

Creating a Framework for Consensus Building and Governance:

An Appraisal of the Swedish Arctic Council Chairmanship and the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting

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The Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 2011-13 represented a distinctive contribution to the development of an Arctic governance structure in transition. As the last of the Arctic Eight to assume the chair of the body, Sweden sought to follow a leadership approach that endeavored to build consensus and find common ground among members who seemed, at times, to be at odds with one another over several significant Arctic policy issues. During its tenure as chair, Sweden introduced a broad agenda for action on Arctic environmental and sustainable development issues. It also attempted to assist the Council in making some necessary organizational changes to the manner in which it conducted its own affairs. The purpose of this article is first, to describe the specific vantage point of Sweden toward the Arctic and the Arctic Council and second, to discuss the specific initiatives it chose to pursue during its chairmanship. Due attention is also given to some of Sweden's specific organizational efforts to "build a stronger Council" and to overcome barriers to institutional growth and development. Events of the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting are also discussed and evaluated in this context. An assessment is offered of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the Swedish Chairmanship and what may be the most significant features of its legacy.

Introduction

Sweden, for the most part, has never fully considered itself to be an Arctic nation. Despite having a significant record in Arctic exploration and northern scientific research, the country has never embraced an Arctic identity in the same way that Canada, Russia or Norway have today or in the past. Only a relatively small portion of its territory is to be found within the Arctic Circle and its northern, largely rural population is miniscule in comparison to the dominant urban communities found in its south.¹ It is also one of the three countries of the Arctic Eight that lacks a coastline bordering on the Arctic Ocean. In a Swedish context, the whole region of the circumpolar north seems both geographically and conceptually remote.

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As such, there was not an established foundation of interest in Arctic affairs when the Swedish government announced that it would take on leadership responsibilities for the Arctic Council in 2011. While there was some underlying national pride that Sweden, again, would be asked to chair another international body, most Swedes had only a limited awareness of what the Arctic Council was all about and what particular contribution their country might make to its efforts. Like the Arctic region itself, the Arctic Council and its work was *terra incognita* for most Swedish citizens.²

Nor did the international community have much sense of what Sweden's role at the helm of the organization might portend. Up to that point, Sweden had not been a very visible player in Arctic affairs with well-articulated views and opinions on key issues of concern. As the last of the Arctic Eight states to step into a leadership role in the Arctic Council, it did not possess a strong record of significant contributions to northern dialogue or decision-making. Several of its fellow Council members openly wondered what its position might be on a number of looming regional problems. Sweden had not published an overall government policy statement on its views towards the Arctic. It was to do so, rather belatedly, on the day it assumed the chairmanship of the Arctic Council.³

Some observers, both internally and externally, contended that Sweden's priorities in its foreign policy were not Arctic-focused. The country and its government seemed far more interested in the Baltic region, the European Union and the broader questions of international politics discussed at the UN and in other global forums. It was suggested that Sweden had only, reluctantly, taken part in the activities of the Arctic Council out of a long-standing commitment to act in solidarity with its Nordic neighbors. Thus it was not surprising that when Sweden's pending chairmanship was discussed, it was done so primarily in the context of being the third installment of a "common umbrella program" offered jointly by Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm. Sweden was to be the dutiful partner who would complete leadership initiatives begun by Norway and Denmark.

Yet it seemed to others that such a limited role for Sweden in the Arctic Council's chairmanship was not consistent with the much more developed posture which Sweden had demonstrated in other international and regional leadership positions. The country had a long and distinguished record in international diplomacy and had chaired a variety of international organizations and conferences over the past several decades. It had performed well in leading UN, EU and Nordic Council bodies through complex issues and demanding agendas. It was an acknowledged global force in international environmental deliberations and had played an important role in helping to establish the Arctic Council's predecessor, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS).⁴ Sweden was a nation that embodied deep values and commitment to international cooperation and dialogue across a wide number of other significant global concerns. Perhaps, then, Sweden might be expected to play a more significant part in the efforts of the Arctic Council than had been initially assumed by some.

