

Political Climate Change: The Evolving Role of the Arctic Council

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Abstract: Climate change is occurring faster in the Arctic than anywhere else on the planet. Because of climate change, sea ice on the Arctic Ocean is melting and creating a new political environment for the eight member states of the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council was formed in 1996 as an intergovernmental forum for member states to address primarily environmental issues, but the institution also has the potential to manage political and diplomatic relations. The Arctic Council has been effective as a forum for member states to discuss environmental issues, but resistance by Arctic superpowers hampers its ability to become a binding institution with a political relations focus. Canada's involvement in the Arctic has been historically inconsistent, reactionary, and focused on sovereignty. The Canadian government's 2010 policy document *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada's Northern Strategy Abroad* should have emphasized development, governance, and regional security rather than sovereignty. As the upcoming chair of the Arctic Council in 2013, Canada has the opportunity to increase co-operation in the region and encourage the creation of a new Arctic Council working group that focuses on persuasive management of the region's political affairs.

Introduction

Climate change has come to Canada's North. It is a dynamic time for the land, the ocean, and the wildlife. The fundamental changes in the natural environment are also fuelling a kind of political change by impacting the circumpolar Arctic nations. This political climate change, and the ability of the Arctic Council to adapt to it, is the focus of this article.

The Arctic Council was originally established in 1996 as an intergovernmental forum for the eight circumpolar nations (Canada, the United States, Russia, Norway, Denmark/Greenland/Faroe Islands, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland) to address sustainable development and environmental issues such as oil spills. The council's activities grow

increasingly important as the impacts of climate change in the region become more pronounced and as oil and gas activity in the Arctic Ocean increases. Although the council's mandate is largely environmental it was also developed as a mechanism of soft law and political co-operation between the circumpolar nation-states in a post Cold War world. Political relations between the circumpolar countries are nothing new; diplomacy, discussion, research, and at times hostilities between nations can be found as far back as the early days of polar exploration in the nineteenth century, through the Cold War and into the present. Never before, however, has the sea ice been melting at such a fast rate; never before have these modern nations experienced a period of open ocean on their northern boundaries with such immense oil and gas potential.

The effects of climate change are barely noticeable in some areas of the world, yet they are clearly evident in the North. Sea ice on the Arctic Ocean has been decreasing by 2.7 percent per decade since 1978, with decreases of up to 7.4 percent in the summer months (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007, 30). The novelty of an open ocean will allow for increased oil and gas production in the region over and above what is already occurring. Indeed, estimates put the amount of oil and gas in the region at 25 percent of the world's known reserves, with only 10 percent of that being exploited currently (United States Geological Survey 2008, 1). Canada stands to benefit economically from oil and gas production in the region, with the potential approval of the Mackenzie Delta pipeline and with increased development in the Beaufort Sea (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme 2007). However, the fact that Canada's Arctic Archipelago is a dominant feature of the region means that Canada, by virtue of having the largest High Arctic land area of all the Arctic countries, is particularly at risk to environmental damage due to oil and gas activity, including catastrophic oil spills (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2011).

This article begins with an introduction to the Arctic Council, its history, and its environmental mandate, before turning to briefly discuss international relations theory as it pertains to institutions, with a focus on regime theory and the effectiveness of the Arctic Council. The council's ability to evolve along with the changing political relations in the North is then discussed, and the potential for the council to take on a managerial role for these relations is assessed. Finally, a general review of Canada's domestic and foreign policy in the Arctic, and the question of how Canada can move forward to strengthen its position in the council, are addressed.

With such change occurring so rapidly in the North, *now* is the time for the Arctic Council to move into the political role foreseen by its founders.

It can do this by changing its mandate to include broadened political relations, by establishing mechanisms of management for oil and gas activity through its existing working groups, and by establishing a new working group that specifically addresses diplomacy and international co-operation.

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council was formed in 1996 when the eight circumpolar nations of Canada, the United States, Russia, Norway, Denmark/Greenland/Faroe Islands, Finland, Sweden and Iceland signed the *Arctic Council Declaration* (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 1; Arctic Council 1996). The Declaration followed on the heels of the *Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy* (AEPS), the basis upon which the Arctic Council's six working groups and mandate were formed (Arctic Council 1991).

