in this sense, emphasises a bottom-up approach that includes individual and community perspectives. This does not, however, always coalesce with other security perspectives.

Challenging Arctic Exceptionalism

The potential tensions between security perceptions are less clear when filtered through the AE narrative. CS, on the other hand, makes space for analysing the interactions between security perceptions in the Arctic. Here, we present four arguments contesting the dominance of the AE term:

- 1) *Not exceptional*: A CS approach allows for analytical comparison between regions, where each has its own distinct features but is not necessarily exceptional. Insofar as the Arctic can be claimed to be an “exceptional political space,” with qualities of peace and security that could potentially be exported to the rest of the world, it is necessary to have comparative tools that demonstrate how regions can be assessed as having inferior or superior approaches to security in relation to one another. Rather than claiming a static “exceptionality,” CS helps us understand how multiple security constellations (from state to human security) operate in relation to one another, exposing both processes of cooperation as well as potential conflict or tension. How does the Arctic therefore compare to other regions? As Heininen (2019) notes, there are other regions that share common interests and cooperate between major powers that, in other instances, behave more belligerently towards each other. In this light, the Arctic is just one of many political contexts in which such cooperation in common interests exist.
- 2) *Narrow security perspective*: The highlighted feature of the AE narrative is the fact that strong cooperation has resulted from “common interests...to decrease military tension and increase political stability” (Heininen, 2019: 220). Claims to success and a cooperative spirit are easier to maintain when the parameters are so narrowly defined and vigorously compartmentalized as they are in the AE discourse. Only in this way can the AE narrative claim that the region is exceptional and insulated from conflicts elsewhere in the world. However, not discussing matters of “high politics” that affect these same states elsewhere does not make them disappear. Kämpylä and Mikkola (2019) note the impacts of the post-2014 Ukraine crisis, resulting in: initial disruptions to political cooperation in the Arctic Council (hold on EU observer status and US/Canada boycott of black carbon working group meeting in 2014); increased distrust of Russia’s rhetoric versus its actions especially in regards to Russia’s military; suspension of regional military cooperation; reaffirmation of Arctic NATO countries’ commitment to the alliance; and sanctions by the West imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea. These sanctions have resulted in the cessation of joint Western-Russian offshore hydrocarbon development in Arctic waters and the stimulation of closer Sino-Russian political-economic ties, which can be seen, for example, in the addition of Chinese investment to the Yamal LNG project (Lanteigne & Shi, 2018). Though the Ukraine and Crimea crises are not rooted in Arctic issues, they nevertheless have affected defence posturing in the region (Wilhelmsen & Gjerde, 2018).

- 3) *Not static*: AE provides a static understanding of security. The Arctic's "exceptional" (negative) peace is in part due to its inaccessibility and the difficulty of realistically engaging in violent conflict in the region itself. Greaves (2016) notes that, "states were unwilling to risk destabilising the global strategic balance or their diplomatic relations over trivial Arctic issues. The inaccessibility of many Arctic resources made them geopolitically insignificant" (664). However, security in the region is dynamic and in flux, especially as it is becoming an increasingly viable pathway to other parts of the world and an expanded source of markets itself. Russia, in particular, has been actively pursuing the development of its vast Northern Sea Route as well as of its exploitable natural resources. More potential activity in the region impacts state, environmental, energy, economic, and human perceptions of security, which need to be weighed in relation to each other to identify which perspectives, and by whom, percolate to the highest priorities in the region.
- 4) *AE disguises insecurity*. Issues of national interest have, and will continue to, take precedence in international relations and with regard to domestic issues. Despite the rhetoric, precious little has been done to protect the environmental and human security of the Arctic region. Indeed, the unfortunate lack of initiatives from Arctic states to curtail their own contributions to carbon emissions, not least in the extraction of fossil fuels that are either burned within these states or sold outside, has in itself contributed to the detrimental effects of climate changes occurring in the region, thereby exacerbating environmental insecurity. In particular, Norway and Russia continue to focus on their Arctic regions (and Canada on its sub-Arctic) as a source of economic resources, including fossil fuels (Beaumont, 2019; Staalesen, 2019).

