Commentary

Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security: A Brainstorming Session on How to Maintain Peace & Stability, and Continue Constructive Cooperation in the Arctic

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The Thematic Network (TN) on Geopolitics and Security, with expertise on IR / Political sciences, Geopolitics, Security studies, Strategic studies, Political geography, Environmental politics, Human & Environmental security, had in spring 2022 a brainstorming session on how to maintain peace & stability, and continue constructive cooperation across borders in the Arctic region

The brainstorm did not produce a miracle, as none expected, but was successful enough by bringing fresh material (questions, comments, ideas, hopes) which are useful as food for further thoughts. Among contributions and (short) comments (questions, critical assessments & thoughts on Arctic cooperation and its structures & bodies, comments based on theory or practice, learned lessons from history, best practices & examples of future cooperation) by TN members (here anonymous) were the following ones:

"What did the Russians and Europeans learn from each other over 20 years of multidimensional and multi-layered interaction?", and if participants of the academic dialogue at the Kuhmo Summer Academy / Calotte Academy "might have been considering themselves representing the two opposite ideological camps" (substantial contribution by one member);

"A renewed opportunity to think about the role of academic events, such as Calotte Academy as social science diplomacy" (comment by another);

Though "Disaster diplomacy results so far do not find many examples where disaster-related activities were the cause of new, lasting diplomacy... [it is being applied] on Svalbard with pan-Arctic implications" (proposal by one member);

"The discussion… of the Arctic without the participation of Russian experts can hardly be called fruitful" (reminded by another);

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"We have to do our best to keep academic dialogue going on the Arctic. Issues of climate change should be... included" (commented by another);

"We can only hope that in the words of the 'functionalists' like Mitrany and others, that the Arctic remains a 'zone of peace"' (hoped by another);

"We are also in a unique position as we are scholars who focus on geopolitics, security, peace and conflict, and we are not only just finding the few topics that are less contentious to discuss, but … also take on the difficult conversations" (though by a senior member);

"How society can make the dramatic changes necessary to protect peace and environmental security?" (asked by a young member);

"The planet, the environment and the Arctic matters to all of us" (agreed another member);

"I, like many others, have never experienced war… Therefore, I can start sharing some examples of my working situation in Academia, since the conflict has definitely had an impact on the research arena… I have seen some sort of closure with Russia or Russian topics" (stated by another young member).

"Another human and nonhuman tragedy right in front of us… war seems to have moved the environmental disaster we are facing into the background… looking at the multiple crises we face in regard to the global environmental degradation, this must be a priority field of international politics & IR… could also be a common ground to continue [Arctic] cooperation… there is space to separate it from geopolitical interests and conflicts and to find common ground" (a striking comment by the last contribution).

Partly as my responses to these questions and comments, and mostly as follow-ups there are a few learned lessons from the first 30 years (or so) of international Arctic cooperation:

- The Cuban Crisis (in 1962) taught that when having weapons of mass-destruction, such as nuclear weapons, and zero confidence between parties, it is wise (for human existence) to have safety & warning systems between rivals, such as the Hot Line between Moscow and Washington DC, US-Soviet arms control treaties on nuclear weapons, the 'agree-to-disagree' as a recognized procedure. Behind this was the fact that the nuclear weapon system is based on global nuclear deterrence, which is credible only by including the capability for a revenge strike. And you cannot win a nuclear war – that means to have the capability for a first strike – when your rival has the capability for revenge strike, and both Russia and the USA have this capability. A strategic nuclear submarine (SSBN) carrying ballistic missiles with several nuclear warheads and hiding under sea ice in the Arctic Ocean is the most efficient 'Warrior' of that; Russia and the USA have (had) their SSBNs patrolling there. Therefore, the best way to avoid the risk of nuclear war is to have a balance between the rivals and their capabilities of the nuclear weapon systems;
- Due to the fact that the end of the Cold War was arrogantly defined by the 'West' as a victory (even an 'End of history'), and Russia was mystified as a primitive, oriental, power-hungry and former enemy, who lost and had environmental degradation. Then the NATO expansion to the Russian borders was interpreted to be legitimized, despite the common sense and agreement to terminate both military blocs (as the Warsaw Pact was). Unfortunately, we do not have, any more, the "to agree that we disagree" procedures for

uncertain times, and only one arms control treaty between Russia and the USA is currently in force. Even knowledge on arms control and disarmament, as well as nuclear weapons, is rare, and a few 'wise women & men" with knowledge & experiences on this are not heard. These procedures and expertise would be useful, even needed, today for the unpredictable / unprecedented situation of world politics;

- The Ukrainian war, in particular how NATO-member states try to avoid a direct conflict with Russia, though sending hard military stuff to Ukraine (a proxy war), is a reminder that the nuclear weapon systems still matter. Furthermore, that there is no guarantee of the old wisdom that they are only 'political weapons'. Hence, it would make sense to have better knowledge of nuclear weapon systems and the nature of global nuclear deterrence, as well as that of arms control & disarmament (e.g. to include programs of social sciences' seminars and workshops);

- Most non-state actors (NGOs, civil societies, scientific community) are more flexible and willing for transformations, as well as open-minded for international, functional cooperation on their fields. In an ideal condition, they are able to push governments to do new things and apply new methods. This was the case in the Arctic (in particular the Barents Sea and the Bering Strait areas) at the turn of 1980s / 1990s, when the transformation started by transboundary cooperation on environmental protection and science. As international cooperation on environmental protection and that on science are largely recognized and valued by the Arctic states and their policies, it is logical to interpret functional cooperation as the most successful field of cross-border cooperation, in particular when facing existential environmental & security threats. Thus, after a decrease of military tension, environmental awakening became an influential force to impact governments to act, environmental protection a focus of Arctic cooperation, and climate change 'politicized' in the Arctic;

- Indeed, among different ways & practices, functional cooperation is a more efficient way, than to build a bloc, to cooperate between actors who, as (former) rivals / enemies, don't have mutual trust and are afraid of transformation. Being mutually beneficial it is easily followed by increasing trust between new partners. Indeed, confidence-building measures (CBMs) were an important means in nuclear arms control and disarmament between the two superpowers in the Cold War;

- Despite, the "high latitudes – low tension" slogan being repeated in statements, policy documents and speeches, and speculations about for how long the high stability will stay due to forth-coming threats, common interests of Arctic states as preconditions for high geopolitical stability are being less analyzed. There could be more and advanced scientific research on the mutually beneficial common interests on the one hand, and on the other how to make a paradigm shift of security by defining climate change mitigation as the ultimate and most urgent aim. Likewise, the relevance of 'science diplomacy' is being repeated and praised, but its efficiency is not, yet, really tested. The current situation could be a 'perfect storm' to test its relevance and efficiency in a crisis;

- Finally, based on the shift of the Arctic focus 'from military tension to environmental protection' and towards climate change (mitigation) when (re)defining Arctic security, it

would be possible to recognize IPCC as more important security actor than NATO. In particular, if / when the environment is defined as the material basis for human existence in danger due to human activities.