

The United States and China in the Arctic

Ingrid Lundestad and Øystein Tunsjø

Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, P.O. Box 890 Sentrum, 0104 Oslo. Norway
(Ingrid.Lundestad@ifs.mil.no)

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ABSTRACT. US-China relations represent the most central bilateral relationship in the world, but few studies investigate the two countries' approaches to the Arctic. This article explores the geopolitical shifts in the Arctic, and compares and contrasts American and Chinese policy in the region. The article examines to what extent the two have common or conflicting interests, and discusses the potential for US-China friction and rivalry. Some alarmist writers suggest that the future Arctic is set for confrontation. This article, however, argues that the current stakes in the circumpolar Arctic region are not sufficiently high to warrant confrontation between the two states. Cooperation predominantly guides their policies and activities. While they play different roles and increasingly seek to demonstrate their influence, there are common interests, such as in the freedom of the seas, in resource extraction and in developing infrastructure in the region.

Introduction

US Secretary of Defense C. Hagel recently stated that 'the Arctic is becoming more important, and regardless of the rate and scale of change, we must be ready to contribute to national efforts in pursuit of strategic objectives in the region' (US Department of Defense 2013a: 1). Likewise, China has expressed its rising interest in the Arctic. In 2013, China became observer to the Arctic Council (AC). With a warming climate, the Arctic ice-cap is retreating, and this entails commercial, strategic, diplomatic, military and environmental opportunities and challenges for Arctic and non-Arctic states. Judging by their global influence, understanding the Arctic perspectives and relations of the United States and China is important.

This article attempts to bring additional understanding of great power interest in the Arctic. By examining the United States and China's policies and interaction here, it also provides a new perspective on US-China relations, bringing awareness of regional nuances in the overall relationship between these two countries. We argue that while the United States and China are showing increasing interest in the Arctic, the potential for confrontation is presently limited. The two have more common than diverging interests here, and other areas of the world remain more important to these great powers. Currently, the stakes in the Arctic are not sufficiently high to warrant confrontation between them. To a limited extent, there is a potential for competition for influence, as China seeks to get more involved, while the United States promotes a stable situation maintaining its interests. Yet the practical policy perspectives of the two seem to converge, and regional circumstances contribute to promote and expand cooperation in the Arctic.

While the United States remains the most powerful country in the world, China is currently the only great power recognised as capable of challenging US dominance (US Department of Defense 2013b; Ross and Zhu 2008; Mearsheimer 2006). The US is therefore rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific (US Department of

Defense 2012a, 2012b; US Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011; Ross 2013). Confrontation has gradually increased in the overall relationship between the United States and China over the last few years (Mearsheimer in press 2014; Roy 2013; Friedberg 2012). For a more benign view see Swaine 2011). Much has been written about a negative trend in US-China relations, in particular the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific and China's 'new assertiveness' (Johnston 2013; Yahuda 2012; Bader 2012; Ross 2012; Dutton and others 2012; Christensen 2011). Few studies examine these two countries' approaches to the world's northernmost region. In putting the spotlight on these states' Arctic affairs, this article turns first to the broader debate about the situation in the Arctic, moves on to address US, and then, Chinese, regional policy, before comparing and contrasting their roles and interests, and assessing their interaction.

The situation in the Arctic

In the Arctic, Arctic and non-Arctic states see new opportunities as the polar ice-cap is recognised as melting, especially for petroleum and mineral extraction and new routes for maritime transportation (Conley and others 2012; Gottemoeller and Tamnes 2008; Lasserre 2010; Holtmark and Smith-Windsor 2009; Fossum and Rousset 2011). Western and Asian researchers and commentators have in recent years anticipated confrontation and conflict as states 'scramble' and 'race' for resources and control of sea lanes in the Arctic (Borgerson 2008; Blunden 2012; Rainwater 2012; Spiegel 2012; Rosenthal 2012; Holmes 2012). Borgerson (2009) writes that 'a Great Game is developing in the world's far north,' while Huebert (2013) highlights a 'growing militarization of the Arctic' (see also Wright 2011; Sharp 2011; Alexeeva and Lasserre 2012). China's growing interest in the Arctic is apparently raising concern and alarm among littoral states, China's Asian neighbours and the international community (Murthy 2012; NIDS 2011; Jakobson and Peng 2011; Sakhuja 2011; Jakobson 2012; Solli and

others 2013). Hence, one might fear confrontation between the United States and China in the Arctic, or that a competitive relationship between the two elsewhere, may spill over into the Arctic.

At the same time, a closer examination of international affairs in the Arctic shows that extensive cooperation is continuing (Young 2009; Koivurova 2010; Wegge 2011; Tamnes and Offerdal in press; Brosnan and others 2011; Rosamond 2011). There are outstanding legal claims among coastal states, but with the Arctic being primarily a maritime domain, they agree that the law of the sea provides the applicable legal framework (Ilulissat Declaration 2008). New observers to the AC have agreed to the same principles (AC 2011). Even on a coast guard and military side, states in the region coordinate and explore opportunities for new cooperation (Miles 2013).

