

U.S. AND THE ARCTIC IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

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Abstract

The United States became an Arctic country by virtue of purchasing Alaska from Russia in 1867. For a variety of reasons, discussed in this work, the Arctic used to be a focal point for the US during the Cold War, but later on this country paid much less attention to the region, including somewhat dubious awareness of America actually being an Arctic state. The aim of this article is to present some opportunities and challenges posed by governing the Arctic, and in particular a brief outline of the U.S. approach towards the region through its track record in the span of about last two decades, until the year 2015. It also attempts to present the expectations connected with American chairmanship of the Arctic Council, as well as the reasons for the country's inability to ratify one of the fundamental international instruments, i.e. the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS.

KEY WORDS: Arctic, US Strategy towards Arctic, Arctic Council, US priorities, UNCLOS.

“We seek an Arctic region that is stable and free of conflict, where nations act responsibly in a spirit of trust and cooperation, and where economic and energy resources are developed in a sustainable manner that also respects the fragile environment and the interests and cultures of indigenous peoples.”

2013 US National Strategy for the Arctic Region

INTRODUCTION

“The Arctic ice is melting” – this is how most of the articles on the Arctic start. It appears that no one in his/her right mind could possibly question that statement. However, when one examines the details, where the devil is, there appear many skeptics, non-believers, lets-wait-and-see-attitude-holders and simple detractors who claim that it is a natural process which has been observed before and there is nothing we not only could but should do about it.

Such is not the attitude of the major stake-holders in the Arctic, i.e. the Arctic Eight (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and USA), as proven throughout recent history. All the directly involved countries, accompanied by a multitude of other players - state, non-state, or multi-national – have voiced concern about this region of the world for more than two decades

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now. The question remains, however, would the impact of global warming have become so imperative and so world-wide if not for the promise of unspeakable riches that the Arctic holds and the opportunities it provides – exactly due to the so much cursed climate change – in the form of new transport routes, fishing opportunities, and tourism openings? The question remains open but it is beyond doubt that any major change in the climate has always brought new opportunities as well as challenges. The above statement could be exemplified by the Little Ice Age (ca. 1350 to ca. 1850 – not that all scientists agree on those dates). Ivan the Terrible, seeking new sources of income, among many other things, managed in the years 1558-1580 to conquer and colonize Siberia, the land rich in animal fur so desperately needed and desired at every European court of the time. Thus the new, powerful and immensely large new Russian Empire was born and Ivan IV Vasilyevich became the Tsar of All the Russias.

A valid question might be posed here whether the new emerging climate change could bring something similar in terms of shift of power in the world and of such profound consequences for the future as before. After all, one could start with the Vikings through Ivan the Terrible to today and easily document that every single change in global climate has brought major consequences to the world. Naturally, nobody knows the answer to the question and only time will show what this shift in climate will bring this time in terms of world order. In the era of international cooperation, will it eventually lead to real international cooperation and safeguarding security and energy resources or will the race for the riches trigger major confrontations, not excluding the possibility of war? Or perhaps we should expect a major environmental disaster of the scope of the Aral Sea? Following the principle of dualism, it is obvious that every opportunity must be accompanied with a challenge, and of the latter category there are plenty. On the one hand, the Arctic promises so many things, but on the other, there is price to be paid for all of that.

Importance of the Region

Much has been written about the importance of the region, be it in the context of the climate and its global impact or the riches the Arctic might hold. After even a glimpse on the map, the strategic importance of the region becomes obvious in terms of security. “The developments in the Arctic will have lasting ramifications for international relations, international law, international climate change policy, international trade, and international human rights. The Arctic’s strategic location will not only influence government policies, but also affect strategic business decisions and global economic development over the coming

decades. The Arctic Institute believes that an interdisciplinary approach to Arctic studies, bringing together researches and experts from a variety of disciplines, is key to fully understanding the ongoing transformation of the region and making progress towards sustainable Arctic development.”² The truth is that the whole Mendeleev’s Periodic Table can be found in the Arctic, not to mention exquisite fisheries, new maritime passages and incredibly rich wildlife. In terms of maritime life alone, after all, there must be a reason why whales migrate up north to find the richest aqua hunting grounds. In short, the Arctic from the American point of view must be examined in terms of security, governance, and economic development.

