

The political order in the Arctic: power structures, regimes and influence

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ABSTRACT. In the last few years, questions pertaining to cooperation and conflict in the Arctic have emerged in the media, as well as within academia. While many scholars have rightly rejected the prospect of an imminent escalation of conflicts, the current debate is insufficiently informed by the literature on political order within the field of international relations (IR). In this article, the author attempts to explain the political order in the Arctic, situating his analysis within the broader context of IR theory. Guided by the perspectives of ‘hegemonics stability’, ‘balance of power’ and ‘Kantian internationalist theory’, focus is laid on power capabilities, international regimes and domestic regime type as independent variables. The main finding is that the Arctic is a multipolar ‘region,’ the enduring stability and peacefulness of which can be explained by both the role played by international regimes, and by the balance of power between the ‘stakeholders’ involved. The paper concludes by explaining how and why the smaller littoral Arctic states are the prime beneficiaries of this order.

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Introduction

In recent years, the sparsely populated Arctic region has reemerged as a prominent concern on the agenda of international relations (IR). While during the cold war, the high north was important primarily because of its militarily strategic value, the recent surge might rather be explained by changes related to global warming and its consequences. While increased shipping activities can already be identified, suggesting a commercial trans-polar route as the most dramatic future scenario, climatic changes have also led to an increased focus on non-utilised oil and gas resources in the region, and the possibility of intensified border disputes (AMSA 2009: 99–121). These developments have put questions of governance and the rule of international regimes higher on the political agenda.

Within the study of IR, researchers have often demonstrated that the lack of an international sovereign, the security dilemma and states’ tendency toward self interested behaviour, make cooperation difficult. This might even be the case when the goals sought reflect common interests. If some of the states are additionally satisfied with the *status quo*, or the potential gain of unilateral defection outweighs the gains reached by cooperation, mutually binding cooperation becomes even harder

(Jervis 1978). This view of international cooperation should be and indeed has been taken into account when analysing order and stability in the Arctic. However, the perspective of imminent, escalating conflicts, or a potential ‘scramble’ for unclaimed resources appearing from underneath the melting ice has not only disproportionately dominated in the media, but also to some extent within the community of IR studies (Borgerson 2008; Howard 2009). Notable scholars of IR and the law of the sea have at the same time rejected many of the most pessimistic projections of the potential for conflict in the high north. This repudiation has often rested on how the Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC) regulates most of the issues at stake, and the fact that control of most Arctic natural resources actually falls in areas where the borders of state sovereignty are undisputed (Holtmark and Smith-Windsor 2009: 10; Hoel 2009: 92–93; Pots and Schofield: 2008: 154). However, the contemporary debate has often lacked a connection to the fundamental debate, as well as to principal questions concerning political order in international relations.

In this article, the author will attempt to mitigate part of this shortcoming through answering the following three questions. (1) How can the political order in the Arctic be explained? (2) Based on IR theory, how robust is the Arctic’s political order? (3) Based on IR theory and empirical data, which actors benefit the most from the current order?

The Arctic region

The Arctic region cannot be simply defined. Relevant criteria for the delimitation of the region include geographic, climatic or biological factors, as well as political or demographical borders. In this article, I will apply the definition of the Arctic Council’s (AC) Arctic monitoring and assessment programme (AMAP), which includes all oceans and territories to the north of the Arctic Circle,

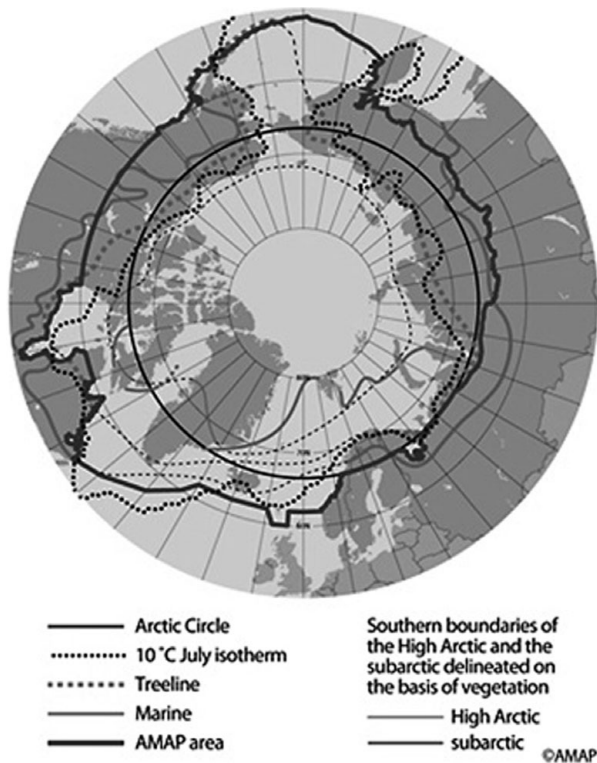


Fig. 1. Definitions of the Arctic region.

adjacent territories in Siberia and north America, and more southern ocean regions in the Atlantic and Bering Strait. The border is illustrated by the bold line in Fig. 1.