Concerning petroleum, the US Geological Survey estimates that about 13 percent of the world's total undiscovered oil and about 30 percent of yet-to-be-discovered reserves of natural gas might be found in the Arctic (USGS 2008). Yet more than 80 percent of the undiscovered petroleum resources are expected to be offshore and the fields most attractive to develop are suggested to be within the littoral states' exclusive economic zones (EEZs) or in non-disputed shelf in the Arctic Ocean (Holtmark and Smith-Windsor 2009: 14). It is estimated that there are very few hydrocarbon reserves in any seabed under the Arctic Ocean not under coastal state control, and these are areas that would be very hard to develop (Offerdal 2009; Baker 2012). The difficulties with the Shtokman project illustrate some of the challenges actors encounter in petroleum exploration and production in the Arctic (see among others Chazan and Belton 2012). The shale gas revolution in the United States, and potentially in China and elsewhere, also challenges the commercial viability of Arctic gas exploration and production. Environmental concerns may further influence the level of petroleum activity, in particular as the Arctic is largely a fragile environment with few capacities and capabilities for spill response (Keil 2014).

As regards more sustainable resources, Chinese officials have stressed the importance of exploring international waters and accessing new fishing grounds (Tang 2013). Large parts of the Arctic Ocean are beyond the EEZ of the coastal states and stocks of fish are migrating northwards due to an increase in water temperatures and decrease in ice cover. However, it is unlikely that large cod (*Gadus* sp.) stocks will cross the shelf-break and move further into the deep polar ocean (Bogstad 2013). It remains uncertain whether the Arctic Ocean will provide opportunities for commercial fisheries. More scientific research of Arctic fish population has been requested, as reflected in the US moratorium on fishing in American Arctic waters (Murphy 2009).

Increased attention towards the Arctic and wariness about the potential for confrontation also relates to an interest in new shipping routes. Avoiding maritime piracy

and cutting costs, with shorter routes between Asia and Europe, are often highlighted in reports about the commercial and strategic opportunities presented. It is estimated that the maritime route between Asia and Europe can be reduced almost 40% using the northeast passage or the northwest passage. From Rotterdam to Yokohama, the distance is 13,950 km through the northwest passage, and 13,360 through the northeast passage. Comparatively, the distance is 23,470 km going through Panama, and 21,170 km through Suez (Jakobson 2010; Lasserre and Pelletier 2011). Yet, several factors are working against the routes' commercial viability, such as seasonal variations, the need for icebreakers, costs of insurance, and risks associated with difficult conditions in an area of limited infrastructure and search and rescue capabilities. Arctic routes cannot provide punctuality and reliability that the business model of many bulk carriers depend on. Still some shipping companies are increasingly looking, and going, north. Yet transit numbers remain limited, especially relative to other sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and some even question future commercial viability (see Balmasov 2013; Mitchell and Milne 2013; Keil and Raspotnik 2013).

The United States and the Arctic

Unlike China, the United States (US) is one of the Arctic littoral countries, due to the state of Alaska. The region was in the cold war important to American military strategy. As the cold war ended, the US became part of multilateral cooperation among the Arctic states, at the same time that the region's strategic importance for the US was reduced. In the late 2000s, the Arctic started to get more, yet moderate, attention in policy circles in the US. This section shows that the US has updated its Arctic policy, by issuing new policy statements, and indicated that it wants to be more active in the region, although little investment has yet been made. Primarily, the US seeks to ensure a stable and secure region, in which its interests are maintained (Lundestad 2013).

The administration of George W. Bush initiated a review of US Arctic policy in its second term. Bush issued a national security and homeland security presidential directive in January 2009, shortly before the inauguration of President Barack Obama (US (White House) 2009). The Obama administration maintains that the 2009 directive continues to represent US Arctic policy, while at the same time it has added several policy statements on the Arctic. This includes its second term 'national strategy for the Arctic region' (US (White House) 2013) and the associated 'implementation plan' (US (White House) 2014).

US policy confirms that it has 'broad and fundamental national security interests' and 'fundamental homeland security interests' in the Arctic (US (White House) 2009). The Obama administration, like its predecessors, seeks to meet US 'national security needs, protect the environment, responsibly manage resources, account for

indigenous communities, support scientific research, and strengthen international cooperation on a wide range of issues' (US (White House) 2010).