Generally speaking, it has been more or less universally agreed that there exist three basic instruments through which Arctic should be governed, namely, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS – adopted in 1991 by all Arctic Eight), the Arctic Council (AC - 1996), and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS – dated to 1982 but officially came into force in 1994), as claimed by R. Huebert (2009, p. 10).

US and the Arctic Council Chairmanship

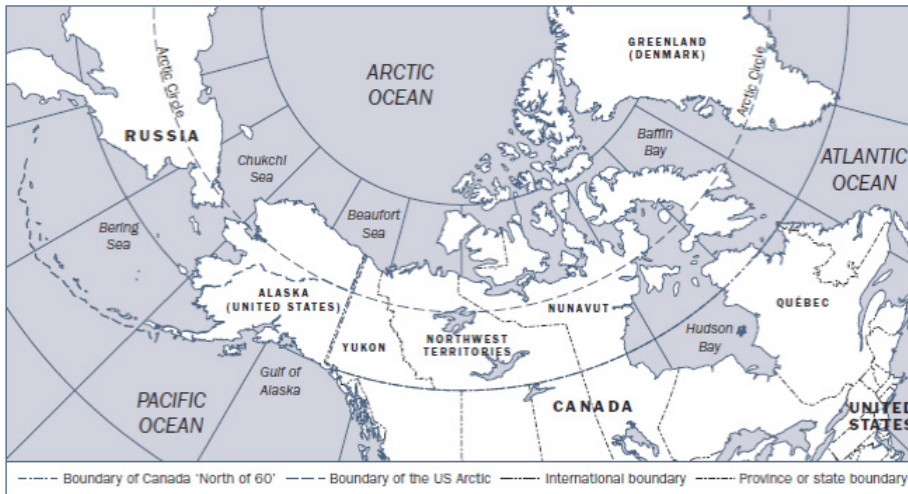
The aim of this article is to present some opportunities and challenges posed by governing the Arctic, and in particular a brief outline of the attitude presented by the USA through its track record towards the Arctic in the span of the last two decades, until the year 2015, together with the expectations connected with its newly assumed chairmanship of the Arctic Council, as well as the reasons for its inability to ratify one of the fundamental international instruments, i.e. UNCLOS. The author will also try to examine the new Arctic Policy of the US and describe some of America’s own challenges which the government must face internally in order to contribute to the family of the Arctic countries.

Since the last two countries to have chaired the Arctic Council are Canada and the United States (2013-15 and 2015-2017, respectively), perhaps it would be judicious to present their claims to the Arctic in the form of a map of Canadian and US Arctic territories (below).

² <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/> The Arctic Institute Center for Circumpolar Security Studies. [12 January 2013].

“The Arctic Institute seeks to establish itself as an authoritative, interdisciplinary, and independent source for information and in-depth analysis about the developments in the High North. The Institute was founded in 2011 and currently aims to bring together scholars and researchers to build a growing stock of knowledge and expertise on the Arctic region. In contrast to existing platforms for Arctic affairs, The Arctic Institute is not affiliated with or sponsored by any of the Arctic states.”

Graph 1: Claims to the Arctic



Notes: Canada's Northern Strategy applies to the three territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, largely corresponding to the area 'North of 60'—that is, north of the 60th parallel. The United States defines the US Arctic as all US territory north of the Arctic Circle or 'north and west of the boundary formed by the Porcupine, Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers; all contiguous seas, including the Arctic Ocean and the Beaufort, Bering, and Chukchi Seas; and the Aleutian chain'.

Sources: SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, No. 2012/1_July 2012, Canadian Government, Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future (Minister of Public Works and Government Services: Ottawa, July 2009); and Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984, US Public Law 98-373, signed into law 31 July 1984, amended as US Public Law 101-609, signed into law 16 Nov. 1990, <<http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/15C67.txt>>.