Sweden Adopts a Role as Chair

Towards the end of the Danish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, Sweden first began to outline the particular stance it desired to adopt as the incoming head of that body.⁵ Rather than push a narrow agenda of concerns motivated by national or regional self-interest, Sweden suggested that it

desired to play the role of an “honest broker.” In that capacity it explained that it wished to facilitate cooperation among all the members of the Council and to build a consensus among them regarding how they might address a series of significant Arctic challenges. In performing the role of the chair, Sweden stated that it would act in an even-handed and flexible manner. It would be open and transparent in its dealings with all members. Perhaps most importantly, it would operate in a manner which would assist the Council “to do its work” effectively and efficiently. This meant not only focusing on addressing key policy questions before the Council, but encouraging its members to implement and follow up on decisions and actions that had already been agreed to earlier.

The Swedish government assembled a team drawn primarily from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Environment to guide its efforts as chair of the Council for the next two years. Though brought together at a relatively late date, the members of this team were soon focused on the challenge of presenting an organized and coherent program for the Swedish Chairmanship. While several members of the team were relatively young and had not worked on matters related to the Arctic prior to taking on their new assignments, they had considerable previous experience with international diplomacy having served in UN and EU posts and in other high-profile Swedish government roles.⁶ Perhaps most importantly, they seemed committed to demonstrating that Sweden was quite capable of directing the affairs of the Arctic Council and of meeting – or surpassing – all expectations that had been articulated either at home or abroad.

This focus on professionalism and competence was to become a hallmark of the Swedish Chairmanship. Its roots go deep into the political and cultural fabric of the nation. To appear competent, effective or “duktig” has been seen as major preoccupation of Swedish society for much of its history.⁷ It has also featured prominently in the country’s efforts to demonstrate to the broader world its capacity to play a significant role in global affairs despite its position as a relatively small country in traditional power politics terms. Like other “small states” in the international community, Sweden has retained access to key international arenas through its reputation as being an effective organizer and promoter of consensus.⁸ Demonstrated competence and “reputational power” were very much at stake in Sweden’s role as Chair of the Arctic Council and influenced the way it was to conduct its business.

From the outset of its chairmanship, Sweden emphasized the point that it wanted the Council to be more than a glorified talking shop. It emphasized the importance of specific “deliverables” that should emerge from the efforts of its several working groups and the need for all member states and permanent participant delegations to adequately consult and prepare ahead of all scheduled meetings. A concerted effort was made to take action on agreed agendas; and time was not to be wasted. From the first SAO session in Luleå through the concluding Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna, the Swedish Chair kept one eye on the clock and a ready hand on the gavel. This was usually done in most professional manner which allowed for some degree of traditional “northern informality” and humor while at the same time conveying the clear message that the Council had important work to do and a limited period to conduct its business.

Sweden's Proposed Agenda for the Arctic Council

In assuming the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, Sweden followed the customary practice of suggesting what would be the specific agenda items that members would like prioritized during its term of office. Several of these proposals represented a continuation of themes initiated earlier under the Scandinavian “umbrella program” that had begun in 2007. Others represented ideas for new undertakings that were reflective of distinctively Swedish interests and concerns. This proposed agenda was presented under three major headings: *The Environment*, *The People* (or the Human Dimension); and *A Stronger Arctic Council*. Together they represented a specific plan of action for the Council over the coming two years and pointed to desired accomplishments or “deliverables” that Sweden hoped to provide by the end of its term as chair in each of the three designated areas.