Overall, the US argument is one of cooperation. The Bush administration on a few occasions warned that although a warming Arctic offered opportunities, 'developments were also 'potential sources of competition and conflict for access and natural resources (US Marine Corps and others 2007). Although operating independently, if necessary, also in the Arctic, the Obama administration has consistently highlighted the importance of cooperation to the Arctic policy of the United States, most recently in the White House's (2013) Arctic strategy. In particular, the Obama administration has put emphasis on cooperating through the AC (see among others Otero 2010; Gillies 2010), as exemplified by the presence of the American Secretaries of State, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, at the Council's most recent ministerial meetings, in 2011 and 2013 respectively. Concerning non-Arctic states, such as China, the US states that it seeks to work with these states, together with other Arctic nations, 'to advance common objectives in the Arctic region,' yet in a manner that 'protects Arctic states' national interests and resources' (US (White House) 2013). The Obama administration has also included public-private partnerships as a cost-effective way of dealing with emerging Arctic challenges (US (White House) 2013).

Concerning the legal regime in the Arctic, the US Senate has not given its advice and consent to US accession to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, even though all recent administrations have supported accession. While the US is not party to the convention, it considers the main provisions as customary international law, and it does not see a need to develop any new comprehensive legal regime to govern the Arctic (US (White House) 2009). The greatest legal controversy for the United States in the Arctic is perhaps the disagreement with Canada over the status of the northwest passage. The US maintains that the passage is a strait for international navigation, while Canada argues that it is internal waterway. Although continuing to oppose each other's legal positions, the two parties have more or less 'agreed to disagree' on the issue (Byers 2009: 56–58, 131).

As regards security and safety in the region, the overarching national security objective is 'a secure and stable region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is protected, and nations work cooperatively to address challenges' (US Department of Defense 2013a: 2; also US Department of Defense 2011a: 8). US Arctic policy identifies 'missile defense and early warning; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight,' as relevant interests in the Arctic (US (White House) 2009; see also Conley and others 2012: 20–27). Such interests, not least with respect to the freedom of the seas and being able to operate in all

kinds of environments, are longstanding and central US priorities (Lundestad 2013).

In recent years, the US military has studied and evaluated the consequences of a changing Arctic for its operational environment and capabilities. Among other things, the Arctic has been explicitly included in the maritime strategy, the national defense strategy, and the quadrennial defense review. The unified command plan modified the command structure for the Arctic, sharing the region between the US Northern Command and the US European Command, while leaving the US Pacific Command without regional responsibilities. Moreover, the US Navy has presented Arctic roadmaps, and the Department of Defense has issued a report and a strategy on the Arctic (US Marine Corps and others 2007; US Department of Defense 2008; US Department of Defense 2010; Garamone 2011; US Navy 2009; US Navy 2010; US Navy 2014; US Department of Defense 2011a, US Department of Defense 2013a). In this way, US agencies have shown that they are monitoring developments and assessing what US measures are appropriate and necessary given the current and future situation in the region.

The general view is that 'U.S. national security interests for the Arctic region reflect the relatively low level of threat in a region bounded by nation states that have not only publicly committed to working within a common framework of international law and diplomatic engagement, but also demonstrated ability and commitment to doing so over the last fifty years' (US Department of Defense 2011a: 8). US Arctic policy does not refer to any traditional state threats in the region. The policy directive issued by Bush only states terrorism and criminal and hostile acts as explicit potential challenges in the region.

Concerning capabilities to meet challenges, the estimate is that 'existing DoD posture in the region is adequate to meet near- to mid-term U.S. defense needs.' Access to the Arctic is here seen possible through 'proven capabilities, including submarines and aircraft,' although it is recognised that 'only U.S.-flagged ice-capable ships provide visible U.S. sovereign maritime presence.' This refers to 'icebreakers or ice-strengthened surface vessels, none of which are in the U.S. Navy current surface combatant inventory, but which exist in U.S. Coast Guard's inventory in limited numbers' (US Department of Defense 2011a: 3). Moreover, the United States operates bases in the north, in Alaska and Thule, Greenland.

Icebreakers have been central to US debate on Arctic interests, as relevant for demonstrating US presence in the region, responding to incidents in Arctic waters, as well as to facilitate research. The United States Coast Guard currently has one operational medium icebreaker, *Healy*, which is specifically adapted for scientific research. The two heavy icebreakers in USCG inventory have not been operational, but one is being reactivated for service (Papp 2011: 5; Song 2012). As prospects for increased activity in the region are being discussed, including more transport going through northern sea routes, the Coast Guard and other parties are arguing

that new icebreakers need to be built (US Coast Guard 2013). While the US has not made this a priority, the Obama administration's budget proposal for fiscal year 2013 allocated \$8 million 'to initiate acquisition of a new polar icebreaker' (US (White House) 2012).

Lastly, US policy addresses the Arctic on the one hand as an energy region, while on the other as an ecologically fragile environment. The risks of oil spills and the challenges related to responding to them have been put on the agenda, with a specific eye on drilling in the north (Joling 2011). Internationally, the US initiated an oil spill preparedness and response task force (US Department of the Interior 2011), which led to an international agreement signed in Kiruna in 2013.

