Networking the North: Cross Border Connections and the New International Circumpolar Geopolitics

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Abstract A new emphasis on human rights, civil society, and regime building, combined with heightened degrees of connectivity, have had a tremendous impact upon the nature and degree of transnationalism within the North. While the development of the United Nations Law of the Sea, a renewed human and indigenous rights agenda, and broadly defined environmental protection regimes have more generally worked to reinforce international if not regional boundaries, in the North the effect has been the creation of a new forum for east-west connectivity. Despite new geopolitical pressures that might launch competitive claims and challenge existing security and sovereignty concerns among North American nations, there remains a strong regional subtext of cooperation. The success or failure of transnational institutions and organizations depends upon the degree to which northern dimension policies can develop a more comprehensive definition of human security within the circumpolar north.

Introduction
The end of the Soviet Union brought change to the North. The change involved prospects for a new round of cooperation more than immediate social, political, and economic change. For nearly two decades, those who explore Northern Geopolitics have focused on how the idea of circumpolar cooperation was cultivated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and how initially addressing comprehensive environmental concerns in the Rovaneimi Agreement in 1991 led to major international cooperation between eight nations with territory within the circumpolar region.¹ The Arctic Council, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), as well as a host of other formal and informal agreements, are comprehensive, region-wide and focused upon the establishment of inclusive and broad-based international cooperation. Originally, what could loosely be called “northern dimension” policies in both North America and Europe led to cooperative foreign policies across boundaries. The AMAP was, in effect, one such cooperative agreement that continues today.

At this point in time, “Environment” and “Science proved to be uniting agendas within the international community. Some powers, specifically the United States, understood these arenas to be distinct from foreign policy discussions and saw them as issue areas in which the U.S. government, perceiving its own interests as the most important item on the agenda, might fully participate without fear of jeopardizing territorial claims or security interests. Indeed, the science and environmental agenda was supportive of both concerns, principally because the U.S. saw its own science and environmental institutions and research agenda as groundbreaking and poised for leadership within the region.² There was no “disconnect” between environmental and science issues in the Arctic and U.S. regional or international agendas. In this sense, the environmental agreements
were instrumental in confidence building, in laying foundations for cooperation, and laying frameworks for international collaboration. However, were they also laying the groundwork for a more comprehensive regime?

While it is true that the story of the original building of momentum within the circumpolar North, and the potential for the development of a cooperative international regime within the region, has already been told,\(^3\) it needs retelling as new events unfold. These include the current challenges to regional cooperation that have emerged with the threat of global warming or, more precisely, climate change. It is a story of cooperation for a period of approximately two decades, beginning in the 1980s, but shifting as new challenges emerged in the early 21\(^{st}\) century. These new challenges include the threat of global warming, melting ice, increased international cooperation for maritime territories, and declining interest in comprehensive security outcomes. In the summer of 2008, for example, *Time Magazine* featured an imaginary illustration of a melting ice flow in the Arctic Ocean, whimsically loaded with flags from the various Arctic states. Inside, an article discussed the imminent likelihood of a round of competing claims for the Arctic Ocean, make urgent by global warming and melting ice. This reflects how the media explains Arctic regionalism and is becoming the stuff of popularized geopolitical discourses. The headlines are now “Arctic Rush!” or “Melting Relations!”, and they represent a geopolitical discourse that calls for urgent and competitive geostrategic thinking.

This then, represents the problem: what are the geopolitical imperatives that currently characterize the Arctic region? Can we speak of a circumpolar North, as an international region of cooperation with any degree of certainty? Was the circumpolar North and the commitment to civil society, regionalization, indigenous voices and sustainable development simply a discourse suited to the late 20\(^{th}\) century, or does a resilient network of transnational connections remain? Are we, as Oran Osherenko and Young predicted two decades ago, entering the “The Age of the Arctic” where “Mercator projection maps” give way to polar perspectives in schools, legislative chambers, corporate conference rooms, and military headquarters?\(^4\)

If so, where do the geopolitics of high drama and territorial clashes fit into this scenario of interconnectivity? I suggest that there remains a strong regional subtext of cooperation and institutional pressure for regional cooperation despite emerging geopolitical pressures that might launch competitive claims and challenge existing security and sovereignty concerns among North American nations. The success of transnational institutions and organizations depends upon the degree to which northern dimension policies develop a more comprehensive definition of human security within the circumpolar North.