Since the United States will assume the chairmanship in the Arctic Council at the ministerial meeting in Iqaluit, Nunavut in Northern Canada, April 24-25, 2015, which also marks the end of the Canadian chairmanship, it is only fitting to start with this international body which may be perceived as the essence of Arctic matters. Much has been written about the role of the Arctic Council in shaping the future for the region which name the Council bears. Apart from the fact that scientists can hardly agree on the scope of climate changes and the definition of the Arctic Region itself,³ especially the last two decades brought about a multitude of programs (nearly every country has found it necessary to formulate its own plan of action or national strategy for the High North; the US has produced its official national strategy only as of May 2013) which are supposed to safeguard/

³ See, for example, R. M. Czarny, *High North – Międzygeografią a polityką*, chap. 1, Scandnavium, Kielce-Trnava 2014, and many other publications by the same and other authors.

secure or perhaps simply use the area, particularly in the field of extracting its energy deposits but also in terms of safety, security, environment protection, maritime traffic, the rights of indigenous peoples, deepening the knowledge on the region and the general governance of the Arctic. Obviously, some are more comprehensive than others and to a varied degree they follow what had been internationally agreed but always with an attempt at safeguarding own national interests, hoping for own slice of the pie composed of the Arctic riches.

If the number of international organizations related to the region and the total of member states involved are any indication of the importance of the region, then the Arctic certainly must be in the lead. Enumerating the member organizations and the affiliated or simply interested entities related to the Arctic Council would certainly take most of this paper, and the matter has been discussed in many scientific materials, with the necessary and ever-changing updates. The Council, which includes the eight states with Arctic territory and representatives of the region's indigenous populations, has evolved into a decision-making organization with a permanent secretariat and budget and it now attracts great attention from the rest of the world.⁴ However, many Americans are skeptical about the Council, quoting fears of its inefficiency, lack of decision-making power and growing similarity to the UN which by some is considered the ultimate example of bureaucracy which all about talking and not much, as the pragmatic Americans would put it: "getting things done." As said by R.M. Czarny (2014, p. 210), some of the objections may be valid as "The Arctic Council is not a fully-fledged international organization as it is based on 'soft' international law. Therefore, in view of the lack of legal international foundation, it is an institution of limited possibilities," although the fact that the Arctic Council has also a representation of the indigenous peoples gives it an additional if not full legitimization to act and decide about the region.

The US is an Arctic state by virtue of its purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. Alaska which has both territory above the Arctic Circle and a coastline on the Arctic Ocean makes the United States an Arctic country, "though most Americans don't know it, and most of Congress doesn't know it," (McNeil 2015)⁵ claims Crocker Snow, director of the Fletcher School's Edward R. Murrow Center

4 The Ottawa Declaration of 1996 formally established the Arctic Council as a high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Arctic Council Member States are Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America. [Online] Available at: <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us> [15 December 2012].

5 This article first appeared in the Fall 2014 issue of *Fletcher News* magazine.

for Public Diplomacy. Throughout its history, the US has seldom recognized this fact although it produced such outstanding polar explorers like Robert Peary and Richard Byrd, as well as modern-day Arctic scientists such as Robert Corell. In addition, the Arctic was central to the United States' nuclear deterrent posture during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the Arctic has seldom figured prominently in US policy discussions. "Thus the United States may be characterized as the 'reluctant' Arctic power" (Huebert 2009, p. 2). The alleged "reluctance" of the United States is a matter of opinion, expressed with particular ease especially if you are a university professor and a Canadian,⁶ with a typical love exhibited by close neighbors of unequal stature. However, there may be more than a grain of truth in this statement, as echoed by many Americans themselves. "Unfortunately, the U.S. national-level focus on Arctic issues and policy is quite modest, a factor that will undermine and limit U.S. capabilities as leader of the Arctic Council" (Rosenberg et al. 2014)⁷ Though this organization is not the only platform to influence Arctic policy and activity, it is an important one deserving of increased U.S. attention. Despite the recent appointment of former U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Robert J. Papp Jr. as special representative for the Arctic and a number of recently released national roadmaps and strategies,⁸ the Arctic remains a policy and investment afterthought.⁹ And, as put succinctly by Heather

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7 Retrieved from cnas.org. [21 January 2015].

