



circumpolar world, or whether it will evolve into a useful forum. If, from Washington's perspective, it becomes just another multilateral arena for moaning about the United States, it will continue to remain a minor item on a crowded U.S. foreign policy agenda.

As in Canada, unless there is real and present relevance to the broader populations of all of the Arctic eight, the Council may become marginalized, or worse, be ignored. And given the Council's requirement for consensus, the disinterest or disinclination of any one capital will be enough to stunt its evolution.

It may be that the more modest its goals, the less likely the Arctic Council will be paralyzed.

Arctic Council: great Canadian initiative

Mikhail Gorbachev gets the nod for first mooted the idea of an Arctic "zone of peace" but, quite rightly, successive Canadian governments deserve the credit for leadership in creating and sustaining the fledgling Arctic Council. In the nine years since former prime minister Brian Mulroney first proposed a grouping of the Circumpolar nations, the Council has overcome U.S. reluctance and become a functioning, if underfunded, reality. Bold in concept, and innovative in its membership structure, especially with respect to the inclusion of pan-national aboriginal organizations, the Council remains an unfulfilled promise.

From a formal policy standpoint, the Council already is regarded as the key institution for our Circumpolar policy.

"Canada is of the strong view", says Foreign Affairs, "that a forum is needed to promote cooperation and concerted action, and to bring political focus to addressing the urgent issues

affecting the Circumpolar North. These issues go beyond those related to the protection of the environment."

But, and it's a big "But", bold ideas don't necessarily become viable realities. Nor does unstinting and impressive staff work — and the Council has been nurtured by a few remarkably dedicated officials, notably Canadians and Norwegians — make an institution successful. (Otherwise the League of Nations wouldn't have failed.)

So far, while there has been considerable activity, particularly on environmental co-operation, and despite extremely limited resources, the Council has neither captured any broad public attention nor emerged as the primary forum for Ottawa (or any other of the member governments) to deal with its Northern neighbours.

That the Arctic Council "should" emerge as that primary forum seems to be almost an article of faith among stakeholders. Broader support remains elusive. It may be that only the emergence of contentious issues will attract sufficient public attention and thus raise both the expectations and the profile of the Arctic Council.

Human rights and self-determination

No Canadian foreign policy discussion is complete, and rightly so, without the question of human rights being raised. Yet it seems largely absent, even among the relative few, concerned about developing a "Circumpolar" foreign policy dimension. It cannot, however, be avoided. Russia's treatment of minorities, especially aboriginal peoples, is variously judged from inadequate to appalling. Some of them are on the verge of extinction.