**Networks of Connectivity**

In North America, the circumpolar North has long been treated as a region with special parameters, arguably because it remained a frontier for many Arctic nations well into the modern era. In Canada, for example, Confederation proceeded without consideration of the High Arctic territories, until Britain ceded the Arctic Islands to Canada in the 1880s. The North was an afterthought in the U.S. as well: when it purchased Alaska from Russia in the 19\(^{th}\) century, many considered the move a “folly.” In Europe, the North was perceived as neither “empty” nor as a “frontier” in the same sense as North America, yet the most northern portions of the Scandinavian Peninsula tended to remain less populated and more indigenous. The same was true of Russia, where the far North was seen largely as a resource frontier throughout much of the Soviet era.

Because the circumpolar North was for most places beyond the population ecu-
mene and economic centre, the concept of “frontier” in the North is generally regarded from the lens of exploration (the North as a physical challenge to be overcome) or geopolitics (the North as a geostrategic place). Both lenses assess the region from the perspective of its potential importance in a broader world. Moreover, the broader world did intrude: during the Cold War, the North became a strategic frontier for North American security concerns, as the Distant Early Warning or D.E.W. Line was constructed - to warn U.S. and Canadian military of potential nuclear weapons attacks from the Soviet Union. The construction of the D.E.W. Line during the Cold War placed the circumpolar North, principally the Canadian Arctic, in the position of the first line of defence between the superpowers. Since then, of course, this border has diminished in importance as a front against the other Cold War superpower, namely the USSR. Today, although no D.E.W. now exists, there are layers of military security “coverage” in the North American Arctic, organized by treaty and agreement, as well as national security concerns. David Wilkins, U.S. Ambassador to Canada, observes, for example, that the United States’ “military security” in the North today includes “Canadian Forces Canada Command [which] is responsible for domestic security but is also responsible to work together with U.S. Northern Command for the combined defence of the North American continent. Additionally, NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command), a fifty-plus-year binational treaty has adopted, in addition to its aerospace defence role, a new maritime warning responsibility to continue to build Continental Defence.”5 Within this continental defence system, the North American “North” clearly remains a frontier.

In Northern Europe and Asia, military security proved to be an integrative issue throughout the Cold War, although more from the Russian than European perspective. The Soviets saw the broader circumpolar North as a region from which military strikes were highly likely; thus it had tremendous strategic currency. However, while networking for strategic defence remains an important perspective through which cooperation in the North must be assessed, it is no longer the only lens. Indeed, one of the truly groundbreaking historical developments within the region has been the post-Cold War discourses in which military security has traditionally not been reified. Rather, the main event has been the recognition of the North as a forum for indigenous peoples and civil society. This process is described by Keski-talo, who traces the “negotiation” of a circumpolar region post-Cold War. Complex region-building discourses that favour inclusivity and transnational civil society have become embedded in region-wide political processes, namely those processes which redefine the North as an interconnected international region.6

Moreover, these same political processes and the fundamental discourses which sustain them have also informed broader geopolitical discourses, evident in the degree to which a circumpolar cooperation agenda was pushed forward within the window of opening presented by a post-Soviet era.7 Thus, Heininen is able to demonstrate how the geopolitical context for the circumpolar North has taken on new significance in recent decades not only at the level of high geopolitics and international order but also at the level of indigenous and civil society. In the North, the number of individuals involved in region-building and regional policy-making has proliferated since the late 1980s.8 This is a significant achievement because it allowed indigenous voices began to be heard and facilitated the replacement of ideas about comprehensive or human security for the old military security and Cold War discourse.9

It was in this spirit that the Arctic Council came into existence shortly after the Rovaneimi Agreement in 1991. It was established as a high-level forum for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction between Arctic states on
common Arctic issues, with the participation of Arctic indigenous communities and other inhabitants of the region. During the 1990s and early 21st century, the Arctic Council expanded its interest from the strictly “science-based” agenda previously described to an agenda that recognized the need for broadly based development programmes within the circumpolar North, such as committed to sustainable development and comprehensive security. By 2006, it identified issues such as the promotion of information and communication technologies available for northern communities, specifically for e-health and e-governance and e-education. For example, the Arctic ICT Assessment Proposal and Rationale (AICTA) proposal of 2006 was based upon deliberations and recommendations of the Arctic Council’s ICT Technical Advisory Committee. In its Programme for the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2006-2008), Norway stated clearly,

However, it will not be possible to maintain settlement patterns and ensure growth and welfare without economic activity. Therefore, the Council should also initiate broad political debate on all issues of importance to the Arctic and the people living there. These include economic activity in the energy, fisheries, and mining sectors and other matters of joint interest related to social and economic development.\(^{10}\)

Certain members of the Arctic Council wished that it would go further, developing a circumpolar treaty in the spirit of sustainable development, human security, and cooperation. However, for members like the United States, such an agenda was untenable. The U.S. inherently opposes international standards, agreements, and multilateral cooperation that limit its ability to act in its own interests; this by its own admission limits the potential of U.S. cooperation within a circumpolar North.

Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the Rovaneimi Agreement and the formation of the Arctic Council, the region became defined in terms of indigenous social, economic, cultural, and environmental terms in ways that were previously unknown. For example, Norway proclaimed that inclusion and integration must now proceed along lines that focus on greater levels of economic development and sustainability.

In recognition of this fact, the Arctic Council invited participation from the region’s indigenous organizations. The category of “Permanent Participant” “provides for the active participation and full consultation with the arctic indigenous representatives within the Arctic Council.”\(^{11}\) The participation of indigenous peoples organizations in the deliberations of the Arctic Council devolved authority within the region to the extent that indigenous voices were heard; however, indigenous organizations did not register the same degree of political power within the Arctic Council as did the governments of nation-states. Nonetheless, the participation of indigenous circumpolar peoples within the international planning community which is the Arctic Council became normative for the region.

One significant example of how this trend towards indigenous participation was more broadly translated was seen in Canada’s 1994 appointment of Mary Simon as Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs. Although now defunct, this position involved “the conclusion of negotiations with the seven other Arctic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation, and the United States) to establish the Arctic Council, which was inaugurated in September 1996.”\(^{12}\) The Canadian appointment paralleled a more general regional interest in inclusion and integration. For example, as Heininen notes, indigenous participation and the inclusion of indigenous issues or perspectives on issues has been relatively successful, despite the differentials between state and indigenous organizational power.\(^{13}\) As such, the forum
of the Arctic Council has proven to be an important networking institution, whereby circumpolar indigenous organizations, like the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), the Saami Council, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, and the Aleut International Association or RAIPON, and the Arctic Eight states (Canada, U.S., Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland Denmark, and Iceland) inform the agenda. Indeed, the tone of international cooperation that emerged from the Arctic Council’s agenda has prompted researchers to suggest that a new age of “geopolitics” is unfolding in the North.

The Great Game Revisited?
Why then, did Vladimir Putin announce in November 2007 that Russia had intensified its military plans in the Arctic “by conducting long-distance patrol flights of strategic bombers at the Pemboi range in Russia’s Arctic, and continuing to fly over the North Pole, the Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans?” One could ask if Putin’s actions were out of character for the region? To some this seemed the case, as in combination with the Russian exploration of the Lomonosov Ridge and claim to the North Pole in the summer of 2007, there was speculation that the age of Arctic cooperation was ending. However, over the past year few years, the Canadian government has acted in a similar way, responding to the new security concerns within the North by adopting a relatively aggressive nation-building stance, with programs designed to heighten military presence and protection in key areas of Canadian sovereign territory, like the Northwest Passage. Yet because it is so focused on military and resource security, this new security agenda has the potential to derail what has until now been a new agenda focused on the building of a comprehensive “post-Cold War” approach to human security in the North.

To understand why a renewed focus on national sovereignty and a new sovereignty discourse in the North has resonated with the international community, we must look at the broad political and economic frameworks that support the current geopolitical discourse in the early 21st century. The explosion of geopolitical and strategic interest within the North has ramifications not only for the way in which Arctic security is “delivered,” but more fundamentally for the way in which security is defined, for whom and by whom. The potential for the increasing relegation of human, rather than national, security to the lower rungs of policy concern within the North reflects a new preoccupation with definitions of security (state, energy and military) more generally in the post 9/11 era, reflecting a traditional or realpolitik perspective. It deflects attention from a pre-existing agenda of concern with the acute social and environmental threats facing indigenous populations in the region and from previous definitions of security designed to build an “international North” agenda in the late 20th century. In many ways, today’s “push button” issues in the emerging geopolitics of the circumpolar North stem from the perceived threats posed to environmental and national security by global warming. They include the potential for global warming to open up competing claims to the Arctic Ocean as Arctic waters melt and expose new shipping lanes and resource-rich territory. Both of these outcomes have already begun to reshape Arctic states’ interest in all things northern, and the approach they take to Northern security. Recent concern about climate change has affected the way in which states perceive the Arctic and the role of the Arctic in international relations. There is a heightened interest in the sovereignty of Arctic waterways, such as the strategic areas of the Arctic Ocean, international waterways like the Northwest Passage, and the validity of Canada’s straight baselines surrounding the Arctic islands which are yet unclear in terms of their legitimacy and international status. There are also disputes between Canada and the United States, Russia and the international community, Canada and Denmark and Canada and Russia with
respect to potential maritime claims or existing ones.