8 See, for example, White House, *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* (May 10, 2013), available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf; U.S. Coast Guard, *Arctic Strategy*, CG-DCO-X (May 2013), http://www.useg.mil/seniorleadership/DOCS/CG_Arctic_Strategy.pdf; U.S. Department of Defense, *Arctic Strategy* (November 2013), http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2013_Arctic_Strategy.pdf; White House, *Implementation Plan for The National Strategy for the Arctic Region* (January 2014), http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/implementation_plan_for_the_national_strategy_for_the_arctic_region_-_fi...pdf; Navy Task Force Climate Change, *U.S. Navy Arctic Roadmap 2014-2030* (February 2014), http://www.navy.mil/docs/USN_arctic_roadmap.pdf; and U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *NOAA's Arctic Action Plan* (April 2014), <http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/NOAAarcticactionplan2014.pdf>.

9 See, for example, U.S. Senate. *Coast Guard Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016*. S 2444. 113th Cong., 2nd sess. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113s2444is/pdf/BILLS-113s2444is.pdf>; U.S. House, *Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology Act of 2014* or the *First Act of 2014*, HR 4186. 113th Cong., 2nd sess., <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr4186ih/pdf/BILLS-113hr4186ih.pdf>; and U.S. House. *An Act Making appropriations*

Exner-Pirot, also a Canadian, “Admiral Papp has expressed that he would like to promote an appreciation amongst Americans that the United States is an Arctic nation. He will be successful if he can use the platform afforded by the Arctic Council chairmanship to help educate Americans about how the Arctic is more than the caricature of sea ice, shipping, and polar bears that the media has made it out to be” (Exner-Pirot 2015).¹⁰ The U.S. first held the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 1998-2000 and had “human health” as their overall theme. The American overall activities supported not only major Arctic health initiatives such as International Circumpolar Surveillance to monitor diseases and human health but they also initiated the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, the first scientific climate impact assessment of the Arctic (Berckmans et al. 2014).

Some experts say although Alaska is an important player in Arctic affairs, the United States has a lackluster record of leadership in the region. “Arctic regional cooperation began in earnest in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The kind of matters the Arctic Council was given a mandate to address--environmental protection and sustainable development--are motherhood and apple pie kinds of issues that all Arctic nations could accept and support. But the United States chose to play a mostly minor role in the Arctic Council, ensuring, for example, that military issues were excluded from discussions, and that no defined monetary contributions were assessed” (Exner-Pirot 2015).

Nevertheless, though it took the US quite some time to formulate its official strategy on the Arctic, it was officially released in May 2013.

“Through the National Strategy for the Arctic Region, we articulate our strategic priorities to position the United States to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We will seek to prioritize and effectively integrate the work of Federal departments and agencies with activities that are already underway in the State of Alaska and at the international level. And we will partner with the State of Alaska and Alaska Natives, as well as the international community and the private sector, to develop innovative solutions and new ways of operating. The Arctic is changing. We must proceed, cognizant of what we must do now, and consistent with our principles and goals for the future,” as expressed by President B. Obama in the National Strategy for the Arctic Region (2013, p. 1).

In the U.S. Arctic Strategy, there are three major points. Firstly, the document

for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes. HR 4870. 113th Cong., 2nd sess. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr4870rs/pdf/BILLS-113hr4870rs.pdf>.

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notes a desire for the advancement of national interest with consideration to all activities (commercial, scientific and military) in the Arctic whether by sea or air with consideration to international law. Secondly, the pursuit of responsible Arctic stewardship by encouraging environmental protection and resource conservation is clearly mentioned as a priority. Thirdly, the document emphasizes the importance of strengthening international cooperation both through bilateral and multilateral relations, including working within the Arctic Council. As expressly said in the document, the strategy is built on three basic lines of effort, namely,