While the Arctic is connected to global politics through its economic, military and ecological importance, its remoteness, size and lack of both infrastructure and political centres makes the circumpolar region quite distinct. Based on the region's unique characteristics of being osculated by the polar ocean and having its own intergovernmental cooperation, I will suggest that, for analytical purposes, the Arctic region should be treated as a system in its own right. Isolating specific geographical locations and treating them as independent or semi-independent systems has had a long tradition within IR studies. Typical examples could be the concert of Europe in the post Napoleonic era, the hegemonic system of the Americas during the 20th century, or the Hindu-Chinese rivalry on the sub-Asian continent during previous decades. While this system certainly remains a part of the global structure, the Arctic as a subsystem has its own key actors, properties and logic. The qualities and attributes of the global system are therefore not necessarily directly transferable to the Arctic. A striking and illustrative example of the latter argument is the European Union's (EU) important global position as a key actor within IR, which is a position it does not necessarily hold in the Arctic today.

All eight member states in the Arctic Council are regarded as Arctic states: 'the Arctic eight' (Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, the USA, and Canada). These are the only states with

territories north of the Arctic circle and within the AMAP area. The EU is included as a relevant actor, as three of its member states are Arctic Council members, and it possesses territory to the north of the Arctic circle (Heininen and Nicol 2007). When referring to 'the Arctic five,' reference is made to the states with a coastline bordering the polar ocean (Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia, the USA, and Canada).

The concept of political order in the Arctic: scramble or stability?

'Order' is a key term in the study of IR. For Bull, order in world politics, or in the system of states, 'concerns the pattern or disposition of international activity that sustains the elementary, primary or universal goals of the system and society of states'. These goals include preservation of the system, upholding of independence for the individual state and maintenance of peace in the sense that 'absence of inter-state war' is the normal condition of the relationship between states. Bull also notes that among these primary goals of the society of states, 'the common goals for all social life' are to be found: the limitation of violence, the keeping of promises and the stabilisation of possession by rules of property (Bull 1995: 3–19). To Elster, 'social order' includes two perspectives: one which emphasises the existence of stable, regular and predictable patterns of behaviour, and another which emphasises cooperative behaviour (Elster 1989: 1). The understanding of order in this paper is based on Bull and Elster's definition. Hence, order will imply a situation where the system of independent states is preserved, patterns of cooperative behaviour are relatively stable, regular and predictable, and peace prevails. Within such order, the distribution of power could embody different constellations (uni-, bi- or multipolar) or go through processes of change.

Recent events in the Arctic have been interpreted to challenge the political order and stability in the high north. This debate, focusing on possible Arctic conflicts, reached its climax in the aftermath of the planting of the Russian flag on the North Pole's sea bottom in early August 2007. Even though the Russian action had no legal status under international law, it had a great symbolic effect in triggering public response and media attention all over the world (Graff 2007; Harrington 2008).

The reactionary wave also engaged researchers and politicians. While the Canadian and Russian governments announced soon afterward new plans to increase their military infrastructure and presence in the Arctic, questions of security in the high north suddenly also appeared at the top of the EU agenda (Blundern 2009: 124–128). In a paper from the High Representative for the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the European Commission to the European Council, it was warned that:

More disputes over land and maritime borders and other territorial rights are likely... In addition, the increased accessibility of the enormous hydrocarbon

resources in the Arctic region is changing the geo-strategic dynamics of the region with potential consequences for international stability and European security interests. . . As previously inaccessible regions open up due to the effects of climate change, the scramble for resources will intensify (EU: High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Commission 2008).

At its most extreme, the increased focus on possible Arctic conflict led to interpretations under which almost all new military activity and procurements were interpreted as a sudden military escalation in the north. This could be exemplified by debates highlighting the increased Russian strategic bomber aircraft activity in the north, the Norwegian decision in 2008 to buy new F-35 fighter planes or Canada's building of new Arctic offshore patrol vessels (Howard 2009: 183–184; Huebert 2009; Borgerson 2008). While the surge of new interest in the Arctic has raised questions about whether a breakdown of the political order and stability in the region, where violent conflicts over disputed borders and natural resources are immanent, scholars of the law of the sea and political scientists have given solid explanations about why this conclusion is a hasty one. To put it in Young's words: [m]any reactions to this situation (the surge of interest and concern for the Arctic) are more alarmist than alarming' (Young 2009: 73). In general, one could argue that, in particular, populist statements and the demonstration of political activeness meant for domestic consumption have repeatedly been interpreted out of context (for example the Canadian prime minister's spokesman stating that Canada 'has an aggressive Arctic agenda' ahead, the Canadian prime minister's Arctic tour in August 2007, or the Russian president's security council statement of 27 March 2009 announcing new deployment of special military forces in the Arctic region).

In recognising that the costs of national self-reliance are usually excessive, the Arctic states have reduced tension in practice by acknowledging the need for collaboration in the high north. In particular, they have agreed upon using the Arctic Council as the main cooperative body for Arctic interstate cooperation, honoring LOSC as the main legal framework to comply with and by pledging to solve any disputes in the region peacefully (Tromsø Declaration 2009; Ilulissat Declaration 2008; Corell 2009; Jensen and Rottem 2009; Haas 1980: 357). Hence, the political development in the Arctic, which is characterised by decades of interstate cooperation, absence of war and adherence to international law, possesses many of the features of Bull and Elster's understanding of a stable political order. However, the recent debate denouncing the potential for conflicts in the Arctic would benefit from a greater attachment to principal IR debates concerning stability, war and order in the international system. In this article, this defect is addressed by placing the political order of the Arctic as the dependent variable. With the guidance of three theoretical perspectives, the author will

seek to identify relevant competing explanatory variables with the greatest causal effects on this order, before assessing questions of relative utility.