This potential conflict has changed the tone of discourse. For example, while few Canadians have been there, the importance of Canada’s Arctic claims are important to most Canadians. This was clear in the summer and fall of 2007, when an overall “buzz” resulted when the Harper Government announced a number of initiatives intended to heighten security and sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic. Nevertheless, it is not just Canada that wishes to heighten military security in the region. In August 2007, “14 strategic missile-carriers and support and refuelling aircraft took off from seven air force bases in different parts of the Russian Federation and began a patrol involving a total of 20 aircraft. As from today, such patrols will be carried out on a regular basis.”

Why this sudden sovereign interest? One reason is the impact of climate change on physical geography. It has been argued that until global warming took effect, the frozen ice connected islands and made them part of a territorial land base of Canada, utilized by its Inuit peoples, in ways that water passages could not. The potential melting of Arctic waters, or prolongation of ice-free seasons, has thus changed the nature of the Arctic maritime borderlands, and raised the issue of shipping and rights of passage within an international regime. It places these waters within the borderlands of an international circumpolar region. With potentially new routes and new resources open, new international claims and challenges to existing sovereignty are possible.

Another reason is the political context in which climate change is occurring, and the particular relevance of such change for the North and the political framework of international and domestic relations. Ratification of the UNCLOS treaty in fall 2007 placed the Arctic waters under the jurisdiction of a world court which has the ability to allocate northern oceans and passages which are now of new interest and importance. There are already pending court cases that give limited periods for countries to establish new claims on the Arctic Ocean, North Pole, or the Northwest Passage. This is one reason why Russia has accelerated its Arctic Shelf research and exploration projects. In the summer of 2007, Novosti, the Russian News and Information Agency, reported that in 2001, Russia stated that it was entitled to an extra 1.2 million square kilometers (460,000 square miles) of the Arctic, based upon the existence of connecting underwater ridges that act as “a continuation of its shelf.” Novosti noted that the UN court which heard Russia’s claim demanded more evidence as to its validity: “The issue came to the fore in early August after Russian researchers made the first-ever dive below the North Pole in two mini-submarines, taking rock samples from the seabed to corroborate the claims.” Zellin elaborates on this event:

Russia, Denmark, and Canada all hope the Lomonosov structure extends outward from their continental shelf; all treaty signatories have ten years from their signing to make their claim. Russia first claimed the ridge in 2001 but the International Seabed Authority requested scientific proof. Denmark is currently conducting research to make its case, as is Canada. Because Canada did not sign the Law of the Sea Convention until 2003, it has until 2013 to make its case, while Russia signed in 1997, so must submit its evidence this year. Denmark signed in 2001 so has until 2011. The United States, owing to its recent taste for unilateralism, has yet to sign the treaty—so for the moment is on the sidelines in the race for Arctic claims, though its newest icebreaker, the USCGC Healy, is currently steaming North into the Beaufort Sea to map the U.S. continental shelf as part of its Arctic West Summer (AWS) 2007 expedition.
In the face of this Russian “transgression”, the Canadian and American Press reacted strongly to the expedition, principally because Russia planted its flag on the Arctic Ocean floor, in what Canadians asserted was their territorial waters: “the explorers planted a titanium Russian flag on the seabed, 4,200 meters (14,000 feet) below the surface in a symbolic gesture that irritated Canada, which has claimed part of the Arctic shelf since 1925.” The Canadian response? “A Canadian diplomat mockingly said Russia was setting up shelf borders using 15th century flag-planting methods, an allegation echoed by the United States.”

Was this rather derogatory comment a knee-jerk reaction to an international operation while contesting Canadian sovereign claims, made under the aegis of a legitimate process? This is one interpretation. The diplomatic comment propelled a normative process of jockeying for territory under a rules-based international regime into the arena of more bellicose geopolitics. However, Zellin suggests that the act was indeed geopolitical, evoking the idea of “the age of the Arctic” predicted some decades ago, by Oran Young. While “the stated objective of their undersea polar mission was to advance Russia’s claim to a vast extension of its continental shelf extending from Russia’s northern shores to the North Pole along the Lomonosov Ridge,” the flag-planting expedition that followed was largely a public relations exercise “designed to bring Russia’s claim to the attention of the world.”