The Arctic Council Declaration formally institutionalized the AEPS. It allowed expansion of relations to provide "a means for promoting cooperative activities to address Arctic issues requiring circumpolar cooperation" (Arctic Council 1996, art. 1). The council was explicitly established as a high-level, intergovernmental forum for coordination and interaction among the Arctic states. The mandate included common Arctic issues, in particular environmental issues and the sustainable development of resources, and promoted the dissemination of information. It specifically excluded matters dealing with military security. The Declaration laid out the method of decision making as consensus of the members (Arctic Council 1996, art. 7.).

The Arctic Council's working groups address issues such as contaminants (ACAP), monitoring and assessment (AMAP), flora and fauna (CAFF), emergency preparedness (EPPR), sustainable development (SDWG), and Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) (Working Groups 2009). While the mandates of the working groups are largely environmental in nature, there is evidence that the countries of the Arctic Council originally considered the working groups as forums for relations beyond the purely environmental (Griffiths et al. 2009). For example, all of the working groups' mandates include some aspect of international co-operation.

Canada should strive to play an active role in developing and facilitating relations between the circumpolar countries as they navigate the novel environment. It can coordinate with Denmark (which became chair of the Arctic Council in 2009 and will remain in this position until 2011) and with Norway and Sweden on their proposal that the current focus

on sustainability and environmental issues should be expanded to include political debate on all topics of importance to the Arctic. The previous Norwegian chair related this broadened political debate primarily to the issue of environmental protection and the sustainable use of the Arctic's natural resources (Norwegian Chairmanship 2007). This will be especially important given the increased oil and gas production in the region.

The council's ability to expand into the realm of diplomacy and political affairs is dependent upon its effectiveness as a regional institution. The following section outlines regime theory and the effectiveness of the Arctic Council as an institution.

Regime Theory and Institutional Effectiveness

States enter international institutions to challenge the problems of misinformation, distrust, and miscommunication (Martin 1999, 55). The Arctic Council is only one of many multilateral institutions in the Arctic region (including, for example, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Arctic Ocean Sciences Board, and the International Arctic Social Sciences Association), but it holds great potential for circumpolar countries dealing with entirely new environmental and political circumstances. As the environment changes, the council can facilitate political relations by providing a system of management for circumpolar countries to maintain effective control in Arctic activities. A discussion of this potential begins with regime theory.

Regime theory is a theory within international relations that emerged as a response to the realization that sovereign nation-states are increasingly interconnected. Regime theorists desire to understand trans-governmental behaviour within international institutions such as the Arctic Council (Krasner 1983, vii).

Regimes and institutions provide a system of rules, procedures, principles, and norms around which sovereign states work to address problems (Krasner 1983, 1). They have several important impacts on participating states including affecting behaviour by influencing awareness about issues, by influencing perceptions and generating norms, and by affecting the actions pursued by the states in areas such as enforcement mechanisms or dispute resolution (Stokke 2007a, 15). Why should sovereign nations, for example the eight countries of the Arctic Council, participate in such an institution? First, the most important benefit is shared information and transparency of partner states' interests. Second, international institutions, instead of being legally autonomous, authoritative bodies, actually acquire their power and authority by virtue

of what their member states give to them (Martin 1999, 52). In other words, states will create international regimes in order to increase co-operation with other states without ceding any of their sovereignty (Oye 1986, 20).

The creation of a regional institution is only as important as the effectiveness of that institution once it is operational. The following section discusses successes and limitations of the Arctic Council with respect to its effectiveness.

Effectiveness of the Arctic Council

The effectiveness of a given regime is an important measure of its influence on the behaviour of participating states. In examining whether the Arctic Council is effective one would ask how the institution has contributed to positively changing the behaviour of the circumpolar states and whether it has achieved the objectives set out in its mandate (Mitchell 2002, 17).

First, effectiveness is determined by the ability of the institution to mitigate problems (Stokke 2007a, 13). This may be measured through the contribution made by the working groups in meeting the council's environmental directives. The member states have carved out a niche for the Arctic Council as an environmentally-focused institution. They routinely meet in the working groups to discuss current issues and future work. The working groups synthesize their own research with that of the member countries' and their reports have shed light on various environmental challenges facing the Arctic. This shows that the council is active in dealing with and mitigating problems in the region.