With regard to the environment, Sweden gave a renewed priority to the Council's continuing work on climate change. It suggested, however, that in addition to focusing on the harmful effects of long-lived greenhouse gases, the Council should move forward to consider the impact of short-lived climate forcers (SLCF) such as black carbon which had their origins often within the Arctic region itself. It also suggested that the Council should consider studying the capacity of natural and social systems to adapt to climatic change and other major forces of potential disturbance in northern polar areas. It supported the undertaking of an Arctic Change Assessment and pushed for the creation of a specific research project on Arctic Resilience looking at the capacity of northern ecosystems and communities to manage and overcome disturbances of a variety of types. Sweden also continued to champion the other environmental work of the Council by supporting ongoing research studies on biodiversity and environmental protection. It signaled its keen interest in having pending reports addressing the state of the Arctic Ocean, Arctic biodiversity, and Arctic Ocean acidification completed by the Council's working groups and having these available as “deliverables” at the Ministerial Meeting in 2013. Sweden also suggested that the Council should do its utmost to facilitate the conclusion of an international agreement on Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness and Response by the same time. This proposed legal agreement was deemed to address a major environmental concern of the Arctic states and would be seen to represent a concrete policy action of the Council.

Sweden's attention to the human dimension of the Arctic continued a theme advanced by its Scandinavian neighbors, Norway and Denmark, in their earlier chairmanships. Sweden, however, was to build upon and expand on the work of the Council in this area by giving new emphasis to viewing the Arctic as “home to the people who live there” (Bildt, 2011). Under the broad heading of sustainable development, it suggested that a variety of research projects should be undertaken including a revised Arctic Human Development Report II that would now include expanded attention to the economic, health, education and employment conditions of northern residents. Other proposed studies in this area would address the means for supporting the languages and cultures of Arctic indigenous peoples; would consider ways to provide access to traditional foods and safe water supplies in the region; and would examine the importance of gender and gender equality issues within northern societies and communities. Such undertakings would be facilitated through a reinvigorated Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) that would be chaired

by a Swede and assisted in its efforts by an expanded research network of scholars drawn from medicine, economics, the social sciences and humanities. Finally, the contributions of the business community to the sustainable economic development of the Arctic region were to be given greater consideration under the Swedish chairmanship. Specific meetings to assess the positive impact of business investment and development in the Arctic were to be scheduled. This would be paired with a consideration of a Code of Social Responsibility that might guide such business efforts.

However, perhaps the most significant undertakings of the Swedish Chairmanship were set forth under the third heading of its thematic program. Here Sweden suggested that its most important contribution as chair might come in helping to build a stronger and more effective Arctic Council. Though some skeptics might question Sweden's credentials as an Arctic nation, none could deny its established interest and demonstrated capabilities in organizational management. It would put these skills to work immediately across a number of fronts. As mentioned earlier, Sweden undertook to use its privileged position as chair to encourage the Council to conduct its business in a timely, focused and well-organized manner. It further indicated that it would push forward vigorously on several organizational reform efforts begun earlier under the Norwegian and Danish Chairmanships. These included the establishment of a permanent secretariat for the organization, the creation of revised rules of procedure, and the tightening up of communication and information sharing efforts between the various units of the Council. Equally important, it announced that it would endeavor to create new and effective links between the Arctic Council and the broader world. It would do so by revamping the Council's website and by implementing a formal communications strategy. Sweden, over its two years as chair, would seek to provide an identifiable "voice and face" for the Council by utilizing the most current communication methods and social media tools. The Swedish Chairmanship team would undertake an effort to represent Arctic issues and concerns at several international and regional conferences across the globe. Finally, the Swedish Chairmanship announced it would work to secure an agreement on the admission of new observers to the Council. It would seek to build a consensus position among the existing members on this issue, and to guide such an agreement through to final adoption by the time of the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting. In leading such an effort, Sweden signaled that it was prepared to undertake an urgent and most difficult assignment as chair of the Council. It was one which had frustrated and eluded its Scandinavian predecessors for four years.⁹