Whose claim is accurate? In large measure, as Huebert’s work suggests, this depends upon how the problem is viewed. Competing claims are the product of an intersection of several trends, one being the negotiation of the UNCLOS treaty itself, which provided a time line and process of claims within the Arctic and other maritime regions. However, as Huebert notes, there are additional influences that encourage competitive approaches to Arctic sovereignty linked to the potential impact of climate change and more broadly defined economic processes that impinge on the Northern resource sector. Indeed, Canadian and US responses to the Russian flag reflect a new geo-economically and geopolitically charged lens with which both countries now view their northern domain. Huebert and Zellin provide the theoretical grist for this revitalized discourse. Hubert observes, for example, that the intersection of climate change, energy security and commodity prices, along with the implementation of the Law of the Sea, will lead to a new international regime - a competitive and volatile regime centered on the Arctic:

The current Arctic sovereignty crisis is less likely to be quickly resolved, owing to three issues that reflect the Arctic's transformation since then: climate change, which has increased accessibility to the Arctic; high energy and commodity prices, which encourage further claims to Arctic resources; and international environmental awareness, and the emergence of new structures to resolve disputes in the Arctic, as reflected by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides various mechanisms for dealing with competing claims...All three of these issues are coming together, and that means the time of the Arctic is now. …all these factors, and the manner they’re all intersecting, basically mean this is the initial phase of a new Arctic international regime.

Indeed, this is quite clear in Canada’s response to the new pressures which Russia’s claim has prompted (or even earlier differences of opinion between Canada and Denmark concerning Arctic boundaries), which was to enhance Canada’s security initiatives in the Arctic and to promote national control and surveillance through a number of new initiatives. Canadian Prime Minister Harper announced that the Canadian Government would construct “two new military facilities in the
Arctic to boost Canada’s sovereign claim over the Northwest Passage and signal its long-term commitment to the North.” Harper also promised that Canadian Forces would build a new training centre in Resolute Bay and would also refurbish an existing deepwater port in Nanisivik, noting in a speech that a convergence of economic, environmental and strategic factors” in the region “will have critical impacts” … on the future of the country.”

This confirms that a new round of geopolitical interest is occurring in the North. Climate change, when interpreted as a process that opens up new strategic space to competing powers, has triggered new rounds of strategic discourse. Underlying this competition is a new interest in the North as a field for resource extraction opportunities. This is particularly true in the U.S., which is badly in need of oil and similar energy sources. Here the strategic importance of northern oil and gas will only increase as the price of oil achieves higher levels on the world market.

The popular media have described how some Canadians suggest that the North lies at the vortex of a new resource-oriented world order:

At the heart of the new security discourse - championed by the previously described Time Magazine cover and the many other media reports that focus on the competition for territory within the Arctic Ocean - are arguments that there is some sort of competition for the “rightful” allocation of space within the international or circum-polar North. In Canadian texts, Canada’s position is deemed correct, in contrast to Russian or American texts, where each respective interest is championed and presented as legitimate. The framework for the new security agenda in the North thus appears to draw upon some sort of scientifically accurate and politically authorized image. The “reterritorialization” of the Arctic Ocean, must “get it right” and “getting it right” will assure security and prosperity in all things. In addition, it is not just Canada’s interests in the North that are at stake. Canada’s close linkages with its American ally must serve to create a spillover of influences to support and sustain basic principals in the broader foreign policy relationship and the international agenda. This means that the geopolitical agenda and benchmarks of the US system will have relevance for Canada, even if they are not identical in all specifications.

However, there remain fundamental differences in abstract ideological approaches as they inform the geopolitics of the North. The US has a far more hegemonic agenda and a more limited interest in the North as a lived-in context. In her analysis of divergent US-Canada Arctic discourse and interests, for example, Keskitalo suggests that the Cold War legacy, its resource-utilization and military security discourses, and the divergent frontier and identity myths of Canada and the US are, in large measure, responsible for continuing a legacy, indeed a clash, of differing visions concerning the definition of the Arctic region, and the requirements for action towards environmental protection and security. It is this geopolitics of division that to large measure supports or even fuels
the competition of claims and the geopolitics of sovereign space within the Arctic.

Moreover, this geopolitics of national sovereignty, and the geo-economic interests it entails, has eclipsed a very important although less commonly understood security discourse that hinges upon different understandings of the meaning of human security and ways in which “spatial relations” are conceptualized and politicized. Our current fixation on melting Arctic ice, shipping lanes, national territory and the potential for terrorist activity in a new North is relies on a very specific “take” not only of what politically expedient actions are important in a 9/11 world, but more precisely whose security is at stake and at what scale. Within the Canadian North, deconstructing the nature of space as a field for political action reveals and reinforces a much older metaphor, one which dates to the era of institution-building for internal colonialism itself, the “northern homeland northern frontier” as Berger and Bone aptly dubbed it. While the discourse of North may seem to have outgrown the homeland / frontier metaphor, it is clear from existing discussions and broad geopolitical posturing associated with the risks of global warming that it has not.