To sum up: while the Arctic has not been as strategically important to the US as it was during the cold war, the US has in recent years expressed an interest in having a more active role. It wants to make sure that the Arctic remains stable and that US interests in the region are secured. New engagement has been visible in the US government reviewing and assessing US Arctic policy and relevant capabilities, and the emphasis given to international cooperation in the region.

Although the United States has developed its Arctic policy, there has been less activity when it comes to implementation and investment. For instance, the US has still not acceded to the Convention on the Law of the Sea, and recent administrations have been criticised for not strengthening US icebreaking capability. There are signs that the Obama administration intends to work on this, although it needs the support of the US Congress. More broadly, the Department of Defense (2011a: 3) has stated that '[t]he challenge is to balance the risk of being late-to-need with the opportunity cost of making premature Arctic investments'. Even though the US is an Arctic nation, the Arctic is quite peripheral from the perspective of the 48 states of the contiguous US. The economic situation and other foreign policy issues are perceived as more urgent and important. US attention to the region is increasing, yet, is still modest. The US has engaged, to the extent perceived necessary, to ensure that the Arctic remains in a secure state, which maintains US regional, and global, interests (Lundestad 2013). The US welcomes non-Arctic states, according to the European Command's Arctic strategy chief, E. Westfall (interviewed in Miles 2013), as partners in keeping the region safe, secure and stable.

China and the Arctic

In contrast to the United States, China has not published an official document on China's Arctic policy. One scholar following China's increasing Arctic activities closely does not expect China to publish an Arctic strategy within the next decade, arguing that the region is not presently a priority of foreign policy officials and simply not high enough on the political agenda (Jakobson 2013). This remains to be seen. While the Arctic will not

preoccupy China's top-leaders for the foreseeable future, the Chinese government may issue a strategy or policy document to clarify China's official position on Arctic affairs, as other states and entities have done in the past.

In July 2009, Hu Zhengyue, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, delivered the speech 'China's Arctic Policy,' at the high north study tour at Svalbard. This speech, and other comments and press statements from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), are some of the few authoritative statements by the government on Chinese Arctic policy. The lack of formal policy documents from top decision making bodies, including the Politburo and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), makes it difficult to associate statements to official policy. But statements by the MFA, for instance regarding the AC are probably approved by the top leaders. Hu Zhengyue's speech was developed further and published on the MFA's webpage in July 2010 under the title 'China's view on Arctic cooperation' (Chinese MFA 2010), which signals that it represents official Chinese views on the Arctic.

China's stand has been interpreted as a 'wait-and-see' approach to Arctic developments, wary that active overtures would cause alarm in other countries due to China's size and status as a rising global power' (Jakobson 2010: 2). Nonetheless, while remaining cautious, China has prepared itself for a more active role in the Arctic. The push for observer status in the AC, and an increasing Chinese presence both on Iceland and Svalbard, evince a clear, official Chinese interest (Alexeeva and Lasserre 2012; Gang Chen 2012; Solli and others 2013). It has been reported that China has a large diplomatic presence in Iceland and that its embassy is the largest in the capital Reykjavik (Tatlow 2012). Strong diplomatic presence has facilitated the signing of a free trade agreement between Iceland and China, the first free trade agreement between China and a European country (Trotman 2013). China's first Arctic research station, Hunghe (Yellow River), was founded at Ny-Ålesund in Norway's Svalbard archipelago in July 2004 and China is now investing in polar hardware, refurbishing and upgrading its polar bases and facilities, and expanding the number of Chinese polar scientists (Brady 2012).

China's growing interest and activism in the Arctic are primarily shaped by scientific considerations, commercial interest in the petroleum, shipping and mineral sector, as well as diplomatic and legal concerns (Tang 2013; Chinese MFA 2010; Jakobson 2013). China started to pay attention to the Arctic in the 1990s, primarily for scientific purposes. China has now expanded its polar research capabilities and is developing strong polar scientific research programmes (Chinese MFA 2010). The building of a new 8000 ton conventional icebreaker, in addition to the 20,000 ton conventional-powered icebreaker *Xuelong*, purchased from Ukraine in 1993, promises to provide China with the capacity to operate in the high Arctic (and Antarctica) more frequently than many of the littoral states. While status and prestige might be an additional factor driving China's polar research,

developing its own Arctic research may allow China to make a stronger contribution in addressing Arctic affairs (Jakobson 2010: 3; Wright 2011).

High oil prices, new maritime transportation routes and energy security concerns are other factors attracting the current interest in the Arctic by China's government and petroleum and shipping industry. It has been increasingly recognised that Arctic petroleum reserves, minerals and new transportation routes may offer investment and commercial opportunities for Chinese national oil companies, Chinese entities interested in Arctic mineral resources, and the Chinese shipping sector. The melting of Arctic ice may allow China to further diversify its trade routes and sources and routes of petroleum and mineral imports.