1. Advancing US security interests: “We will enable our vessels and aircraft to operate, consistent with international law, through, under, and over the airspace and waters of the Arctic, support lawful commerce, achieve a greater awareness of activity in the region, and intelligently evolve our Arctic infrastructure and capabilities, including ice-capable platforms as needed. U.S. security in the Arctic encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from those supporting safe commercial and scientific operations to national defense” (*National Strategy*).
2. Pursuance of responsible Arctic Region stewardship: “We will continue to protect the Arctic environment and conserve its resources; establish and institutionalize an integrated Arctic management framework; chart the Arctic region; and employ scientific research and traditional knowledge to increase understanding of the Arctic” (*National Strategy*).
3. Strengthening international cooperation: “Working through bilateral relationships and multilateral bodies, including the Arctic Council, we will pursue arrangements that advance collective interests, promote shared Arctic state prosperity, protect the Arctic environment, and enhance regional security, and we will work toward U.S. accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Law of the Sea Convention)” (*National Strategy*).

The approach of the United States is to be based on or rather informed by the guiding principles of safeguarding peace and stability, making decisions using the best available information (including most current science and traditional knowledge), pursuance of innovative arrangements, and consultations and coordination with Alaska Natives.¹¹

As shown in the initial address by President B. Obama, Alaska comes and Alaskan Natives come first, which is understandable, and only then international organizations. However, given the government structure of the United States

¹¹ For the full text of the US Strategy, go to https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf.

and the relative independence of its states, even the state of Alaska already poses problems for Washington D.C. The proposed focus on climate change has opened a gap between the federal government and Alaskan stakeholders “when Alaskan legislators recommended focusing on jobs and economic opportunity, as well as practical issues such as suicide prevention and sanitation facilities” (Exner-Pirot 2015).

“Before once again gaining the attention of the US Government, the Arctic was a concern almost exclusively for the state of Alaska. As Alaska is a sparsely populated state, it occupies only one seat in the US House of Representatives; in addition, over 65 per cent of Alaska’s land is owned and managed by the US Government” (Bergh 2012, pp. 13-14). Alaska’s lack of influence in the federal government has led to tension between the state and federal governments, notably over oil drilling in national wildlife refuges (including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) and the reduction of federal grants earmarked for Alaska (Bolstad 2010). Representatives of the Alaskan State Government have addressed US Senate committees on changes in the Arctic and their impact on national security, foreign policy and energy security.¹²

Jobs in Alaska seem to be of particular interest to the governing authorities of the state and the White House proposed ban on in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and parts of the Beaufort and Chukchi seas has drawn much criticism. “Lisa Murkowski, a Republican senator from Alaska, has accused Mr. Obama of launching a ‘stunning attack on our sovereignty and our ability to develop a strong economy’. Bob Herron, a Democratic member of the Alaska legislature, told a recent US Senate hearing organised by Ms Murkowski: ‘We feel it is important to [show] that we are not a snow globe. We are not little Eskimos in... an environment that needs no development’.”¹³

In addition, point number three also draws attention, particularly in the part relating to the promise of working toward U.S. accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Law of the Sea Convention). Much has been written on the subject of the US not ratifying the Convention which, as agreed by almost everybody, should be one of the fundamentals of negotiations and problem solving, should conflicts arise. The reasons why the US never ratified the Convention are complex and many, and they could be discussed in a separate paper, but perhaps a bit of history is necessary at this juncture.

12 See e.g. S. Parnell, “The strategic importance of the Arctic in US policy,” Statement before the US Senate, Subcommittee on Homeland Security Appropriations, Anchorage, 20 Aug. 2009, <http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/Parnell_testimony-20Aug09.pdf>.

13 B. Jopson (Washington) and R. Milne (Oslo), “US urged to assert itself over Arctic,” March 9, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/de5fb444-c5e5-11e4-bd6b-00144feab7de.html#axzz3Z4CedNtO>.

July 1982: refusal to sign the Treaty

President Ronald Reagan announces his opposition to the treaty and refuses to sign it based partly on his broad belief that the ocean's resources cannot be claimed by any one nation. "While most provisions of the draft convention are acceptable and consistent with United States interests, some major elements of the deep seabed mining regime are not acceptable," (Murse 2012) R. Reagan said.

December 1982: Law of Sea Signed

The Law of the Sea Treaty is adopted by a United Nations conference in Montego Bay, Jamaica.

November 1994: Treaty Enforced

The Treaty takes effect internationally.