Making Headway on Several Fronts

As might be expected from a leadership team that was keenly focused on assisting "the Council to do its work," the Swedish Chairmanship provided a carefully planned and tightly coordinated schedule for the Arctic Council during its two years at its helm. It set regular formal sessions for the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) and the Permanent Participants (PP) on a biannual basis. During November of 2011 and 2012 they gathered in the northern Swedish communities of Luleå and Haparanda. During March of the same years, they met in the capital city of Stockholm. These sessions –especially those in Swedish Norrland – allowed the several delegations to get an impression of life in that part of the circumpolar north. These formal meetings were supplemented by informal gatherings held in Tromsø, Norway in January of 2013 and in Stockholm in April 2013

where the SAOs and the PPs were able to take additional time to consider items of some complexity and ongoing concern such as the observer question. They also provided an opportunity to celebrate achievements such as the formal start of the Permanent Secretariat in Tromsø and to carefully plan the specifics of the upcoming Kiruna ministerial meeting. During this same time period, the Swedish Chairmanship also planned a mid-term meeting for Deputy Foreign Ministers on Arctic matters that occurred in Stockholm in May of 2012 and assisted in coordinating a gathering of the Environmental Ministers from the Arctic Eight in Jukkasjärvi in February of 2013.¹⁰

The Swedish Chairmanship also endeavored to provide direction and assistance to the several working groups and task forces of the Council. Gustaf Lind met with the chairs of each of these bodies very early in his term as the Swedish head of the SAOs. He conveyed the clear message that all of these groups should endeavor to follow a well-planned and executed work schedule over the next two years. In so doing, he argued that they would be better able to share their undertakings at the regular SAO meetings and guarantee the delivery of their final reports or other deliverables at the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna. Perhaps at no previous time in the history of the Arctic Council had the Chairmanship been so deeply engaged in the process of overseeing and coordinating the work of these groups – many of which had operated in a fairly autonomous fashion up to this point. Such intervention “from the top” was generally received in a positive fashion by most members of the Council’s working groups and task forces – though a few grumbled over what they saw as “excessive regimentation” coming from the Swedish Chairmanship. Regardless, these several bodies undertook a large number of successful research efforts during this period and were to report their findings in a series of well-received scientific studies at the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna.

The work of two of these groups – the Task Force for Institutional Issues and the Sustainable Development Working Group – were accorded special attention by the Swedish Chairmanship. The former, led by Andreas von Uexküll – a member of the Swedish Chairmanship team – was given the key responsibilities for concluding the arrangements for the legal status and formal operation of the new Permanent Secretariat in Tromsø. This body was also tasked with the assignments of revising the Arctic Council’s Rules of Procedure and drafting a manual to guide the future participation of observers within the Council and in its subsidiary bodies. The latter group, the SDWG, was chaired by Michael Anzén – also a member of the Swedish Chairmanship team – and given the mandate to broaden and highlight its efforts including those related to the Arctic Resilience Study and the proposed outreach to the business community. In each instance, the accomplishments of these bodies were seen as vital to the overall success of the Swedish Chairmanship.

An equally significant undertaking during this period of time was the drafting of the proposed agreement on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic. The successful conclusion of such negotiations was seen to provide further evidence that the Arctic Council was not simply a “talking shop” but could undertake important steps to deal with pressing Arctic concerns. With the precedent of the Agreement on Search and Rescue in Arctic Waters that had been signed in Nuuk in 2011 very much in mind, the members of the Council moved forward to finish the final draft of this new legal document in sufficient time for signature at the 2013 Kiruna Ministerial Meeting.¹¹ Though criticized by some – including Greenpeace – for not seeking to

address the sources of oil spills in the Arctic, the agreement, nonetheless, represented a solid step forward in encouraging international cooperation in addressing environmental challenges arising from energy development in the region. Interestingly, as had been the case with the earlier Arctic Search and Rescue Accord, both Russia and the United States played significant roles in developing and shaping this new agreement. In so doing, these two major powers demonstrated their renewed interest in the concrete work of the Council and their willingness to collaborate on a multilateral basis on important Arctic concerns.