It remains to be seen to what extent the Arctic Ocean will play a role in the strategic planning of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Other seas and oceans, including the South and East China Sea and the Pacific and Indian Ocean and issues, such as protecting China's sovereignty and developing access denial capabilities, are of higher priority and importance. The PLA Navy's participation in escort missions in the Gulf of Aden indicates a growing interest in protecting SLOCs (Erickson and Strange 2013). However, it will be a long time until SLOCs in the Arctic Ocean will be commercially attractive and there are presently few threats to security here.

China lacks an EEZ and rights to any underwater continental shelf in the Arctic and China's national oil companies are likely to struggle to secure a stake in the challenging and high-cost exploration and production environment in the Arctic, which requires state-of-the-art technology. One option is to partner with foreign companies in joint ventures or to invest in companies already operating in the Arctic. In late November 2013 it became clear that China's National Offshore Oil Corporation will operate with Statoil and Iceland's Eykon Energy firm to explore for oil offshore Iceland's southeast coast (Reuters 2013). Large energy deals between Rosneft and China's National Petroleum Company was signed in 2013 and it was announced during President Xi's visit to Russia in March that China's oil companies would explore Arctic fields for oil and gas (Bierman 2013; Katakey and Kennedy 2013; Bierman and Arkhipov 2013). Chinese investments will also be used to develop Russian petroleum infrastructure. This opens the possibility for developing pipelines from Russia's Arctic coastline and northern Siberia that potentially could link up with the East Siberia Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline, the Sino-Russian oil pipeline and a potential gas pipeline from Russia to China (Tunnsjø 2013).

Seaborne Arctic petroleum supplies do not improve China's energy security. It is only the US Navy that can blockade China's seaborne oil supply. In order to be effective, a potential maritime blockade must be enforced close to China's coast. Hence, the northeast passage does not provide China with any alternative seaborne supply

route in a potential war time contingency with the United States. Increasing the capacity of oil pipeline from Russia to China and building a gas pipeline will enhance China's energy security. Hence, it is likely that China will place priority on such development in addition to relying on petroleum shipment through the Arctic Ocean (Tunnsjø 2013).

Regarding diplomatic and legal concerns, some Chinese civilian and military observers have questioned the legal framework for the region. Rear-Admiral Yin Zhou's comment in March 2010 that 'the North Pole and surrounding areas are the common wealth of the world's people and do not belong to any one country' is often cited in the literature assessing Chinese perspectives on the Arctic (Dawney 2013). None-Chinese observers also writes that China's position is based on 'the premise that the Arctic remains a global commons, with non-Arctic states having access to the region and its resources,' and emphasise that China might challenge the legal position of the coastal states through positioning itself as a 'near-Arctic state' with 'legitimate rights' in the Arctic (Stephens 2012; see also Blank 2013; O'Rourke 2013: 53; Guschin 2013). With no authoritative Arctic strategy published by the central government, it appears that alarmist voices have been allowed to shape China's public debate over its Arctic policy. At the same time, Hu Zhengyue, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, has clearly stated that China supports both the legal framework of the Arctic and the cooperation promoted by the AC (Chinese MFA 2010; Tang 2013). China's willingness to become an AC observer supports the view that China does not challenge the sovereignty of the littoral states in the Arctic Ocean.

Conversely, some Chinese analysts have argued that China's observer status in the AC 'bring more obligations than rights to China' (Chen 2012: 364). Indeed, by joining the AC, China confirms its authority and the rights and legal position of the Arctic states, while China maintains no formal decision-making authority. The AC has a limited mandate and China, strictly, does not need the AC to advance its commercial, shipping and petroleum interests in the Arctic, which instead can, and largely have been, promoted and safeguarded through bilateral deals. Moreover, China has been engaged in scientific collaboration in the Arctic before the AC became a prominent forum and China is a signatory to the Spitsbergen Treaty. Maintaining an ambiguous position on how the law of the sea should be interpreted in the Arctic Ocean could have provided China with flexibility and more bargaining options. Yet China's senior officials accepted the Arctic states' sovereign rights in becoming observer. This can be seen as consistent with China's peaceful development strategy, the principles of peaceful coexistence, and may serve to prevent speculation and alarmist views about China's position. By not seeking a strong stake in Arctic sovereignty claims, China maintains a consistent position as party to UNCLOS. It also promotes its view that non-littoral states have no significant role to play in China's

maritime disputes in the South and East China Sea (see Chinese contributions to Dutton and others 2012).

In sum, there are strong indications that China supports the law of the sea and the legal framework for the Arctic region and that it respects the sovereignty of Arctic states. China is likely to boost its Arctic-focused research and has recently acquired an additional conventional powered icebreaker. China's interests in the Arctic are commercially and scientifically driven. China wants to increase its diplomatic role in the Arctic, bilaterally seeking to influence states in the region to advance its interests and multilaterally continuing to promote its presence in the AC. Chinese attention to the Arctic should, however, be modified by the fact that the Chinese is increasing its activity and presence all over the globe, and other areas are receiving more attention than the Arctic.