While some scholars seem to emphasise the underlying ideational aspects that cause political order, others tend to stress structural or material factors, like economic or military power, which are thought to enable, embed and occasionally enforce such ideas (Barma and others 2007: 25). Still others have focused on possible relationships of dependency, or the role played by regimes. Here key aspects of these dimensions are analysed, starting by choosing three theoretical perspectives that can systematically direct the focus onto the most important independent explanatory variables. The three perspectives are selected as they all appear as plausible, well established theories, emphasising different features of international relations generally, and also possessing key properties especially relevant to the Arctic. The perspectives are as follows. (1) Theory of hegemonic (or unipolar) stability. (2) Theory of stability under a multipolar balance of power. (3) Theories of a Kantian international society. In the following section(s) the three perspectives are examined with the aim of identifying what types of variables are most important with regard to how a political order could be explained.

Theoretical approaches to order

The theory of *hegemonic stability* originates from studies in international political economy, and has been further developed and widely applied in IR studies (Kindleberger 1973; Gilpin 1975, 1989; Krasner 1976; Keohane 1980, 1984; Cox 2001: 102–111; Brooks and Wohlforth 2005). The main idea of this theory is that one state might become so dominant that it could single handedly create and uphold the international military and economic order. Britain's way of promoting liberal free trade in the late 19th century (*Pax Britannica*) and the United States' establishment of the economic order after World War II (*Pax Americana*) are common examples (Gilpin 1989: 144–145).

Hegemonic stability is sometimes differentiated from unipolar stability. In these accounts, a unipolar system is often viewed as being based on the mechanism of balancing, while a hegemonic system refers to a state that enjoys a further increase in power, as it can act virtually without constraint by any collection of other states anywhere in the world (Pape 2005: 11). Still, these theories unite in being crucially concerned with the material aspects of power, and often focus on military capabilities and the importance of controlling technology, raw materials, markets and sources of capital (Layne 2009; Keohane 1984: 32). Hegemonic stability theory also addresses the role played by international norms and institutions. Within this debate, the tradition states that the hegemonic power will possess the ability to shape and dominate the international environment, and is thereby likely to create and maintain strong international regimes

reflecting its interests. However, the international regimes might concurrently benefit smaller states if they accept the strong states' leadership (Cox 2001: 102; Keohane 1980: 136; Gilpin 1989: 144; Pape 2005: 43–49). The fact that the United States is an Arctic country, and the world's only global superpower, makes applying this perspective relevant.

While situations of hegemonic stability might occur, they are most often viewed as an exception within the study of IR. Stability caused by a balance of power, where the states seek to avoid one pole becoming hegemonic, is the 'normal state of affairs'. The concept of 'balance of power' is closely related to the dominant realist tradition, and it is as old as the academic discipline itself, tracing its roots back to the ancient Greek Thucydides and the writings of the Renaissance politician and philosopher Machiavelli. Whereas disagreements have often been about what patterns of balancing are the most stable (bi- or multipolarity), if it is power or merely threats that are the object of, or indeed, if inter-state relationships are a constant game of balancing, most traditions acknowledge that balancing does occur, and that some types of balancing behaviour could create a stable political order (Deutsch and Singer 1964; Waltz 1979; Walt 1987: 5; Mastanduno 1997; Wendt 1992).

In this tradition, the distribution of military power capabilities is viewed as the most important source of power, followed by economic strength, while the concept of international regimes could be viewed as a 'misleading concept that obscures basic economic and power relationships' (Carr 2001: 102–120; Waltz 1979: 129–194; Mearsheimer 2001: 55–57; Krasner 1982: 185). The Arctic states' focus on military presence, protection of sovereign rights, and the vast economic resources of the region makes balance of power theory a highly relevant theoretical perspective in an analysis of the political order in the region.

Kant's ethics and understandings of the nature of the human being, the state and international relations have influenced the study of IR for centuries. In the philosopher's 'perpetual peace', we find the foundation of what could be called a liberal *Kantian internationalist theory*. According to this work, everlasting peace is obtainable only when states adhere to 'the three definitive articles'. (1) States must be republics (with representative government, liberty of the individual and division of powers). (2) A federation of free states must be created. (3) The principle of universal hospitality (constituting a cosmopolitan, international law) must prevail (Doyle 1986: 1157–1158; Kant: 1795). While Kant accepts violence as being an inherent part of international relations, including the concept of power balancing as a mechanism to prevent war, Kant's ideal peace is a 'positive one'. In this 'Kantian peace' the republics abstain from using violence against each other because they exercise democratic caution and are capable of appreciating the international rights of foreign republics. In describing another causal explanation for how this peace might take

place, Kant outlines how both the principle of free trade leads to interdependence and the existence of international regimes gradually bring about universally accepted norms (Oneal and Russett 1999; Malnes 2002: 77–94; Kant 1795: 152–157; Doyle 1986: 1162).