This continuation of colonial processes has become embedded in the structure of post-Cold War security debates within Canada and the U.S. For example, after the end of the Cold War, it was thought that a new era for peace and cooperation had been achieved. The term “comprehensive security” was coined by the Palme Report and other contemporary reports and documents that focused on the human condition in the late 20th century and the challenges ahead. In its report Our Common Journey, for example, the Board on Sustainable Development argued that the notion of comprehensive security and sustainable development were and remain linked, providing a context for understanding security and its relationship to environmental systems in the post Cold War era.

The End of Cooperation?
It is becoming clear that the resulting nation-building, or indeed the militaristic definition of security which follows from global warming concerns in the Arctic, has become hegemonic, drowning out equally important discourses involving global warming, indigenous peoples, and more comprehensive types of human security. This is problematic on several grounds. It has, for example, engendered a refocusing of the site “international” interaction. There is an important subtext to current cooperation in the Arctic, however, that is not appreciated by North Americans and is absent from many North American considerations of Arctic cooperation. Osherenko and Young argue, “We are entering the Age of the Arctic in geopolitical terms. Europe is no longer the principal focal point of global power and international relations.” The problem here is that while it is true that Europe is no longer the sole force, it is indeed today still a very significant force, perhaps the most significant force, orienting circumpolar cooperation in the 21st century, as North American cooperative geopolitics are increasingly torn between cooperation and competition. While Keskitalo and others argue that in the late 20th century Canada was a driving force in the negotiation of a common or international North, by the 21st century, the shifting politics of North America, particularly in response to U.S. domestic terrorism agendas, means that this claim is no longer true. The European Union has once again become the most important broker.

In recognition of this reality, in May 2008, Denmark’s Foreign Minister, Per Stig Møller, urged respect of international laws, environmental cooperation, and a promotion of sustainable development that would respect indigenous fishing and hunting traditions. What are the chances that Denmark’s plea will be successful? The answer lies in the degree to which connecting institutions, discourses, and projects are valued, and the degree to which comprehensive security
agendas can be linked to securitization discourses. This raises the question of whether regionalism and transnational cooperation developed within current northern international regime practices and foreign policy dimensions can support or be expanded to include new structures and activities that promote both transnational and local forms of civil society. Can existing international regimes be linked to new forms of governance and sustainability and new institutional capacities focused on the regional and local scale? The question is relevant in terms of the bigger question of the changing form and function of the state system in the late 20th and early 21st century and the impact of neoliberalism and other forms of ideological and structural change on the regulatory state under conditions of globalization.

More recently, however, the idea of “comprehensive security” has been linked to notions of securitization rather than broader environmental and economic agendas. Website after website will indicate the attachment of the term to home and workplace security systems rather than to broader debates about human security and more restricted definitions of resource, military, and national security. This broader, yet increasingly ignored, aspect of security includes the development of “measures that reduce hunger and poverty.” It is, the Board on Sustainable Development argues, “a normative vision of sustainability, which in our view is defined by the joint objectives of meeting human needs while preserving life support systems and reducing hunger and poverty. This vision is firmly anchored in the goals and aspirations of the world community as expressed through major international conventions and commissions of the past decade.” It is also firmly anchored in the lives of individuals who inhabit the North rather than those who live further south in the capitals of Arctic states.

Heininen observes that there has been a florescence of regional actors involved in the performance of new regional governmental initiatives, particularly in northern Europe but also throughout the circumpolar North. Geopolitics is inherently pluralized and transnationalized, not necessarily because of state-to-state dialogue but because of the connections between peoples and networks.

Indigenous people’s organizations and intergovernmental organizations have been effective in bridging borders and linking the region from east to west. There are many organizations in northern Europe that have transcended international borders effectively by building linkages both at the regional and at the local scale - one example is the North Calotte Committee for interregional cooperation between the northernmost counties of Norway, Sweden and Finland.

Moreover, in the 1990s several counties, among them Lapland in Finland and the Komi Republic in Russia, created their own regional “foreign” and economic policy. In northern Europe, the idea of a ‘Europe of Regions’ and trans-boundary regionalism via the model of Euro-Regions includes east-west cooperation across the national borders between the counties of the Nordic states and Northwest Russia. This kind of cooperation has also promoted integration across the national borders among the Nordic countries. It has been used as a model for inter-municipal cooperation in northern Europe. EUREGIO Karelia, in the context of regionalism, can be seen as a realistic possibility for providing cooperation and development in Northwest Russia. This type of “Northernness” represents the emerging role of northern regional and local actors in international cooperation per se, reflecting the fact that northern issues have infiltrated the political agendas of the Arctic states.