Different roles, common interests?

There are substantial and obvious differences between the United States and China in the Arctic. The US is an Arctic coastal state, with a more longstanding interest in the region. It has a population, territory, EEZ and continental shelf in the Arctic. The US has also for decades had a significant presence in the broader circumpolar region. It is a member of Arctic cooperative forums such as the AC. The US has strong influence and maintains broad interests in the Arctic, including significant strategic and political interests, due to its regional and global responsibilities. The freedom of the seas, facilitating US presence and activity, remains a top priority for the US, in the Arctic, as elsewhere.

Compared to the US, China is a relative newcomer and first showed its interest in the region when it started Arctic scientific research in the 1990s. China is not an Arctic state, has no Arctic coastline and has no sovereign rights in the area. Thus, China's access to the Arctic is more constrained and the US and China are unequal powers in Arctic affairs.

Also the types and broadness of interests the two countries have in the region are significantly different. On the one hand, the United States has interests in most if not all issues pertaining to the Arctic region, related to diplomacy, defence, economy, including energy, the environment, research, and the indigenous population. China on the other hand, has more limited interests in the region, primarily pertaining to economic development and research. Thus the roles of the two countries in the Arctic are quite different.

Even with such an uneven foundation for their current engagement in the north, there are some similarities in how the two countries view the region. On a general basis, the US is a global power and China a great power in the Asia-Pacific with increasingly global ambitions. This has implications for their approaches to the Arctic, which may be more similar than the case between, for instance, China and other Arctic states. As great powers with more or less a global outlook, the Arctic is viewed

as just one region among many in their respective foreign policies. For many of the other Arctic countries, perhaps most notably Canada and Norway, the north has a much more prominent place.

Because of this global outlook, it may be argued that the Arctic is not considered of vital strategic interest to either great power. While the Bush administration in the 'war on terror' focused on the broader middle east, the Obama administration has put explicit emphasis on the Asia-Pacific (US Department of Defense 2012a; Clinton 2011). Also China is currently preoccupied with the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the western Pacific. Thus, while the US has more longstanding and broader interests in the Arctic than China does, the intensity of these interests, when seen next to other priorities, make them less different from those of China.

Even if the Arctic Ocean becomes navigable and strategically more important in the future, China may continue to focus diplomatically and militarily on its sovereignty claims and territorial disputes in the Yellow Sea and the South and East China Sea. The Arctic is not mentioned in the 2013 white paper on China's armed forces (Chinese White Paper 2013). China has no territorial claims in the Arctic and cannot be expected to have a significant military presence here. For China it is more relevant to continue to emphasise sea control in coastal waters and access denial capabilities in the near seas and the western Pacific. Growing power projection capabilities and the developments of a 'blue water' navy facilitate missions in the high seas, but it is likely that China will deploy its naval vessels to other oceans and seas, such as the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, rather than the Arctic.

This implies that the United States and China have less focus on and activity in the Arctic than what their statuses as great powers may indicate. As noted, the US Department of Defense wants to balance its Arctic engagement, ensuring that the US neither invests too much nor too little. Thus, it seems as if the US wants to be as active in the region as deemed necessary to protect its interests (Lundestad 2013). While the Chinese government has not published any official Arctic strategy, their priorities are likely to resemble the balancing act of the US, although China has so far been more ambiguous about what role it will play in the Arctic. Both countries have become more active in the region as the Arctic is opening up to more activity and other Arctic and non-Arctic states are paying more attention to it.

There also exist certain common interests in the Arctic, especially related to the freedom of the seas. US and Chinese foreign affairs and maritime agencies have met to talk about issues related to oceans, the law of the sea and the polar regions (US Department of State 2014). The US as a global maritime power has an interest in the Arctic in terms of navigation and overflight, and we have seen that China sees the potential for benefiting from Arctic transport routes. Thus, both countries seem to argue in favour of the freedom of the seas and seeing Arctic

passages as straits for international navigation. However, conflicting views and interpretations of UNCLOS and maritime rights in the South China Sea may compromise US-China cooperation regarding the usage of sea lanes in the Arctic. A Chinese exception to accepted rules of international law, such as in the South China Sea, could undermine laws guaranteeing freedom of navigation elsewhere (Dutton 2012). Thus, China could support Russia's and Canada's position that Arctic sea passages are internal and their policies of imposing restrictions by remaining silent and accepting the rules, regulations, and regimes enforced in the waters and sea lanes defined as internal waters.