While Kant's 'perpetual peace' might appear remote and certainly stems from another time, the work consists of ideas that are still relevant, and the elements of which could easily be retrieved in other contemporary IR traditions. In this article, the author points out three traditions sharing features with Kant's internationalism. (1) *The democratic or Kantian peace* tradition, in which Kant's hypothesis that democracies do not wage war with each other is empirically scrutinised (Levy 1989: 88; Oneal and Russett 1999); (2) The English school and its focus on the *anarchical society*, in which likeminded countries share certain rules, customs, values and norms, in spite of lacking an international sovereign (Bull 1995). (3) The traditions of regime studies, in which international law and organisations are treated as autonomous, or partly independently intervening, causal variables in political development (Keohane 1990; Krasner 1982). These three Kantian traditions each emphasise features found in international politics in today's Arctic.

Key independent variables explaining the Arctic order

The three theoretical perspectives both differ from, and overlap with, whatever independent variables are deemed to be the most important when explaining a political order. In the following sections an analysis is presented of the Arctic region with respect to three variables that a combination of all three perspectives determine to be the most important. These are (1) power capabilities; (2) international regimes; and (3) the Arctic states' domestic regime type.

Power capabilities

Theories that explain political order as being a result of hegemonic stability or balance of power focus on the distribution of power capabilities. The capabilities usually deemed most important are military and economic strength. In addition, the following tangible sources of power are also frequently noted: population size, technology, control of natural resources, land area and efficient political leadership, including the diplomatic services (Evans and Newnham 1998: 447; Kaplan 2009, Waltz 1979: 131, Handel 1990: 9–54). Here focus will be placed on the following four elements:

Military capabilities. As a cold maritime region, the Arctic is characterised by uninhabitable oceans, a harsh climate, and vast distances with limited infrastructure. Human infrastructure becomes extremely sparse north of 70°N, when compared to the enormous area in question. These geographical and climatic particulars make many forms of human activity in the region challenging, including military undertakings, and they demand high robustness and self-sufficiency. While the U.S.A., Russia, and

the big EU states like France and the U.K. certainly have considerable reserves of general military capabilities that are capable of projecting power in the Arctic, particularly with the use of missiles, submarines and aircraft, these means do not appear to be fit for prolonged presence in the region. Due to the fact that most of the Arctic is a marine area covered by thick sea ice most of the year, maritime ice breaking capacity stands out as a key factor for both military and civilian presence and mobility in the region. Icebreakers, together with other elements of Arctic maritime infrastructure thereby constitute a good indication of the state's Arctic operational capacity.

Economic strength. Economic strength could be moulded into relevant capacities. This ductile and indirect role makes the states' general economic strength relevant. Economic strength could also create patterns of dependency or be used to reward desired behaviour. The following frequently used indicators of a state's economic strength: GDP, GDP per capita and share of world trade, are applied.

Administrative capacity. Administrative capacities indicate an ability to develop and execute policy. Measuring this capacity in the Arctic is difficult. However, two key elements provide an indication and will be employed in the analysis: the existence of governmental structures focusing primarily on Arctic issues, and general institutional efficiency.

Control over natural resources and territories. Both control over natural resources and control over territories are directly linked to state sovereignty and stand out as relevant sources of power, which mitigates physical presence and the utilisation of raw materials.

The USA and Russia

While the USA possesses the world's most powerful and complex military force, its material and operational focus has not been directed towards the Arctic. Thus, the country could not be said militarily to dominate the region. Its limited icebreaker capability, in having only two or three ships compared to Russia's approximately 14, is a profound illustration of this situation. This restricted capacity, together with an almost complete absence of installations aiding navigation north of the Bering Strait have made U.S. military and civilian operations in Arctic waters limited (*The New York Times* 17 August 2008; AMSA 2009: 163). Sufficient icebreaking capability has been repeatedly identified as being critical to supporting U.S. interests in the Arctic, but with the end of the cold war, there has been a lack of political will to maintain this capability (NRC 2007: 1–3). However, the USA is by far the strongest economic power in the Arctic and thereby possesses great potential for increased capacity building if it decides to do so. The American administrative capacity is also considerable, but resembles that of the other 'Arctic five'. Finally, control of large territories and natural resources in the region is significant, but not much different from the other coastal states.

As with the USA, Russia also cannot be characterised as having a dominant military position in the region. While Russia scores high on its volume of complex military capabilities, Russia has no scientific or technological upper hand. Its forces suffer also from insufficient maintenance and training (Baev 2009). Nevertheless, Russia possesses crucial infrastructure and relevant operational capacities, such as having eight of the world's 10 most powerful icebreakers and advanced Arctic ports (AMSA 2009: 156). Furthermore, Russia does not appear to have a particularly robust economy, and its state bureaucracy stands out as being extraordinarily ineffective, in comparison with the bureaucracies of the other Arctic states. However, the country possesses a significant number of institutions that are charged with focusing on the Arctic. Finally, in being the state with sovereignty over the largest Arctic territory and exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Russia will always be one of the key Arctic countries (Hønneland and Stokke 2007: 6).

Canada, Norway and Denmark/Greenland

These three countries have all ascribed high importance to military operations in the north, and permanently possess military forces of high quality.