Second, effectiveness is determined by political mobilization, including participation in and influence of decision making by the institution (Stokke, 2007a, 13). This is measured by action taken by the member states in response to the working groups' recommendations. The reports of the working groups guide member states' policy decisions. For example, PAME (the protection of the Arctic maritime environment group) developed the Arctic Offshore Oil & Gas Guidelines, which were adopted by the member states in 2002.

Finally, the Arctic Council's effectiveness can be measured by the contribution it makes towards increasing the connectedness between inhabitants of the region (Stokke 2007a, 13). The most important example of this is the inclusion of Arctic Indigenous groups as Permanent Participants in the council, which influence the direction of the working groups and are consulted in all council decisions. The PAME working group has been co-operating with the International Maritime Organization to develop the International Code of Safety for Ships Operating in Polar Waters,

and has also developed the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan with the help of other working groups of the council, and with regional and global bodies (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 34–37). The work of the council allows member states and local, regional, and international groups to participate, thereby building cohesion in the region.

From the three factors outlined above it appears that the Arctic Council is a reasonably effective institution when it comes to promoting coordinated environmental research and discussion. However, it is limited as an institution itself. It lacks a formal legal status and is referred to as a “soft law” institution, or one that creates norms or standards of behaviour without creating legally binding obligations on the member states (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 57). This non-status is due to the fact that the founding document of the Arctic Council created a mandate for the council that specifically excluded military issues and neglected to develop potential issue areas for diplomatic or political cooperation. As a non-binding instrument, member states are not bound nor even strongly encouraged to implement suggestions coming from the council or its working groups. The influence of the council is therefore limited in scope, as ultimately it is the member states who, based on their interests, preferences, and political will, decide whether or not to adopt the council’s recommendations. The Arctic Council also has little to no enforcement or monitoring power. Thus it is difficult to determine whether the member states have adopted recommendations, or to enforce or police them if they have not.

Recently there have been calls for a new binding treaty amongst the Arctic states to address the changing political relations in the North. However, while the Arctic Council’s limitations include the absence of such a binding instrument, the council already contains forums for discussion and avenues for dealing with political change so that a new institution or treaty is not necessary. Change of the Arctic Council’s mandate to include a more politically co-operative role would be a change within an existing regime and much simpler than the development of a *new* regime as is proposed (Krasner 1983, 5). The following section addresses the reality and potential for change within the Arctic Council.

The Potential for Change

The effectiveness of the Arctic Council is linked to economic and political change both nationally and internationally. The potential for oil and gas activity in the Arctic Ocean means that all circumpolar countries will be affected. The success or failure of these activities depends on the natural

environment, and necessarily means that the countries are economically interdependent. This could make state governments more likely to welcome increased political co-operation via the Arctic Council (Mitchell 2002, 20). The circumpolar nations have committed to participation in the council and smaller nations such as Canada, Norway, and Iceland view it as an opportunity to have their voice heard on an international and political stage (Stokke 2007b, 165). Effective change within the Arctic Council to deal with the increased activity in the Arctic Ocean will depend on the ability of these small nations to get the attention of the “great powers” in the area—Russia, the United States, and the European Union (EU) (Hønneland and Stokke 2007, 6). This inspires the question of whether such change is possible.

Reality for Change

There are many impediments to an increased role for the Arctic Council, including: (1) fluctuating northern governments and governmental priorities; (2) the two-year rotation of chair; (3) changing science identifying new issues in the region on a regular basis; (4) the influence of other organizations; and (5) the resistance of the “great power” member states to the evolution of a stronger Arctic Council (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 65). It is predicted that because of these issues, the Arctic Council will move into the future on “soft sleds,” maintaining its role as a forum for discussion rather than a forum for governance. Also predicted are tough questions in the days ahead such as the need for a new Arctic treaty (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 66). However, these impediments are no greater than those faced by other institutions, as governmental priorities in democracies that enable transitions of leadership will always be fluctuating, and science always progressing. The final impediment to change is the resistance of the political superpowers in the region—the United States and Russia.