Throughout this period, headway was also made in providing a “face and voice” for the Arctic Council as an organization. Within weeks of assuming the leadership role, the Swedish Chairmanship began revamping and updating the website of the Arctic Council. It published its new agenda for action over the coming two years as well as the earlier undertakings of the Council. It also began implementing a formal communications strategy for the organization.¹² Through such efforts, vital information regarding the work, capabilities and interests of the body and its several sub-units were shared both internally within the organization and with the broader external community. It was recognized that the latter included both Arctic residents and those living further south who, nonetheless, maintained an interest in the region. The Swedish Chairmanship took the initiative to actively highlight on the organization’s website the variety of significant issues that were being considered within the Council. Using new social media tools, it also indicated a number of ways in which policymakers and the public might involve themselves in these discussions. Additionally, it sought to bring Arctic issues and concerns to the attention of larger international conferences and meetings. During the 2011-13 period, representatives of the Swedish Chairmanship took part in a number of such gatherings including those related to the World Oceans Summit in Singapore and the UN World Climate Conference in South Africa. As a consequence, the profile of the Arctic Council was raised not only throughout the circumpolar world but in non-Arctic settings as well. It carried the message forward that Arctic concerns should be global concerns.

This latter focus – on the interests and potential contributions of non-Arctic states to the work of the Arctic Council – was to occupy a good deal of the remaining time and energies of the Swedish Chairmanship during its term of office. Specifically, it was active from its first days in office to the conclusion of the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting, in seeking to forge a consensus among the members of the Council as to which new observers might be added to the body. Taking the new criteria for admission that had been earlier approved at the Nuuk Ministerial Meeting in May of 2011, Sweden worked with both applicants and Council members to ensure that all submissions were adequately prepared and considered in a comprehensive fashion. Through both formal and informal discussions with the parties, it helped to identify areas of concern and to facilitate dialogue between the parties involved. It sought to use the “good offices” of the chair, to bridge disagreements and to foster a spirit of compromise between the parties. Still the issue lingered as a seemingly unsolvable question.

The Kiruna Ministerial Meeting

A day prior to the Ministerial Meeting the portents for the upcoming session were not entirely promising. Cool, showery weather had descended upon Swedish Norrland and a thick blanket of fog had both enveloped the meeting site and threatened to prevent the arrival by air of some of the foreign ministers scheduled to attend the Kiruna session. While these climatic conditions gradually improved, there persisted a number of policy questions (the most significant being who were to be admitted as new observers) that still needed to be fully resolved before the opening of the Ministerial Meeting. As a consequence, the normally relaxed and informal dinner gathering which had been scheduled for the evening prior became more of a final and prolonged negotiation session over a meal among the ministers and their advisors. It was not to break up until just before one in the morning.

As the new day began, it was not entirely clear whether the Swedish Chairmanship had accomplished its overriding goal of “letting the Council do its work” and building consensus among its members. The setting had been carefully prepared within the City Hall of Kiruna, but it remained to be seen whether Arctic harmony would prevail. There was a bit of nervous tension in the air with the realization that as Gustaf Lind, the Swedish SAO had put it: “Two years of work will be summed up in two hours” (Lind, 2013). However, as the Swedish Foreign Minister, Carl Bildt, called the meeting to order, it became increasingly evident to all in attendance that much had been achieved over the past years through concerted effort, and that the Swedish Chairmanship would conclude having accomplished most of its original goals.

In the Swedish Foreign Minister’s opening speech, and in the subsequent statements offered by most of his Council colleagues, it was noted that the Arctic Council had achieved significant results over the past two years both in the areas of environmental stewardship and in protecting the quality of life for residents of the north. Furthermore it was maintained that the Council, itself, had matured institutionally and had “come of age” by undertaking the internal reforms and improvements that provided for “the self-confidence necessary to stimulate a global approach to the most urgent problems in the region and to build bridges of cooperation to outside stakeholders” (Bildt, 2013). Foreign Minister Bildt also indicated that the Council had clearly demonstrated that it was capable of fostering consensus and taking concrete action on important issues for the Arctic and the broader world. These sentiments were underscored both in the *Kiruna Declaration* issued that day and in the accompanying *Vision for the Arctic*, a document that sought to outline the future path of the Council over its next round of chairmanships.¹³

