



Shared North: shared interests or other players, other priorities?

Much is made of the commonality that links the Circumpolar nations; of shared geography, similar climates, the bonds of similar isolation, joint challenges and, in the case of the Inuit, the ties of history, culture and (to some extent) language.

Without diminishing those shared interests, it may be useful to put them in some perspective. For any "Circumpolar" dimension in foreign policy, and not just in Canada, will only be a part of the larger foreign policy picture.

So while a new era of opportunity may be opening in the Circumpolar Arctic, other currents are pulling in other directions.

Three of the Arctic Council eight are now members of the EU (European Union). For the new two, Sweden and Finland, the EU exerts a powerful new pull of economic, and perhaps eventually, political integration. The EU is in the midst of massive undertakings; a common currency, expansion to the East and structural reform. None of these need negate Nordic interest in pushing ahead in the Arctic, priorities will be set for foreign policy in the Nordic countries. And, while all of the Nordic EU members can claim a history of more dynamic involvement in their "Norths" than can Canada, the big pull right now is South.

Not so in Norway, which having decided to eschew the EU, has, among the eight, set the highest priority on the Arctic Council. Like many medium-sized nations, Norway has a natural inclination for multilateralism. Yet its unique circumstances, some of them inherently Northern, led Norwegians to twice reject EU membership. With NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) role diminished and its future

uncertain, Norway is keen to find new fora in which it can play a significant role. It was a key co-leader, with Canada, in the drive to ban anti-personnel land mines and has pushed hard for even closer ties with Canada, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. Still, Norway is, and will likely remain, spiritedly individualistic in some of its foreign policy, as its successful intervention in the Middle East, and its willingness to defy the world by restarting Minke whale harvesting, demonstrate.

Iceland, the smallest of the eight, is also toying in strengthening its relations with the EU. It is also, in many ways, the least Arctic of the eight.

Denmark, with its stewardship over Greenland and, like its Nordic neighbours, a Northern outlook driven by both history and geography, has actively promoted the Arctic Council. But other preoccupations, closer to home, are driving its foreign policy. Not only does Denmark want to see a "Northern" dimension to EU policies, but it has focussed on the tangled, and rapid development of the Baltic region.

Russia's foreign policy, still shaken by the end of its superpower status and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, is chaotic. The Warsaw Pact has collapsed. NATO is seen, sometimes threateningly, marching Eastward and Moscow's once-considerable clout in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia is in disarray.

Both the direction and commitment to any "Circumpolar" policy, and for that matter domestic policy in its own vast North, remain obscure and could change overnight.

The United States, the least enthusiastic about the founding of the Arctic Council, seems as yet undecided whether the grouping poses an impediment to furthering U.S. interests — still overwhelmingly strategic and economic — in the