Within the region, the vulnerabilities of Arctic residents and communities to the consequences of state policies as well as larger global processes are well-documented (Hoogensen Gjørsv et al, 2014; Cone, 2005; Greaves, 2016). Arctic states have frequently prioritized their state interests at the expense of human and environmental security, both in and beyond the Arctic. Though much of the Arctic Council's work is rooted in environmental concerns, it is also restricted by the interests of the Arctic states to continue fossil fuel production. Environmental security perspectives take on a dominant state-centric orientation, whereby protection of the environment is performed through energy security practices of extracting fossil fuels in an environmentally friendly manner (Hornmoen, 2018), which further caters to narratives wherein economic security is dependent upon fossil fuels. These claims can be further strengthened when linked regionally, across states that share similar economic and energy security perspectives (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2017; Dale et al, 2018).

When it comes to environmental security, it may be difficult to argue that "security" is attained, when a core source of climate change - the extraction and subsequent burning of fossil fuels - continues to be a central economic foundation for the vast majority of Arctic states (Beaumont, 2019; Staalesen, 2019), ironically contributing to environmental insecurity instead. Zojer (2018) notes the contradiction between environmental protection rhetoric on the international level with brown habits at the national level. It can be argued that the focus on the environment was predominantly tokenism and, even when efforts were sincere, the tensions between environmental, economic, and energy security were too strong for the environment to triumph (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2017). For example, all of the Arctic states signed the AEPS, which considers oil to be a pollutant that must be eliminated. However, Norway, the United States, and Russia have all declared the

exploitation of their Arctic (and non-Arctic) hydrocarbon resources is a matter of national interest, which they are prepared to protect by military means, if necessary. Furthermore, “while some regions may be affected positively, the Arctic region and population at large will likely not benefit from hydrocarbon development” (Zojer, 2018: 212) because the “revenue will drain toward the economic and political centers in the south” (ibid: 213). Economic security has therefore been “bought” at the costs of the environment due to limited controls on fossil fuel extraction (Dale & Kristoffersen, 2018; Dale et al, 2018).

CS is a tool that can be used to expose these geopolitical and human security tensions and discuss them plainly as challenges to security in the Arctic, while at the same time acknowledging how other security perspectives, such as environmental security, potentially play a role to unite the region. CS exposes this interplay of security perspectives, providing an overarching understanding of security perspectives across actors, values, and practices, revealing both synergies as well as tensions.

Conclusion

Heininen (2019) claims that the Arctic not only reflects discourses of classic geopolitics (including questions of military confrontation and resource races), but also of critical geopolitics where environmental challenges (pollution, climate change) and the engagement of multiple state and non-state actors (including Indigenous peoples, NGOs, research) are significant for and within the discourses about the region. Therefore, he advocates a “holistic geopolitical” approach applied to Arctic issues and politics, including a “comprehensive coverage of factors and identities of both the Arctic’s Cold War legacy and the contemporary, broad, and new approaches to geopolitics” (ibid: 218). This affords broader consideration of issue areas (i.e., environmental protection) and actors (i.e., Indigenous groups) vis-à-vis military structures and priorities, in regional institutions. He further emphasizes the close linkages between Indigenous cultures and ways of living, and environmental protection, and how the combination of these informs Arctic policies.

To view Arctic security from such a CS perspective would afford Arctic actors and communities a louder voice in matters that have a direct impact on their lives. It would give greater legitimacy to their human and environmental security needs, beyond the state level, where they might become swallowed by national interests. Such an approach would still acknowledge and provide a place for military security concerns to be addressed. For all of these reasons, comprehensive security serves as a more holistic and realistic perspective for Arctic security.

Notes

1. All Arctic states were involved and/or contributed to the 2001-2014 intervention in Afghanistan, including both NATO (Norway, Canada, USA, Denmark, Iceland) and non-NATO (Finland, Sweden) states, including Russia which facilitated logistical support early in the operation. Russia engaged in its own intervention in the country – the Soviet-Afghan War - from 1979-1989. Currently 39 NATO partners and allies contribute to the Resolute Support operation, including the following Arctic states: US, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

2. Iceland is located just south of the Arctic Circle aside from where the Arctic Circle passes through its most northern island, Grimsey Island. Iceland is also below the treeline which has also been considered a defining feature distinguishing Arctic from non-Arctic.

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