While several important challenges and opportunities still remained to be addressed, the Council could, nonetheless, point with pride to a number of significant Arctic scientific studies and policy actions being announced at Kiruna. These included the *Arctic Biodiversity Assessment*, the *Arctic Ocean Review*, the *Arctic Ocean Acidification Assessment*, and the *Agreement on Marine Oil Pollution and Preparedness and Response in the Arctic*. Additionally, the *Senior Arctic Officials Report* that was also tabled at the Ministerial Meeting outlined a wide variety of additional undertakings of the Council and its specialized working groups and task forces. These included inquiries into such diverse areas as maritime shipping, ecosystem-based management and northern community health and resilience.

Taken as a whole, they represented a substantial body of both new research findings and concrete policy deliverables.

Equally important, the long-standing and troublesome question of admitting new observers to the organization was finally resolved in Kiruna. The Council decided to welcome six new observers: China, Japan, Korea, India, Singapore and Italy. It also provided an opportunity for the European Union to join this group in the near future. By reaching outward to include a number of non-Arctic states within the body – and at the same time recognizing the primacy of the Arctic Eight and the Permanent Participants – the Council arrived at the type of desirable compromise position that the Swedish Chairmanship had long-encouraged. It had taken long hours and many meetings to accomplish this, but the result promised a stronger and more effective Council in the future.¹⁴

Having achieved most of its stated objectives with respect to promoting environmental protection in the Arctic, encouraging sustainable development in the region, and strengthening the institutional framework of the Council, Sweden now passed the gavel of the Arctic Council to Canada. It could do so with some degree of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. Two years of focused attention and committed effort had brought about important results and an enhanced sense of organizational vitality. These both could be celebrated at the Swedish Chairmanship's concluding dinner at the Ice Hotel just outside of Kiruna.

Conclusion: Assessing the Impact of the Swedish Chairmanship

In many respects, the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council proved to be quite successful and certainly exceeded the limited expectations that some held for it at the outset of its term. It delivered on many of its proposed agenda items during the two years it was at the helm of the organization and provided visible and adept leadership for the body as it undertook important steps in its own development and evolution. Nonetheless, there were some limitations to its performance. Some of these arose from an over-crowded schedule – too much to do in too little time. Others were reflective of significant internal debates and changes taking place within the organization itself which made it difficult to formulate consensus positions on all items. Examples of each type of problem are provided below.

Although the Swedish Chairmanship had promised a wide-ranging discussion of Arctic issues, some tended to get sidelined along the way. Two in particular – support for the culture and languages of Arctic indigenous peoples and consideration of gender issues – received rather limited attention. The Swedish government's relations with its own indigenous people, the Saami, have been troubled and difficult for some time. Meaningful dialogue and shared perspectives on issues related to natural resource utilization, autonomous cultural development and local decision-making in traditional Saami lands have been limited. As such, it seemed difficult for the Swedish Chairmanship to decide how to move forward on its planned initiative to encourage support for indigenous languages and cultures across the Arctic. Though well-intentioned, its efforts often went in no particular direction except for perfunctory statements of support for such undertakings and brief presentations of Saami cultural traditions at official sessions and gatherings of the Council. This limited attention to indigenous issues, along with a seeming lack of recognition of the continued Saami opposition to

resource development in its own northern lands, left the Swedish Chairmanship efforts rather flat-footed and hollow sounding. It also brought about one of the few protests against the Swedish government's policy in the Arctic when the representative of the Saami Council formally rebuked Sweden at the Ministerial Meeting for its actions in support of the expansion of mining activities in Norrland.¹⁵