These countries each have individual icebreaking capabilities and control deep water seaports in the Arctic. They also possess relevant advanced technology, illustrated by Norwegian deep sea oil and gas extraction in the Arctic fields of Snøhvit and Goliat. Canada, Norway and Denmark/Greenland all have sizable administrative capacities, and score high on institutional efficiency. Moreover, these countries are among the wealthiest in the world, all ranking within the top 11 in relative terms (GDP/Capita) and top 28 in absolute terms. At the same time, while Canada alone has about the same GDP as Russia, all three countries have considerably smaller defence budgets than Russia or the USA. Nevertheless, Canada, Denmark/Greenland and Norway all have sizable territories and continental shelves, and control large amounts of natural resources in the Arctic. In addition, these three countries, with the possible exception of Denmark, value their role in the region as a matter of paramount long term national strategic interest, which is a crucial concern when evaluating any actor's engagement and role in IR analysis. On this matter, Denmark constitutes an exception. While Greenland today is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, with Copenhagen being responsible for Greenland's foreign, defence, and security policy, the increasingly self governed Greenlandic administration is moving slowly towards independence. This movement was underscored by the island's referendum on increased autonomy in November 2008, and is taking place with a shared understanding by the Danish government and parliament (Table 1).

Sweden, Finland, Iceland and the EU

Sweden, Finland and Iceland possess territories to the north of the Arctic Circle and are AC member states. However, with no coastline bordering the Arctic Ocean,

Table 1. Key indicators of power capabilities

	USA	Russia	Norway	Canada	Denmark/ Greenland	Sweden	Finland	Iceland
GDP (billion US \$)*	14,204	1,608	450	1,400	343	480	271	17
World rank	1	9	24	11	28	22	33	101
GDP/capita (US\$) **	46,716	11,339	94,359	42,031	62,327	52,057	51,060	52,549
World rank	12	42	2	17	5	8	9	6
Share world trade (%)***	11.91	1.96	0.84	2.97	0.95	1.3	0.62	0.05
World rank	1	13	29	8	27	18	33	NA
Military expenditure (mill US\$)****	548,531	38,238	4,821	15,940	3,541	5,205	2,782	NA
Economic competitiveness*****	2	63	14	9	5	4	6	26
World rank								
Institutions: (Legal/administrative framework, efficiency)*****	34	114	7	17	3	5	4	13
World rank								
Technological readiness (economy) *****	13	74	7	11	4	32	10	14
World rank								
Organs/ structures with specific Arctic focus at ministerial or parliament level	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no

*World Bank. 2008. URL: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GDP.pdf> (accessed 28 February 2010).

**World Bank. 2008. URL: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/POP.pdf> (Gdp/population). (accessed 28 February 2010).

***World Bank. 2007. URL: <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/wti2008/docs/Briefaags.htm> (accessed 28 February 2010).

****Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. URL: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/> (accessed 28 February 2010).

*****World Economic Forum. 2009. The global competitiveness report 2009–2010.

these three countries and the EU have little or no military engagement in this area. Economically, it is particularly Iceland that is directly involved in the Arctic, both with respect to fisheries and possible extraction of oil, for example on the subsea Northern Dreki area along the Jan Mayen ridge. Iceland is also discussing developing a major port to assist a potential trans-Arctic shipping route, and, if it becomes an EU member (something that seems unlikely according to recent polls, with 60% 'no' in the Capacent Gallup's poll of 23 March 2010 (Iceland 2010)), will constitute a key Arctic country for the union. At the same time, when compared to the littoral states of the Polar Ocean, the three states appear to be less comprehensively involved in the region, especially militarily, as well as possessing fewer administrative structures specifically engaged in Arctic issues. Nevertheless, Sweden and Finland possess a handful of icebreakers (normally stationed in the Baltic Sea) and the three countries are technologically advanced, wealthy, and have well functioning administrative capacities.

Of all the powerful actors with growing interests in the Arctic region, the EU appears to be the most notable. While the EU does not traditionally have a

policy concerning the Arctic, this situation is presently changing. In 2008 the EU Commission presented its communication on the union's interests in the Arctic: 'The European Union and the Arctic Region' which the council conclusions of 8 December 2009 welcomed and continued to develop (EU Commission 2008; EU Council 2009). However while the EU has put the polar region high on its foreign policy agenda, creating bureaucratic structures responsible for Arctic issues within DG Relex and DG Mare (Directorates for external and maritime affairs), the union remains an outsider, having barely any Arctic territories, and limited administrative capacity directed toward the region. The EU suffers also from a lack of internal coordination in which especially the European Parliament has deviated from the council and commission in its view on Arctic governance (EU Parliament resolution 9 October 2008, Koivurova 2010: 151–152). As a unique actor in IR, the EU also possesses few autonomous tools for power projection and the first planned EU icebreaker, *Aurora borealis*, has not yet passed the sketchbook. Despite this, the EU remains a big funder of, and a considerable participant in, Arctic research and, as a large geographical neighbour, with significant shipping and fisheries interests in the region,

will remain an actor of general political significance in the circumpolar north.