October 1994: President Clinton Announces Support

"U.S. President Bill Clinton signs the Law of the Sea Treaty and sends it to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The committee fails to take action on the agreement after its chairman, Republican U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, expresses concerns. The treaty does not make it to the full Senate, where ratification would require support from a two-thirds majority of its 100 members" (Murse 2012).

April 2002: Bush Administration Backs Treaty

Mary Beth West, the deputy assistant secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries under Bush, indicates the administration's support for joining the treaty, telling a United Nations meeting: "The administration of President George W. Bush supports accession of the United States to the Convention, and we intend to work with the U.S. Senate to move forward on becoming a party" (Murse 2012).

May 2007: President G. W. Bush Calls for Ratification

President George W. Bush calls on the Senate to ratify the treaty. "Joining will serve the national security interests of the United States, including the maritime mobility of our Armed Forces worldwide," G. W. Bush said. "It will secure U.S. sovereign rights over extensive marine areas, including the valuable natural resources they contain. Accession will promote U.S. interests in the environmental health of the oceans. And it will give the United States a seat at the table when the rights that are vital to our interests are debated and interpreted" (Murse 2012).

October 2007: Senate Panel OKs

The U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations debates the Law of the Sea Treaty¹⁴ and votes 17 to 4 to send the agreement to the full Senate for a vote.¹⁵

The Senate fails to take up the measure for ratification.

May 2009: New Effort to Ratify

Democratic U.S. Sen. John Kerry, who chairs the Senate Committee on

14 <http://usforeignpolicy.about.com/b/2007/09/27/senate-opens-law-of-the-sea-treaty-hearings.htm>.

15 <http://usforeignpolicy.about.com/b/2007/11/01/law-of-sea-treaty-heads-to-the-full-senate.htm>.

Foreign Relations, announces plans to restart the effort to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty. “I hope we’re ready to ratify it. I am going to do everything in my power, but I want to do it on the right schedule” (Murse 2012), J. Kerry tells *The New York Times*. His support is a clear signal that President Obama supports the move.¹⁶

July 2010: President Obama Supports U.S. in Treaty

President Obama adopts the recommendations of the Ocean Policy Task Force, which supports joining the treaty.

May 2012: Hillary Clinton advocates Law of Sea

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calls on the U.S. Senate to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty by the end of 2012, saying the agreement is “critical to the leadership and security of the United States ... U.S. interests are deeply tied to the oceans. No country is in a position to gain more from the Law of the Sea Convention than the United States” (Murse 2012).

The Convention’s opponents have resorted to an alleged dilution of U.S. “sovereignty” as the basis for their opposition. “As Secretary Clinton noted in her testimony, the United States is a party to hundreds of international treaties and conventions that limit United States freedom of action in exchange for corresponding commitments from other nations. Not only does the United States, with the second longest coastline and the largest navy in the world, have far more to gain from UNCLOS than most other states” (Kass 2012).

Opposition to the Law of the Sea treaty in the United States comes mostly from Republican senators, wary of granting too much control to the United Nations. “No international organization owns the seas,” Ohio Republican Rob Portman, one of the two lawmakers to announce opposition to the treaty, said in a statement on his website. “We simply are not persuaded...this treaty will be more favorable to U.S. interests than bilateral negotiations, voluntary arbitration, and other traditional means of resolving maritime issues” (Hargreaves 2012).

In the Arctic at least, the resources the U.S. might lose out on are relatively small -- most of the sizable conventional oil and gas reserves fall within 200 miles of the coast, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. As said in the CNN Money, “Everyone is laying claim to the Arctic, except the U.S. As nations rush in to stake out their part of the Arctic Ocean, the U.S. is being shut out of the process and potentially giving up a large swath of the Arctic. Below is a map that shows what countries are claiming regions of the Arctic and what the U.S. could likely lose out on.”¹⁷

16 <http://usforeignpolicy.about.com/b/2008/12/16/will-america-join-the-law-of-the-sea-treaty-under-obama.htm>.