Attention to gender and gender-equality issues also received only modest attention during the Swedish Chairmanship. This was despite the fact that these issues had been prominently mentioned in its originally proposed agenda for action. A few specific research initiatives were begun under the auspices of the Social Development Working Group (SDWG), but very little of a concrete nature was completed by the end of the Swedish Chairmanship's term. This was a bit of an embarrassment as the discussion of gender and gender equality issues had become a hallmark of Swedish domestic politics and the nation's foreign policy for the last several decades. In fact, it was rather remarkable that the whole discussion of gender at the Kiruna session was largely consigned to a single panel discussion held during the day prior to the Ministerial Meeting. Although it was proved to be one of the highlights of that day's presentation of research findings from the Council's working groups and task forces, it was sadly, scheduled late in the afternoon, as the last order of business, ahead of what turned out to be a busy evening of final decision-making. As a consequence, few Arctic Council participants attended this session or heard what proved to be an insightful discussion of some of the gender issues and challenges in today's northern communities.¹⁶

Another type of limitation to the performance of the Swedish Chairmanship arose from internal debates and divisions within the body itself. As noted above, Sweden had to devote a significant amount of time and energy to the resolution of the ongoing observer question. The growing centrality of this issue was reflective of a significant amount of discord among the membership over whether non-Arctic states should have any voice in charting the future development of the region. This question was particularly politically charged as some of the Permanent Participants saw the inclusion of such delegations as a threat to their own unique status within the body. Other members of the Arctic Eight, including Canada and Russia, worried that the admission of major players like China, Japan and the European Union might threaten their own sovereign economic and political rights in the Arctic. The Swedish Chairmanship found its efforts in other agenda areas constrained by a lack of forward movement on the observer question. For instance, it could not conclude work on the revised rules of procedure for the Council until it better knew what final direction the membership was going to take in welcoming new observers and the extent of the roles they might play.

Similarly, the Swedish Chairmanship's struggle to enforce greater uniformity in procedures and greater coordination among the working groups and the SAOs was hampered due to an ongoing debate within the organization as to where the center of gravity of the body should be found. Several of the working groups - especially those which had their origins in the AEPS era - felt that they should retain a good deal of autonomy in their research undertakings and internal processes. On the other hand, many of the SAOs argued for increased governmental oversight of these research efforts and more centralized administrative accountability. This division of opinion was

exacerbated by the fact that new government interests in Arctic affairs seemed to be moving in the direction of its “human dimension” thus threatening the existing research priorities of some of these established working groups. Finding an acceptable balance between these alternative viewpoints – and building a consensus from which to move the organization forward – became a growing responsibility of the Swedish Chairmanship during its tenure.

In meeting all of these challenges, the Swedes were simply demonstrating many of the classical roles performed by a chair of any organization.¹⁷ They undertook the responsibility for directing the formal sessions of the body. They oversaw and gave form to many of the internal processes of the organization. They helped to shape and maintain the agenda of the Council over their term of office. They played a brokerage role in helping to resolve divisive issues between the members and build consensus. Finally, they endeavored to represent the organization in other settings giving it a distinctive face and voice. However, in most every instance, they took their responsibilities one step further. They sought not only to carry out their specific short-term assignments as part of the Swedish Chairmanship, but also to assist in setting a general pattern of leadership for the Arctic Council that would allow the body to more fully develop and prosper.

In the period following the conclusion of the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting, most observers of the Arctic Council have been generally complementary of the approach and achievements of the Swedish Chairmanship. Its organized, focused and fairly transparent way of directing the affairs of the Council have been applauded. So too has its willingness to play the role of an “honest broker” in seeking to build consensus among the members and in assisting them to find common ground on potentially divisive issues. Sweden has been largely praised for its ability to deliver an impressive list of important research studies and policy decisions by the Council on Arctic matters. However, it may well be that its organizational building efforts (establishing a Permanent Secretariat, providing new rules of procedure, creating a formal communication strategy and resolving the impasse over new observers) will become the most important legacy of the Swedish Chairmanship. Sweden has again demonstrated its considerable capabilities and skills in organizational leadership and reform. Though Sweden will likely never be seen as a leading *Arctic* state, its specific contributions as Chair of the Arctic Council from 2011-2013 were nearly a perfect fit for the needs of the organization at that time.