The United States, for example, is hesitant to enter into binding agreements that would affect change in their domestic legislation or create supranational institutions (MacMillan 2008, 71). Former president George W. Bush released an updated Arctic policy document shortly before leaving office in January 2009. The document explicitly stated that the US does not support the transformation of the Arctic Council into a formal international organization (Federation of American Scientists 2009). President Barack Obama has neither superseded nor publicly supported this policy document. Similarly, Russia has historically been seen as reluctant to engage with other nations on shared issues (Griffiths

et al. 2009). For example, Russia was the first to submit a continental-shelf claim to the United Nations in 2001. This action, together with the planting of their flag on the seabed at the North Pole in August 2007, illustrates the country's aggressive and independent approach to the region's development as well as in relations with the other Arctic states (Borgerson 2008, 63). Finally, all of the member states' reactions to recommendations by the working groups are varied and indicate a reluctance to commit to any consensus on action (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 84).

Indications for Change

Despite the obstacles it is still possible for the Arctic Council to adopt an evolved role. The council would maintain its soft law status but its mandate would be expanded to include aspects of international co-operation in areas such as oil and gas development, shipping, and military coordination. This change has been called for by the former Norwegian chairmanship's program for the council and is necessary given the increased interest in the council by member and non-member states (for example, the increasing interest of China in the region) (McLeary 2010).

The Arctic Council's Declaration itself contains language that indicates the possibility for an increased role in encouraging co-operation between the circumpolar countries. While there is a strong focus on environmental issues and sustainability, the words "common issues" in the *Declaration* should not be ignored (Arctic Council 1996, art. 2). This language has been picked up by the current Norwegian/Danish/Swedish chairmanship program (the three countries that together share the council's chair until 2013). The proposal by the Norwegians, Swedish, and Danish that the mandate be expanded to include debate on broad political issues of relevance to the Arctic is a step towards increased co-operation in the council. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated its desire to see the council's mandate increased to cover political and project-related co-operation as an expansion of the council's responsibilities towards shaping both national and international frameworks (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 86). Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have indicated the desire to coordinate their programs, to establish a permanent secretariat, and also to review the council's structure (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006, 13 and Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty 2006, 119).

Former US president George W. Bush's Arctic policy calls for strengthening co-operation between the eight nations that participate in the Arctic Council. Specifically, the policy comments on changes in the region leading to increased activity, which in turn calls for new

arrangements or the enhancement of existing institutions. The United States supports updating the structure of the council, including changes to the working groups that are consistent with their mandate (Federation of American Scientists 2009). The directive also supported the accession of the US to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982), which indicates an increased desire by the US to be more active in the future with Arctic issues. As a major power and a member of the Arctic Council this increased US interest in Arctic issues is vitally important.

Furthermore, worldwide interest in Arctic governance is increasing. For example, the Nordic Council of Ministers released a document about the EU's policy towards the Arctic in June 2008 and the European Parliament has begun questioning the need for a new treaty (Nordic Council of Ministers 2008; European Parliament 2008). Countries such as China, Japan, and Korea, all of which maintain Arctic stations at Svalbard, Norway, are increasingly concerned with management of the area (McRae 2008, 161). Non-governmental groups such as Greenpeace at one point called for an Arctic marine sanctuary and a treaty similar to that governing the Antarctic, which designates the area as the common heritage of humankind (Greenpeace International 2007). The Arctic Frontiers meeting in Tromsø, Norway in January 2009 reflected a desire among Arctic countries for co-operation on issues beyond the environment, including military and oil-and-gas activity coordination (Hensen 2009).

Finally, shipping and oil and gas activity were an important part of the agenda at the council's November 2008 meeting of Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) (Arctic Council 2008). The SAOs recommended that the PAME recommendations on oil and gas guidelines be used as a baseline for member states' domestic policy, and that PAME's work on the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment be used to coordinate member states' shipping regulations (Arctic Council 2008, 4–6). This indicates the possibility for the council to assume coordination for such issues.

Despite the promising indicators outlined above, evolution of the Arctic Council from an informal discussion forum to a regulatory forum is improbable. Still, this does not rule out the council as an effective organization for political influence. State compliance with decisions made by international institutions in which they participate has little to do with the degree of formality of the institution. Behaviour is constrained by understandings, agreements, and reciprocities (Puchala and Hopkins 1983, 88). There are still avenues for co-operation that can be explored. Canada's upcoming chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2013 is an

opportunity for the country to propose an increased, yet informal role for the Arctic Council.