Geopolitical discourses that fall within this paradigm generally perceive the North as a transnational negotiated space that is highly regionalized but contextualized in terms of its contents. Those who sub-
scribe to a critical Northern geopolitics are outnumbered by those who subscribe to the more popularized abstract notions of the north as a frontier, a war zone, a resource rich space, or even a territorial marker for the Canadian state. Notable examples are the approach of the the Keskitalo, *Negotiating the North*, which argues that the circumpolar North as we know it is constitutive of the process of defining Canadian Foreign policy within the North. In contrast, the Gordon Foundation report from the fall of 2006, while drawing upon the specified territorial notion of a “North,” appreciated that there is a civil society or third sector within the North that is distinctive from government and commercial society. The problem, according to the Gordon Foundation, is that the North comprises a series of contexts arbitrarily linked by artificial geographical limits that are important only insofar as they help define regionalized problems and solutions.

Such minor differences aside, it is clear that this international North, stemming from an environmental and “scientific” understanding of regionalism, resulted in a new way of structuring policies within the North. During the 1980s and 1990s, the European Union and the Canadian Government worked closely with Arctic states and the Arctic Council. They believed that the Arctic Council was uniquely placed to address environmental challenges in the circumpolar region and the broader challenges of developing trade and economic development. They each developed their own “northern dimension” of foreign policy. The main objectives of the Northern Dimension of Canada’s foreign policy, for example were first, to enhance the security of Canadians and Northern peoples, and second, to ensure Canada’s sovereignty in the North. Moreover, the policy stated the goal of establishing the circumpolar North as an integrated entity and promoted human security and sustainable development. Accepted in May 2000, the new Northern Dimension Foreign Policy, the Canadian Government also observed that “a clearly defined Northern Dimension of Canada’s Foreign Policy will establish a framework to promote the extension of Canadian interests and values, and will renew the government’s commitment to cooperation with our own northern peoples and with our circumpolar neighbours to address shared issues and responsibilities.” Moreover, it would “demonstrate that our future security and prosperity are closely linked with our ability to manage complex northern issues.” A proactive approach in strengthening Arctic circumpolar relations, drawing on Canada’s experiences, traditions and capabilities, in both the domestic and international context, will help to shape the nature and thrust of circumpolar affairs, and Canada’s central place therein.

However, the discourse of the Northern Dimension has been replaced by a more politically charged, state-centered geopolitical discourse strongly linked to notions of territoriality. It is supported by a popularized geopolitical discourse that defines global warming scenarios within the circumpolar North as “a fight for the top of the world.” The region, as *Time Magazine* portrayed it, has taken on a new saliency and its environmental problems a new urgency, due to changing territorial conditions and potential new claims, shipping routes, and boundary disputes in the not so frozen waters of the Arctic Sea. Therefore, while Canada’s northern dimension foreign policy speaks about globalization and interdependence, the solution is increasingly territorial and militaristic. As we have seen, *Time*’s new Arctic map reads like a game board, tracing out the new territorial claims and establishing the lines for Canada’s military and political surveillance.

Yet such competitive notions of territoriality within the Arctic may be more imagined than real. The new post-war security agenda in the North is also the result of a growing awareness of the need for applying the concept of sustainable development in the North. This stems from the work of
the the Brandt Commission, which in the late 1980s was one of the first international venues to publicy promote the idea of “comprehensive security.” In its discussion of “Common Security,” for example, the Commission urged the transformation of traditional military-based notions of security to include a broader focus on “human security.” Such transformation would require greater international cooperation, transparency, disarmament, and demilitarization. The impact of 9/11 notwithstanding, this new approach to the definition of security has had a catalytic impact on the structure of international relations in the circumpolar North, as attention shifts from maintaining strategic control of territory to promoting environmental cooperation and multilateralism.

Indeed, the importance of this changing definition of security should not be underestimated, particularly in terms of its impact on the circumpolar North. This is true not only in terms of its role in encouraging new forms of northern cooperation in foreign policy terms, but also in terms of its influence upon the structure and nature of Northern governance - at all scales. In recognizing new types of security threats beyond those associated with military security - including climate change, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and other forms of environmental degradation - new ideas about comprehensive security and their geographical definition have both facilitated and demanded new forms of the geographical definition of Northern security and northern Regionalism. Northernness and remoteness, combined with regional physical characteristics which make the geographical area extremely vulnerable to environmental change, have proven to be a real motivation for transnational cooperation in ways which are unprecedented in the south.