Notes

1. Sweden’s own indigenous peoples, the Saami, form a distinctive element of its northern population base and provide almost an iconic symbol of the area. Nonetheless, relations between the Swedish national government and the Saami people have not always been harmonious. The type of conflicts between indigenous peoples and settler communities found elsewhere in the circumpolar world are also part Swedish history. Present relations between Stockholm and the leadership of the Saami community have been strained over unresolved land claims and land use policies. A good insight into the nature of the interaction is provided by Udtja Lasse in his book *Bury My Heart at Udtjajaure* (2007).

2. The *Rethinking the Top of the World* opinion survey revealed that most Swedes had only a limited understanding of current Arctic issues and that some 72% of those who were sampled had never heard of the Arctic Council.
3. *Sweden's Strategy of the Arctic Region* (2011). Lassi Heininen provides an excellent overview of the document in his *Sweden's Strategy for the Arctic Region: Priorities and Objectives* (2011) noting its just-in-time origins, but also suggesting that it is "straightforward and clear on its priorities."
4. See Oran Young's discussion of Sweden's and other the Nordics' contributions to international environmental protection and the establishment of the AEPS in his *Creating Regimes: Arctic Accords and International Governance* (1998).
5. See *Sweden's Chairmanship Programme for the Arctic Council 2011-2013*. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) took an interest in the Swedish Chairmanship and sponsored several meetings reviewing its progress. Summaries of the April 2011 (The New Arctic: Building Cooperation in the Face of Emerging Challenges) and November 2012 (The Arctic Council in Transition: Nordic to North American Leadership) are particularly useful in getting a sense of Swedish goals and objectives.
6. Gustaf Lind, Sweden's Arctic Ambassador and Chair of the SAOs during the Swedish Chairmanship helped to organize and direct Sweden's earlier Presidency of the European Union. He has suggested that this earlier experience assisted him in undertaking his responsibilities within the Arctic Council.
7. Please refer to the discussion of the Swedish concept of *duktig* offered by Åke Daun in his *Swedish Mentality* (1995) or by Christina Johansson Robinowitz and Lisa Werner Carr in their *Modern Day Vikings* (2001).
8. See the discussion of small state behavior within the international community provided in Christine Ingebritsen's edited volume *Small States in International Relations* (2006).
9. Piotr Graczyk provides a very good discussion of the whole observer debate in his *The Arctic Council Inclusive of Non-Arctic Perspectives: Seeking a New Balance* (2011).
10. Background material and documents on both of these meetings can be found at the Arctic Council website. Although not formally part of the Council's specific undertakings, the gathering of the Ministers of the Environment was deemed by many as an important effort in circumpolar cooperation. A useful summary of the discussions of the Environment Ministers can be found in *Arctic Change - Global Effects* produced by the Swedish Ministry of the Environment.
11. The texts for both of these agreements can be found at the Arctic Council website.

12. Elements of this approach are outlined in a *Communication Strategy for the Arctic Council* (2013). The full document is available for review at the Arctic Council's website.
13. Copies of these two documents can be downloaded from the Arctic Council's website.
14. Please refer to the *Economist's* article of May 18, 2013 entitled "Arctic Diplomacy: A Warmer Welcome."
15. Please refer to a summary of the presentations of all Permanent Representatives at the Ministerial Meeting entitled *Indigenous Statements in Kiruna* found at the website of the Arctic Council's Indigenous Peoples Secretariat.
16. A discussion of the panel is provided on the website of the Arctic Council's Indigenous Peoples Secretariat entitled *Engendering the North*.
17. Please refer to Jonas Tallberg's excellent article in the *International Studies Quarterly* (2010) which discusses the roles of chairs in international organizations and the influence they may derive from such a position.

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