Canada's Role in the Arctic Council

Of Sovereignty and Soft Diplomacy

That there is still a void speaks volumes about Canada's approach to and neglect of the High Arctic ... Canadians have never strayed far, either physically or spiritually, from the Canada-US Boundary. We are a northern nation in fantasy and imagery only. (Coates et al. 2008, 6)

Canada's government is historically inconsistent when it comes to northern policy. Many prime ministers have made grand statements about sovereignty in the region, yet few have followed up. It usually takes some catalytic event to force action by the Canadian government, such as the passage of the US oil tanker SS *Manhattan* through the Northwest Passage in 1969 that spurred the creation of the *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act*, or the passage of the US coast guard icebreaker *Polar Sea* through the Northwest Passage that led to the 1988 *Arctic Cooperation Agreement* between Canada and the US (McRae 2008, 156–7). Most recently, the dropping of the Russian flag at the North Pole and Russian bomber flights over the Arctic Ocean have caught Canada's attention.

In recent years, the Canadian government has been increasing its presence in the North. *The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy* (NDFP) was created under former prime minister Jean Chretien's government in 2000 and continues to this day. The policy statement deals with issues of climate change, economic development, and circumpolar relations. Priority areas included taking a leadership role in the Arctic Council, engaging circumpolar countries on Canada's northern policy, and encouraging increased dialogue and activity in northern organizations (Canada 2008a). While little action appears to have taken place on this policy, the government has been actively seeking public input on Canada's role into the future. Under the NDFP there was actually a period of discussion amongst policy-makers and academics, and joint scientific research between Canada, the US, and Denmark as to the limits of the continental shelves continued. Finally, the current government amended the *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act* in August 2009 to add further protection to Canadian waters by extending the enforcement zone from 100 to 200 nautical miles before Stephen Harper, the current prime

minister, released an updated *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada's Northern Strategy Abroad* (Statement; Canada 2008; Canada 2008c; Canada 2010a). The Statement firmly entrenches the commitment of the government to development in the Arctic, focusing first and foremost on the continuation and promotion of Canada's sovereignty in the region, followed by goals to improve economic and social development, strengthen governance, and protect the natural Arctic environment.

The Canadian government's insistence upon sovereignty as the crucial aspect in Canada's foreign policy has been picked up by Canadian media, which often make a frenzy out of the issue. The most recent activity surrounded the flights of Russian planes into Canadian airspace over the Arctic Ocean before US president Barack Obama's diplomatic visit to Stephen Harper in February 2009 and again in July 2010. Before this Russian activity, it was an American Arctic Policy update stating that the US views the Northwest Passage as an international strait and therefore subject to transit passage that stirred the media's imagination. According to the media these are direct challenges to Canada's sovereignty. The reality is that transit passage through the Northwest Passage and over Arctic airspace does not mean that Canada has lost sovereignty over the North. Rather, it suggests that Canada will have an increased responsibility from the present to monitor transit through its territory, and it also means that Canada may have a tough time dealing with the environmental consequences of travel through the northern archipelago (McRae 2008, 157–8).

The true focus of this "race for the Arctic" is on the continental shelves that extend from each of the Arctic basin countries,¹ and the oil and gas resources beneath the seabed (McRae 2008, 159). Only when Canada has finished mapping its continental shelf, has submitted its claim to the UN's Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, due in 2013, and had its claim accepted, will we understand the true extent of our rights in the Arctic (UNCLOS 1982, arts. 57 and 76).² The potential for conflict lies in competing claims for shelf rights where boundaries are not clearly defined or are obscured by ridges on the seabed. If Russia, Canada, and Denmark share the same shelf as, for example, is speculated along the Lomonosov Ridge that crosses the North Pole, boundaries will have to be decided upon. When that has been done the problem remains of how to manage the open waters of the Arctic Ocean, the oil and gas resources therein, and the legal regime that governs shipping (McRae 2008, 159).

This is where Canada's involvement with the Arctic Council and its potential for an expanded mandate can prove useful. There are claims that Canada's diplomatic golden age ended with the death of Lester B. Pearson and the decline of a once influential federal department of foreign affairs and international trade (Cohen 2003). Proactive and engaged participation in the Arctic Council at this time could signal a renewed energy in Canada's diplomacy and foreign relations. This kind of diplomatic savvy will be especially important because Canada is not considered one of the "great powers" in the Arctic. Any kind of initiative taken must inevitably be supported by Russia, the US, and the EU if it is going to be effective.