International regimes

Hegemonic stability theory, multipolar balance of power theory and the Kantian peace tradition differ in their view of how international regimes could play a role in constituting the political order of the Arctic. The discord between these traditions makes an analysis of this dimension interesting and relevant. Since (A) the law of the sea and (B) the AC are the two most conspicuous regimes in the Arctic, these will be at the core of this analysis.

A) The Arctic region is primarily a marine area that is regulated by a vast number of international regimes (Koivurova and Molenaar 2009). While some of these regimes, like regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) might have significant issue specific regulatory significance, the primary legal framework for the area was established by the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea of 1982 (LOSC). The LOSC defines the rights and obligations concerning the use of seas and oceans. It establishes criteria for the legal boundaries of the seas and airspace, and determines procedures for demarcating the outer limits of the continental shelf towards the deep sea bed.

The LOSC is today signed and ratified by almost all coastal states and expands the rule of law to two-thirds of the Earth's surface. All of the Arctic states agree that LOSC constitutes the best legal framework to regulate the region, and, with the exception of the United States, they have all ratified the convention. The US senate has thus far abstained from acceding to the treaty, fearing that it might impose legal restrictions that are not in US interests, and arguing that the USA as a superpower does not need the legal framework provided in the convention (Borgerson 2009). The last five US presidents, however, have supported adherence to the treaty, stressing that it would bolster US national interests in the Arctic. Thus, the USA is officially and practically together with all of the other Arctic states regarding the LOSC as the cornerstone of stability in the Arctic. The Ilulissat Declaration of 28 May 2008 illustrates its importance, when the foreign ministers of the 'Arctic five' stated: '[w]e remain committed to this legal framework (law of the sea) and to the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims'. At the same time, the European Parliament has opposed the view that the LOSC provides a sufficient legal framework for the Arctic. While in its report on Arctic policy, the EU commission acknowledges that the law of the sea is the main legal framework for the region, this acknowledgement did not take place without internal debate, as the parliament has been a strong supporter for a separate 'Arctic treaty' resembling the one for Antarctica (EU Commission 2008; European Parliament 2008).

B) The Arctic Council (AC) is the main intergovernmental institution devoted to the region. It is composed

of the eight Arctic states and assigned to work within a broad range of fields, with military security being the most prominent exception. The AC could be viewed as a positive outcome of the end of the cold war, and embodies the idea of a more profound and extended circumpolar cooperation. It was established by the Ottawa Declaration of 1996 as a high level inter-governmental 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 on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic (Arctic Council 1996: 1). The AC meets at the ministerial or deputy level every second year, and has thus far primarily worked on overseeing and coordinating multiple programmes focused on environmental protection and monitoring. The AC has throughout the years been criticized for being a forum in which little has happened.

The institution suffers further from lacking a permanent secretariat and adequate funds, as well as having to rely on the goodwill of governments to function. In addition, it can only state non-binding soft law recommendations (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007: 191–192). The USA has been particularly reluctant to strengthen the council, and has served as the main obstacle to both increasing its administrative capacity, giving it a greater political role and transforming the high level inter-governmental forum into a formal international organisation with assessed contribution (USA 2009). Despite U.S. reluctance, the Norwegian government has voluntarily set up a semi-permanent secretariat of the Arctic Council in Tromsø. The secretariat will at least be operative through the Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish chairmanship (2006–2012), which is a development favored by the other Arctic states. While the USA so far has opposed formally strengthening the AC, the US government admits that the AC has played a significant role as on issues within its area of competence, not ruling out a softening on its position (D. Balton, personal communication, 20 May 2009). Aside from the USA, Russia might also appear to be ambivalent in its attitude towards the AC. This has particularly been the case with regard to debates on the expansion of tasks for the organisation, and could be interpreted as an aspect of its great power ambitions. The AC's strongest supporters have remained the smaller states, which is demonstrated by their asymmetrically large share in funding the organisation. While all of the Arctic states formally affirm their support toward making the AC the key international instrument in the circumpolar north, recent developments also suggest that the council is becoming increasingly relevant in practice. The Tromsø ministerial meeting in April 2009, which approved the establishment of a task force (reporting to the group of Senior Arctic Officers in AC): 'for developing and completing negotiations for the creation of an international instrument on search and rescue operations in the Arctic', represents such a move,

Table 2. Democracy index.

	USA	Russia	Norway	Canada	Denmark/ Greenland	Sweden	Finland	Iceland
Rank (score. 10 = max)	18 (8,22)	107 (4,48)	2 (9,68)	11 (9,07)	5 (9,52)	1 (9,88)	6 (9,25)	3 (9,65)

even though the process formally runs independently from the AC structures being co-chaired by the US and Russia (Tromsø Declaration 2009). Finally, viewed from the outside, the AC's relevance is perceived as increasing, a tendency underscored by the recent wave of countries and actors, such as China and the EU Commission, applying for observer status in the council.