China's own sovereignty and jurisdictional claims in the South China Sea are likely to continue to be China's primary consideration. China faces the traditional challenge, shared by other coastal states and maritime nations, of balancing expanding jurisdictional waters and of developing the natural resources in those waters on the one hand, and the desire of major maritime powers to uphold the principle of the freedom of the seas throughout the world, on the other (Wu and Zhang 2012). In other words, China is facing a dilemma and needs to juggle between global norms and national interests. So far, China has supported coastal states' claims to jurisdiction, partly in conflict with its own, and US, maritime interests in the Arctic. China and the US have no conflicting maritime claims in the Arctic or the South and East China Sea. Overall, a few disputes remain over delineating maritime jurisdiction in the Arctic, but in comparison to some of the disputes in the South and the East China Sea they have been resolved peacefully or have been alleviated through joint development. Those still being debated are seeking settlement in cooperative ways and within the existing legal framework.

Arctic affairs are to a great extent viewed in a multi-lateral context. This is exemplified through the growing emphasis given to the AC, including from the US and China. Here, China's participation in the AC as observer, and perhaps more generally in the Arctic, have been dependent upon Chinese support for existing frameworks and actors, not upsetting the current stability (AC 2011). This is consistent with US interests in a stable region and the broader US goal of pulling China in as a 'responsible stakeholder' in international affairs. US engagement with China over the last few decades, suggests that there is more support for a policy of bringing China into multilateral cooperation than isolating and keeping China outside such frameworks. Generally, China wants to become part of Arctic diplomacy, and the US wants to emphasise inclusion in the region and council (Benneth 2012; US (White House) 2013).

The Arctic as a focal point in US-China relations?

US-China interaction in the Arctic remains limited. In the bilateral relationship between these two countries, there are other pressing issues on the agenda, showing

that Arctic affairs are a less conflicting or contentious issue. In the region, it is relevant to comment on the fact that the US Pacific Command no longer has Arctic responsibilities. This decision was built upon an assessment that the Northern Command and particularly the European Command have longstanding relationships in the region, in addition to this improving 'unity of effort' (US Department of Defense 2011b). In this way, the Pacific Command, whose responsibilities include China, may concentrate on the Asia-Pacific and does not have a specific Arctic role. This reflects the tendency that the US interacts a lot more with others in the Arctic, primarily Arctic and European states.

As China becomes more active in the Arctic, there may be prospects for more interaction and regional meeting points, and even more rivalry and competition as many have warned about. In addition, structural factors or the distribution of capabilities and a potential bipolar system, with only two superpowers and concentrated on US-China relations, leave 'no peripheries'. As Waltz (1964) has argued, 'not only are there no peripheries in a bipolar world but also, as a second consideration, the range of factors included in the competition is extended as the intensity of the competition increases'. In other words, US-China competition and rivalry in the Arctic could signal the coming and the beginning of a bipolar international system characterised by hard balancing and strategies of containment. Nonetheless, the above arguments show that this is not the situation today, and certain features specific to the Arctic region, and the US-China relationship, may continue to promote cooperative relations in the north, rather than confrontation as an effect of any conflicting interests.

Limited capabilities have in the past contributed to regional cooperation. By pooling assets, Arctic countries have found that activities and responsibilities may be more easily and effectively undertaken. For instance, the United States and Canada have for several years cooperated on mapping the ocean floor to survey their respective extended continental shelves (Van Pay and Moore 2012). In this cooperation, the US has employed its only working icebreaker *Healy*. Polar research is often pursued cooperatively and icebreakers have repeatedly been used to support national and international expeditions by Arctic and non-Arctic states. Small cooperative steps in scientific cooperation between China and the US were taken in 2009 when Chinese scientists 'embarked on a USCG ice breaker to retrieve data from buoys in the polar region.' But the study notes that 'much more can and should be done' (Goldstein and Chase 2012: 255). Chinese and US scientists have also worked together in other dimensions, for instance through the International Arctic Research Center (2014).

At the same time, certain individuals in the United States, when arguing that the federal government needs to allocate money for increased icebreaking capability, have referred to expanding Chinese capabilities in this area, which may be interpreted in competitive terms

(Colvin 2011; Forgey 2011). However, there have also been suggestions along the lines of seeing opportunities for partnership with Russia and China on research like hydrographic surveys (Titley and St. John 2010: 40). Environmental challenges in the Arctic also seem to foster cooperation in areas such as polar research, developing infrastructure and search and rescue capacity. The harsh climate conditions may fuel cooperation in the usage of icebreakers to safeguard sea routes, and in the development of joint ventures in the petroleum sector that capitalise on the state of art technology and investments opportunities.

China and the US are the largest oil consumers and importers in the world and energy considerations are influencing their diplomatic and strategic calculations. China's increasing role in the world energy market contributes to US-China competition. An active Chinese role in the search for petroleum in the Arctic may raise a contentious issue between China and the US. China, however, is not an Arctic coastal state and is unlikely to control any large petroleum production in the region. China's national oil company's overseas petroleum production or equity production is largely sold in the international petroleum market for profit rather than being shipped back home (Jiang and Sinton 2011; Tunstjø 2013). Chinese investments and involvement in Arctic petroleum production or as a market for Arctic petroleum are unlikely to remove assets from the global market. In this way, potential Chinese involvement in Arctic petroleum development does not necessarily work at the expense of the supply and diversity of the international petroleum market. Moreover, the development of shale resources in the US, is likely to reduce the relative importance of extracting petroleum resources in the Arctic. Added are the commercial and environmental challenges to increasing petroleum production in the Arctic, as discussed previously.