Next Steps

Canada's involvement in the Arctic Council and a soft diplomatic approach will increase in importance as oil and gas resources of the region become available. There are many suggestions for Canada's next steps. These suggestions are outlined further below.

First, Canada should abandon promotion of sovereignty as its priority for foreign policy, and instead adopt a more progressive and co-operative approach to northern issues. Canada's sovereignty in the region is unquestioned and unchallenged by the other Arctic states. The real question is on the delineation of the continental shelves and even there co-operative research is ongoing. Sovereignty as the backbone of Canada's policy is outdated—a more progressive policy would look towards co-operation on shared issues such as infrastructure for oil and gas development and shipping, and on regional rather than individual security.

Second, Canada should encourage dialogue amongst the Arctic Council nations and should actively work to engage both Russia and the United States in the region. Canada should encourage the use of established legal regimes such as UNCLOS, and should promote the idea of the United States becoming a party to the convention. This should be done at a high diplomatic level; continued engagement of Canada's prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in the region is necessary for encouraging co-operation amongst all member states. As oil and gas activity increases, co-operation between the nations will be crucial to avoid catastrophes such as spills.

Third, as one of the upcoming chairs of the council, Canada is in an advantageous position to take a leadership role for the protection of the environment as well as for increased discussion between the countries about the oil, gas, and shipping regime that is to exist. Canada should use this opportunity to forward not only this country's individual interests for

the area, but a vision for the region as a whole. For example, one particular vision for the region is the creation of an “Arctic Partnership” amongst the Arctic-basin states with the objective of environmental management of the Arctic Ocean and its resources, and shipping (McRae 2008, 163). This calls on the Arctic Council to maintain its role as an institution for sharing information rather than decision making. This vision maintains that the Arctic-basin states must present a united front to other states and international institutions when it comes to managing the Arctic, especially when non-Arctic states claim the area as the common heritage of humankind (McRae 2008, 163). In fact, Canada did host a meeting on 29 March 2010 for the nations that have coastline in the Arctic Ocean. The purpose of that meeting was to encourage discussion between the states on their shared interests and to specifically address continental shelf delineation and public safety concerns (Canada 2010b). The exclusion of Arctic Council member states Iceland, Finland, and Sweden, as well as Arctic Indigenous groups, was heavily criticized (O’Neill and Boswell 2010).

A less contentious solution to the issues that would be addressed by an “Arctic Partnership” would be the formation of an International Cooperation Working Group within the Arctic Council itself (Koivurova and Vanderzwaag 2007, 87). This working group could coordinate with other working groups such as PAME to manage the interests of the Arctic states with respect to oil and gas activity and the marine environment. While chair, Canada could encourage the member states of the Arctic Council to disclose to such a working group all decisions that may have an impact on the region, for high-level political analysis and discussion. This would create a non-binding yet persuasive avenue for diplomacy that could influence the political movement of the member states and encourage cohesive policy-making in the region.

Canada will chair the Arctic Council from 2013–2015. This opportunity for leadership must not be wasted. Canada should follow up on the Norwegian proposal for an expansion of the Arctic Council’s role, and propose a further increase in the council’s position by creating an International Co-operation Working Group that could coordinate and monitor the political action taken by the member states.

Conclusion

This is a dynamic time in the Arctic region. The changing climate is having an impact upon more than the natural environment, the birds, or the caribou—it is effecting necessary change in political relations as well. The

Arctic Council has the ability to evolve to meet this change and Canada, as a member state with significant interests at stake, must take the diplomatic lead. It is a time of both great opportunity and great urgency. It is *the* time for a well thought-out legal strategy, a policy of resource management, and a return to the diplomacy for which Canadians were once known.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor David Long at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, and Professor Don McRae at the Faculty of Common Law, University of Ottawa, for their guidance and support in writing this paper.

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Notes

1. The five states whose coasts entitle them to maritime claims in the Arctic Ocean: Canada, the United States, Russia, Norway and Denmark.
2. Maritime states may claim a 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone and further continental shelf rights.

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