Domestic regime type

While theories of hegemonic stability or balance of power pay little attention to questions concerning the legitimacy of the government or the regime type, this is a key concern for the Kantian peace tradition as well as for the English school. Therefore the question of the governmental system in the Arctic states is included as the last variable. Within the 'Kantian peace' tradition, different theories might emphasise the structural or normative aspects of why democracies do not wage war against each other. Both institutional constraints, such as limitations placed on the government by the legislative branch, whose members ultimately have to consider reelection, and the role played by norms developed in a liberal society, are pointed out here (Owen 1994: 90). While critics have argued that no one has directly observed causal mechanisms preventing war among democracies, others have argued that fundamental liberal ideas concerning commitment to liberal individual freedoms do produce foreign policy, ideology and institutions that collectively lead to peace (Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Owen 1994: 123–124). Ultimately, empirical studies offer an impressive record of inter-democratic peace where the absence of war between democracies comes 'as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations' (Levy 1989: 88). On a systemic level, the presence of democracies is expected to create zones where a positive peace prevails, as in Bull's understanding of the anarchical society (see also Adler and Barnett 1998).

Kant focuses on a range of factors characterising true republics (democracies) including representative government, liberty of the individual and the division of powers, all of which are factors that seem relevant today. While a narrow definition could state that a 'bourgeois democracy' only involves regular and free elections by at least 10% of the male population, and that the elected parliament controls or shares parity with the executive branch, a modern definition would usually consider broader civil and minority rights (Small and Singer 1976: 55, quoted in Levy 1989: 88). *The Economist* has developed an index measuring the extent to which different states could be regarded as democratic. The index is based on the fulfilment of four main criteria, including free and

fair elections, the security of the voters, influence of foreign powers on government and the capacity of civil services to implement policies combined with scores in the following categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the function of government; political participation and political culture (*The Economist* 2008: 16). The index covers Kant's key concerns and represents a quantitative indication of the state's democratic status. It also shows that all of the Arctic states except Russia are among the 18 most democratic states in the world. Russia, on the other hand, is ranked as number 107 and categorised as a 'hybrid democracy' (Table 2).

Analysis

How can the prevailing order in the Arctic be explained? Three different theoretical perspectives have been introduced that point to partially different explanatory variables. When reviewing the possibility of the current order being a function of the power capabilities of different actors, empirical scrutiny demonstrates that no one actor seems to dominate. As the only remaining superpower, the USA should be considered the only potential hegemonic power. However while having the strongest economy and greatest military strength, the maintenance and development of infrastructure sustaining continuous military and civilian presence in the (maritime parts of the) Arctic has not been a priority for the USA. American ambivalence towards the AC and the USA's reluctant adherence to the LOSC (while simultaneously accepting most norms of the LOSC as customary international law, legally binding the US) does not suggest a hegemonic role. Since the USA has not ratified LOSC, US representatives are not presently participating in some of the most important decision making structures concerning the Arctic, such as the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. These are structures making decisions that the US government will very likely have to respect, and in fact, the last five consecutive American administrations all wanted to join the LOSC to *improve* US influence in the region. From the perspective of the White House, the obstructive minority standpoint in the US senate seems rather to diminish American influence. The USA has hence been unable and unwilling to enter into a hegemonic role, and remains a rather reluctant, but still strong 'pole' in the system. The political order of the Arctic should therefore not be viewed as a system of hegemonic stability.

Of the remaining actors, there are four states in particular with a coastline on the polar ocean that possess and exercise a more or less complete spectrum of power

capabilities relevant to the Arctic. While Russia stands out militarily, the opposite is true with regard to its low scores on GDP per capita, administrative efficiency, technological readiness and general competitiveness. These are areas where Denmark, Norway and Canada score very high, as they are usually among the 10 top ranked countries in the world. These three Arctic countries also possess key territories and vast natural resources. Given the distribution of these power capabilities, the Arctic region could be described as a multipolar system where the 'Arctic five' together dominates the region, while the other Arctic states, including the EU, play a more secondary role.

While multipolar systems may endure for long periods, political scientists have disagreed about whether such systems should be viewed as unstable compared to hegemonic or bipolar systems (Waltz 1979: 163–176). According to Deutsch and Singer, a multi-polar power system is stable when it retains all of its essential characteristics, no single nation becomes dominant and its members continue to have political independence and territorial integrity without any significant likelihood of becoming engaged in a 'war for survival' (Deutsch and Singer 1964: 390–391). A stability that depends on balancing, however, always runs the risk of being challenged by shifts in power structures as well as by overbalancing, which could trigger a costly and dangerous arms spiral, or underbalancing, during which states may create a power vacuum tempting other states to exploit it (Schweller 2004: 167–168). Hence, the Arctic's multipolar characteristics could be considered a destabilising factor.

While balance of power might explain important aspects of the current political order in the Arctic, institutional development appears similarly to contribute profoundly to today's cooperative environment. The LOSC has particularly demonstrated its instrumentality in both regulating the states' activities, as well as constituting a legal framework for both their obligations and rights and the long term peaceful settlement of territorial claims. With the LOSC producing a more foreseeable future, increased predictability has been created, and norms and mutual trust have gradually been built. The Ilulissat Declaration by the main Arctic powers is a strong indicator of this situation. However, more importantly, the political statements are supported by empirical data. For decades, state behaviour has followed international law almost without exception, and, since World War II, the Arctic has generally been a zone without military confrontation, despite harboring major strategic weapon systems and natural resources, and retaining value as a key military theatre. Adherence to international law rather than reliance on power politics has increased the smaller Arctic states' leverage in decision making processes and given countries such as Denmark/Greenland and Norway very large undisputed natural resources, while also making them members of the small group of key decision makers in the region.