17 CNN Money. Available at: <http://money.cnn.com/infographic/news/economy/arctic-claims/?iid=EL> [15 March 2015].

Graph 2: Potential loss to the US in the Arctic



Source: Durham University, International Boundaries Research Unit, United Nations, Marum.
Illustration: Dana Lipnickas/CNNMoney.

The official Arctic policy is something quite new in American politics, as previously all that was available were Presidential Directives, and it states that “The United States is an Arctic Nation with broad and fundamental interests in the Arctic Region, where we seek to meet our 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” (National Strategy, p. 2).

Arctic Region Policy is a departure from previous US actions in that it is Arctic specific. “Traditionally, US policy has dwelt with the Arctic and Antarctic simultaneously. This time, the decision was made to develop an Arctic-only policy. The policy is both frank and direct, and it has significant ramifications for all Arctic nations — Canada included. While it is not yet clear if and how the Obama administration will choose to implement the policy, the policy itself does not signal a significantly different direction for the United States. Instead, it offers a clear picture of what the United States considers to be its core Arctic policy objectives and provides a guide on how to achieve them” (Huebert 2009, p. 1).¹⁸

¹⁸ The six objectives of the prior document on the Arctic policy of the US, dated to 1994, were: *Protecting the Arctic environment and conserving its biological resources. *Assuring that natural

The US program for the chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2015-2017) has three focus areas:

- Improving Economic & Living Conditions for Arctic Communities
- Arctic Ocean Safety, Security & Stewardship
- Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change

The American team is composed of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Chair of the Arctic Council; Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr., U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic; Hon. Fran Ulmer, Special Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of State on Arctic Science and Policy; Ambassador David Balton, Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials; Julia Gourley, U.S. Senior Arctic Official; Dr. Nikoosh Carlo, Senior Advisor to the Senior Arctic Official Chair; Dr. Adrianna Muir, Deputy Senior Arctic Official; Nomi Seltzer, Arctic Affairs Advisor; Erin Robertson, Arctic Press and Public Affairs Officer; Matthew Kastrinsky, Administrative Officer.¹⁹

Admiral Papp (2015, p. 8), Special Representative for the Arctic Region, who is going to effectively lead the US team in the Arctic Council, in the WWF²⁰ magazine called *The Circle*, identified the chairmanship theme as “One Arctic: Shared Opportunities, Challenges, and Responsibilities.” The theme, according to him, reflects the fact that although there are many dimensions to the Arctic, in the end it is one region of peace, stability and cooperation. Even the composition of the American team raises many questions. The US, as nearly everyone knows, does not have a Prime Minister, so who should represent this country at, for example, a meeting of Prime Ministers? Moreover, the presidential elections are coming in the year 2016, so the current Democratic regime must do everything to assure that American sovereignty and security are at the front of all declarations and activities, including the international ones, for the sake of the domestic front. “Admiral Papp has been given the unusual title of ‘Special Representative’ to the

resource management and economic development in the region are environmentally sustainable. *Strengthening institutions for cooperation among the eight Arctic nations. *Involving the Arctic’s indigenous people in decisions that affect them. *Enhancing scientific monitoring and research on local, regional, and global environmental issues. *Meeting post-Cold War national security and defense needs. (US Department of State, “Fact Sheet,” p. 1.)

19 For bios of the US team, go to <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/u-s-chairmanship>.

20 The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is an international non-governmental organization founded on April 29, 1961 which works on issues regarding the conservation, research and restoration of the environment. Formerly, it was named the World Wildlife Fund and the term is still used as its official name in Canada and the United States. “Our mission is to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. From our experience as the world’s leading independent conservation body, we know that the well-being of people, wildlife and the environment are closely linked. That’s why we take an integrated approach to our work.” <http://wwf.org/> [14 February 2015].

Arctic, amidst a plethora of Arctic Ambassadors who spearhead Arctic policy for their respective countries. He was also named 'Coordinator' of the U.S. Arctic Council Chairmanship, a position that does not exist in the Council's terms of reference. Traditionally, the Foreign Minister or Secretary of State of the designated country officially chairs the Council, and a diplomat is appointed to chair the senior arctic officials responsible for the work of the Council on a daily basis. Admiral Papp, apparently, will be neither of those" (Exner-Pirot 2015).