The inhospitable environment in the Arctic may also contribute to peaceful relations and restrict potential military operations. As Holmes (2011) points out, the 'strategic value of geographical positions in and around the region will fluctuate as navigable waters open and close.' Thus, 'shifting geography may make the Arctic region a region of relative calm' and 'sustained combat among surface warships would range from difficult to impossible for most of the year.' Military deployments to the Arctic are currently not a major priority for China and the US. Even in a situation in which the Arctic is seasonally ice-free it will remain a difficult environment in which to conduct military operations.

The flag often follows the trade and China has increasingly participated in securing sea lines of communication and shows the flag around the world in order to promote and safeguard its interests. Nonetheless, other areas than the Arctic are taking priority. Eventual sporadic missions and deployments to the Arctic by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) will not in itself substantially change the security environment. Strategically and militarily

it may be ideal for China to operate strategic nuclear submarines or nuclear attack submarines once they become operational, in the Indian, Pacific and Arctic Ocean as nuclear deterrence. However, melting Arctic ice will make it easier to track submarines by surface ships and satellites, and naval deployments can be monitored when passing through the Bering Strait. Hence, the PLAN's submarines may instead prefer operating in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

In the cold war, the Arctic had a significant military role, its being between the US and the Soviet Union. A similar role in any controversy between the US and China, is currently difficult to imagine. The Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean were critical areas of operation for the Soviet Union's Northern Fleet during the cold war and the Soviet Navy could threaten important SLOCs in the North Atlantic. US military plans sought to eliminate or minimise this threat in a potential war. In an unlikely war between China and the United States, naval activity will probably concentrate on the Pacific, and the Arctic have a much more limited strategic importance. Even if the melting of the Arctic ice-cap and new shipping routes increase the strategic importance of the Arctic region, potential conflict may be limited by the fact that the oceans of the world are seamless and sea lanes are difficult to control.

Conclusions

While the US has a longstanding role in the region, China has more recently tried to become involved in Arctic affairs. Their Arctic policies and activities are present in parallel, in which they play different roles, and both see more urgent situations in other parts of the world. There are fundamental differences in the roles of the two, especially as one is an Arctic littoral state and the other an external state seeking influence. There are also some common interests, such as that in the freedom of the seas, new trade routes and petroleum resources, as the Arctic Ocean is opening. The changes in the Arctic entail prospects for cooperation, partly due to a lack of infrastructure in a challenging environment. While the US may more naturally cooperate with other Arctic states, including Russia, China has a bearing on economic, scientific and diplomatic activity in the region.

There is little high level regional interaction among the US and China in the Arctic. This helps their contemporary cordial relations in the region. Much may change as more and more of the ice retreats and the Arctic Ocean potentially becomes ice-free during summer. Tensions may of course erupt among Arctic or non-Arctic states. However, the harsh environment and the geographical distances in the Arctic are more likely to foster cooperation than confrontation and the US and China have no conflicting territorial or maritime claims in the region. The states involved see an interest in a stable region, support the existing legal framework, and currently work to uphold the cordial and benign diplomatic relations that

now characterise inter-state behaviour in the Arctic. This should imply that the prospects for managing competition and conflict of interests and promoting cooperation in the Arctic are presently sound.

The introductory assessment, as well as the analysis of US-China perspectives, indicates that there is no scramble for petroleum resources in the Arctic, that it is unlikely that the Arctic Ocean will become a central ocean for fisheries, and that there is great uncertainty as to whether Arctic sea routes offers attractive, significant alternatives to existing sea routes for the foreseeable future. Scientific exploration, environmental challenges, tourism and search and rescue have become increasingly important topics in the Arctic and highlight the relevance of regional governance and the enhanced role of the AC. Yet this does not suggest that a 'new great game' in the Arctic is shaping great power politics, or warrant headlines such as 'Cold, hard facts: why the Arctic is the world's hottest frontier' (Breum 2013). When examining more closely the Arctic positions of the world's two greatest powers, the US and China, a limited potential for competition for influence in the Arctic is identified, but, most clearly, the two seem to support a stable, secure region with international cooperation enabling the promotion of their more specific regional interests.

Little above indicates that the Arctic will be a focal point of potential rivalry or confrontation in broader US-China relations. Other areas are more central to their respective international priorities, and to their interaction. The analysis shows that there may be potential for more specific cooperative arrangements in the Arctic, that includes both the United States and China.

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