For example, in 2006, the Arctic Council reviewed the Arctic ICT Assessment Proposal and Report (AICTA), a comprehensive document that presents the rationale for Arctic Council involvement in the study of information and communications landscapes of accessibility in the North. The idea that ICT capacity is closely linked to sustainability has infiltrated the political agendas of Northern states, highlighting the importance of issues like the delivery of Northern health and education services as key social and economic goals. ICT is regarded by many as an important vehicle for their delivery. The Arctic Council’s Committee on Sustainable Development explored the need for ICT capacity for ensuring access to health, education and environmental assessment in the North. It suggested that while institutional capacity for environmental cooperation is well developed within the North, and it is possible to speak of a circumpolar region in terms of the instruments, ICT proves to be a different story. The nation-state and the international regime has not been an effective conduit for the delivery of ICT capacity, infrastructure, and quality internet resources. Indeed, its delivery is highly localized because the development of communications infrastructure is not perceived by national governments as being a transnational project in the same sense that environmental assessment and environmental treaties might be seen.

Yet, in their analysis of ICT and Distance Education in the Arctic, Pekkala et al argue that electronic communication systems might be the solution to overcoming barriers to education and other services that are currently challenged by distance and remoteness in the North. In its 2006 draft report to the Arctic Council on Sustainability, the AC Working Group on Information and Communications Technology observed, “In discussions on information and communication technology in a global context, there is a need to bear specific regions in mind. This includes the Arctic. Small remote communities, long distances, and a general lack of effective infrastructure and communication characterize life in most of the circumpolar region.”
ICT networks are thus critical to the delivery of comprehensive security in an internationalized context. However, the delivery of ICT remains the domain of the national government in terms of strategies, goals, focus areas, higher education applications of ICT, and the infrastructure and governmental policies that sustain technology programs. Each circumpolar nation has identified an ICT plan which, to some degree, furthers not just generic “region-building” in the circumpolar North but also its own specific national agendas. Although state subsidy is critical to the development of ICT capacities, geographical conditions also demand cooperative transnational efforts and cooperation among the spectrum of northern governmental and non-governmental agencies. While preliminary, this cooperation may have important implications for assessing the potential for the achievement of the broader goals of social equity, strengthened civil society, and sustainable development, if brokered through the Arctic Council. It also represents the problems faced by the circumpolar North as it attempts to redefine itself as an international region.

Conclusions
The landscape for cooperation in the circumpolar North is in flux. Competition for new maritime territories has emerged in the wake of global warming, dominating regional geopolitical discourses. However, these competitive discourses are a thin veneer upon regional cooperation that, over the past few decades, has widened and deepened in response to a comprehensive security agenda.

Perhaps, as Scott has remarked about transboundary cooperation in Europe, the institutionalization of Northern transboundary cooperation at the local or even regional level is not so much an idealistic goal as it is an essential precondition for resolving the ecological, economic, and social problems affecting everyday life. Yet, “transboundary cooperation can only develop if nation-states mutually agree to suspend sovereignty over certain aspects of domestic policy.”

Whether this occurs in the circumpolar North is debatable. However, in the final analysis, a co-operative relationship is potentially ensured in the existing international institutions and agendas that allow for indigenous participation and regional specificity. Thus, Norway’s call for new rounds of cooperation negotiations in the context of the Arctic Council sends the message that there is more to fragile transnationalism than the media or populist politics might admit.

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2 Such attitudes were expressed by several individuals interviewed in the U.S. State Department in the summer of 2002, in the preliminary phases of this research project.


9 Ibid.


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


36 See *Our Common Journey A Transition Toward Sustainability Board on Sustainable Development*, Policy Division, National Research Council, NATIONAL ACADEMY PRESS, Washington, D.C.

37 Oserenko and Young, *Age of the Arctic*, op. cit. p. 4


39 Ibid. p. 21


41 See E.C.H. Keskitalo’s *Negotiating the Arctic: The Construction of an International Region*, London: Routledge, 2004

42 The Northern Dimension of Canada’s Foreign Policy. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada, May 2000.


44 Olaf Palme, Swedish Prime Minister in the 1980s, used the phrase “comprehensive security” to describe the comprehensive implications for three types of post-Cold War security needs: economic security, environmental security and human security. See The Palme Commission, 1982, *Common Security*.


46 Leo Pekkala et. al., On Top of It, Overcoming the Challenges of ICT and Distance Education in the North. University of the Arctic Press, No. 1, Rovaniemi, 2004.