The situation is rendered even more complex by the upcoming presidential elections and the fact that the Democratic President has to work with the Republican majority in the Congress. Naturally, no Republican senator would possibly agree with any policy of the Democratic President and the former may find it very difficult to take a bipartisan attitude when taking a vote on anything proposed by the former. In addition, any debate on the Arctic in the US seems to evoke the old nightmares: Southerners trying to decide about the fate of Northerners, federal government versus state, the issues of sovereignty and fear of submission to foreign laws, and the accusations of inefficiency of international bodies (UN in particular). Moreover, Nordic countries, in spite of their sporadic squabbles and sporadic divergence of interests,²¹ present a more or less united front while there is hardly common interest or united front of North America. If we take the member states of the Arctic Council (8) and their respective memberships in various organizations (e.g. the EU, NATO, NAFTA), add to them permanent participants (6), permanent observer states (currently 12), intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary organizations (currently 9) and non-government organizations with the observer status (currently 11) with the observer status and the multitude of states and organizations currently applying for the observer status, together with their affiliations, and complement that situation by the variant of the changing chairmanship, and then multiply the received number by international, multilateral political and economic relations of each of the entities, the result will be mind-boggling. The situation is dynamic, ever-changing and what is written today probably will no longer hold true tomorrow. With the right of veto enjoyed by the state members and the complexity of various interests, a comparison with the United Nations Organizations seems to suggest itself. Even if we examine the investors, following the obvious trail of money, in the global world of economy today and the very complex ownership of companies, the picture does not become much clearer.

Much is being said about security, resources, maritime passages, environment, sharing, defense strategies, indigenous peoples' rights, sustainable development, and governance, and they all are undoubtedly important and true. However, if the

21 As well-documented in the book by K. Kubiak, *Interesy i spory państw w Arktyce w pierwszych dekadach XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2012.

issues become so complex that no layman appears to be able to make heads or tails of them, it probably is about money. Hence it seems, in a nutshell, that what drives the countries to join the Arctic Council is the economy. In addition, it is a wonderful PR tool, especially for the Scandinavian countries.

One may criticize the Council but there is no one who disagrees with the statement that it is much better to debate, discuss things and talk about pressing issues rather than to resort to military confrontations. There is no doubt that it is an extremely important region and the issues pertaining to it are much pressing, if not imperative. The climate is indeed changing and bringing awareness about the Arctic to people all over the world is of utmost significance. Whether one perceives the international efforts pertaining to the Arctic as valid and/or effective is a matter of opinion, but facts are pressing and require much attention and actions. “You’re entitled to your own opinions. You’re not entitled to your own facts.”²²

CONCLUSION

The Arctic is a dynamic international region, with novel governance arrangements, strong cultures, incredible natural assets, and immense political challenges. “The Arctic Council is on the right track to address many of the region’s challenges through its respect for local input and capacity building. The United States will do well to support momentum in achieving common goals of the Arctic Council as a partner, not a leader” (Exner-Pirot 2015). Being a partner may also prove difficult for the United States as being number one is so imbedded in the culture of this country.

The American chairmanship in the Arctic Council promises transparency, which already is commendable, but the results are obviously to be seen and examined later on. As proven above, it is not going to be easy and there seems to be much domestic opposition to the main themes proposed by the American team. But this is typical of any free and democratic country, and the old saying that “Absolute unanimity certifies only to verifiable lack of intelligence” might have a grain of truth in it, after all. The US, as I believe proved in this article, cannot boast of a very impressive track record in Arctic matters so far. However, if, or rather when, the awareness of the urgency of Arctic matters becomes clear to the decision-makers and citizens of this country, judging by the American historical track record, they may indeed put the Arctic Council on steroids as put by the Admiral Robert J. Papp Jr., US Special Representative for the Arctic

22 The statement is usually attributed to Daniel Patrick Moynihan (March 16, 1927 – March 26, 2003) who was a four-term U.S. Senator, ambassador, administration official, and academic.

(Eilertsen 2014),²³ always assuming that putting anything on steroids is a good thing.

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23 “We will make the Arctic Council a stronger and more vibrant organization.”