Further, the AC has served as a key venue for co-operation. While practical cooperation has thus far been primarily technical within typical soft political issues like 'scientific monitoring', 'health' or 'indigenous issues', the AC has served as an important forum that is able to take on a greater spectrum of tasks according to the desires of the member states. Its development from a low key political role to a gradually more important political structure has further safeguarded the AC from producing possible destabilising effects. Even so, the tendency of the AC slowly to become a more political organ was symbolised at the ministerial meeting 2009, when the council, in classic 'power politics' fashion, denied the EU commission a symbolic formalised position as a permanent observer. In this context it should be noted that the AC's position was a response to the EU ban on seal products. In sum, it could be argued that the LOSC and the AC give the region a fairly robust institutional framework, which can be adopted to handle political discord and conflicts among the engaged actors. Further, the states' have generally adhered to the rules, generating fertile soil for the development of common norms, which is a tendency that is likely to continue.

According to the Kantian peace tradition, the absence of war could be attributed to domestic regime types. Overwhelming empirical material demonstrates that democracies do not wage war against each other, and instead create a society of states based on shared norms and practices. This could potentially also explain the current political order in the Arctic. However, Russia's low score on democratisation, making it a 'hybrid democracy', undermines this causation. Democracies do go to war with non-democracies as often as other states do. Since Russia is not a true democracy, regime oriented explanations are neither entirely valid nor sufficient in explaining the stable political order of the Arctic.

Conclusion

This article has applied insights from classical IR theory and has investigated how some crucial analytical factors could be related to the political order in the Arctic. This insight is relevant for decision makers both in order to secure peace and maintain good and efficient governance, as well as to contribute to a broader understanding of how to handle the vast challenges facing the region due to climate change.

On a systemic level, empirical findings suggest that the power structure of the Arctic is multipolar. While the dynamics inherited in multipolar systems may tend to be unstable, this aspect is profoundly mitigated by multilateral institutions and a demonstrated respect for international law by the Arctic states. As such, the Arctic could therefore be interpreted as having many similarities to a Kantian internationalist federation, where the rule of international law prevails together with shared norms

and respect for the rights of foreign republics. However, Russia's 'hybrid democracy' remains a limitation to achieving an even more 'Kantian peace' in the region.

In assessing what actors relatively gain or lose the most due to the current political order in the north, the effects of two key properties, multipolarity and the effect of institutionalised cooperation, should be addressed. Since the two potentially strongest poles, the USA and Russia, are both unwilling and unable to dominate the region, multipolar dynamics can give more room to the relatively smaller states. It has been mostly the Arctic states with territories bordering the polar ocean that have exploited this opportunity. However, within these smaller littoral states, opportunities have been grasped through robust capacity building and significant military and civilian presence in the region. When further analysing the effects of international law and institutions, one should note the following; for the USA and Russia, the law of the sea and AC certainly seem to be venues for exercising legitimate influence in the region, as well as being instruments for building trust, and countering a costly arms race. Still, with the possible exception of Russia potentially being able to reach international acceptance for the outermost limits of its extended continental shelf, it is not easy to see the large unilateral benefits that the law of the sea or AC provide these two countries, benefits that they would not have otherwise obtained. The situation appears to be different for the smaller Arctic countries. When looking at the American Arctic, it seems the LOSC and the AC give Canada, as opposed to the USA, much greater influence than it would have if the region did not have the legal and inter-governmental framework. A striking example is the fact that Canada presently sits at the table in the LOSC decision making bodies, while the USA is not a member, and hence has no formal voice. Similarly, the USA has repeatedly been dependent on Canadian infrastructure, such as icebreakers, when operating in the Arctic. A parallel situation may be mirrored in the Norwegian – EU relationship, in which Norway's position as an AC member gives it a greater voice in Arctic governance than the EU, which currently is not even allowed the status of an observer in the council. Furthermore, based on its Arctic competence and presence in the region, Norway has as a non-EU country been able to exploit these factors to exercise influence on the development of the EU's maritime and Arctic policy. This has partly taken place through the European Economic Area (EEA) framework but, is also a result of a proactive and instrumentally utilisation of 'hard' infrastructure, demonstrating insight and competence for example through inviting key EU decision makers to Norwegian research vessels and scientific stations in the Arctic (J. Richardson, personal communication, 21 October 2008). The LOSC also adds to this picture by giving the Norwegian state significant institutionalised rights such as jurisdiction in large parts of the European Arctic, an area of increasing importance and interest to the European Union.

In a multi-polar situation based on respect for international law and a tendency to strengthen inter-governmental institutions, the author would argue that the smaller Arctic states are the prime beneficiaries. As most of the Arctic consists of coastal areas around the Arctic Ocean, the smaller littoral states (Canada, Denmark/Greenland, and Norway), are possibly gaining the most from the multi-polar but still highly institutionalised structure. Their position is both a result of static geographical facts, as well as realist assumptions about the importance of military presence combined with diplomatic activism, seizing room for pro-active political initiatives and active support for multilateral cooperation and international law. The political gains experienced by the smaller states in the high north might be best expressed by their very robust presence in the Arctic, combined with their strong support for an enhanced AC and their firm and steadfast position in respecting the LOSC.

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