

Briefing Note

Is there Scope for Scotland to develop its own Arctic Policy and What Would it Look Like?

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The Arctic is an area receiving a large amount of global attention due to the increasing evidence of climate change all across the region, acting as a harbinger for action to be taken on this global issue. Scotland is inseparably linked to the dynamics of the region, but is concomitant with the politics of the UK, which has been found not to offer of yet, a comprehensive policy approach to the Arctic. Ultimately issues of governance and security are likely to increase in the High North, as will economic opportunities. As a result, there is imminent demand for more comprehensive governance and security in the region, especially as resource extraction continues.

Scotland as part of the UK is a near-Arctic country and will undoubtedly be drawn into future discussions on the concerns facing the region. Many subnational and regional governments have their own Arctic policies. The possibility for Scotland to develop its own Arctic policy is fairly limited, however, in large part due to the constitutional context it currently finds itself in. Although the vote for Britain to leave the European Union, increasing powers through devolution, demand from Arctic states and international institutions for more comprehensive

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governance, and increasing economic opportunities suggest that a Scottish Arctic policy stating its intent and outlining its specific areas of concern and abilities from the UK is a strong possibility.

Scottish British divergences

There is an interesting divide in the UK towards action in the Arctic, which became especially apparent in the build up to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Convolution of effective approaches in policy building has been manifested due to clashing interests of politicians in Westminster and in Holyrood. The firm position of the SNP is for increased consideration of challenges facing the High North, with a particular focus on improved cooperation with northern partners and multilateral organisations (Robertson, 2015). This includes the EU, which became a major battleground in discussions ahead of the Scottish independence vote. The pro-independence movement rallied for continued membership, as uncertainties towards Brussels grew in Westminster, fuelled by the Atlanticist wing of the Conservative Party. This unremitting desire by many UK Conservatives to break away from the EU comes with the aim of also increasing cooperation with northern states through bilateral and multilateral partnerships. As Hille stated, “Northernness and Euroscepticism are obviously correlated”, meaning that as well as Scottish nationalists seeing Norway as a model, Atlanticists also do in its staunchly anti-EU stance (2003: 166). Interestingly, the Northern Isles at the northernmost peripheries of the British Isles have expressed unionist desires with the UK, often also citing anti-EU sentiments over the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) (for example, Shetland Times, 2014).

The SNP has sought alignment with Scandinavian politics and is reflected in policy such as the International Framework published in 2008 – harking to economic policies of the countries in the “Arc of Prosperity” (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, and Norway) (Johnstone, 2012: 115). The Scottish Government also notes its focus “on the Nordic and Baltic region and the High North” (Scottish Government, 2014), showing an affinity to regions closer to its northern sphere of influence.

UK Arctic Policy Framework

This complexity in domestic issues can explain why there has been slow progress in the political arguments around the High North, as well as explaining how Scotland stands out in the desire for increased cooperation through bilateral and multilateral partnerships with organisations interested in the Arctic. Due to a lack of strong or standardised policy towards the Arctic by Westminster, it is apparent that pro-independence actors in Scotland have capitalised on this issue in forwarding arguments for separation and increased devolution (Powell, 2014: 88).

For Scotland within the UK as an observer state, a political dilemma is presented in formulating policy aimed at the Arctic: how and to what extent is the UK able to develop

policy which engages with the issues presented, without infringing on the Nuuk criteria? Or, put another way – “how to express a neighbour-like concern and secure national interests... without inciting the irritation of... governments” (Depledge and Dodds, 2014: 27).

In publishing the Arctic Policy Framework 2013 (APF), the UK officially stated its interest in the Arctic and showed a willingness to cooperate with the A8, offering its expertise, experience and equipment (Depledge and Dodds, 2014: 30). It also accentuates the UK’s “unique role among non-Arctic states in supporting development, governance and stewardship of the region” (Mazo, 2015: 248-250). However, as has been extensively noted, the APF was found to be weak and has been criticised for being incomprehensive and failing to address any future UK military or business roles. It has also been criticised for not including the Scottish Parliament in discussions on the policy proposal (Bailes, 2014). Having distinct interests and competence, this signifies there is clearly scope for Scotland to address issues in the High North on its own accord.

What is important to note aside from the content of the APF, is the term ‘framework’ used to describe the publication. This implies a different policy approach than a ‘strategy’ would suggest. As discussed by Depledge, frameworks tend to be more flexible, changing in reaction to varying circumstances, whereas a strategy is a more rigid “sustained commitment” to a plan of action (2013: 371). A lack of strategy shows the UK is not as engaged with the developments of the region as it could (or should) be, based on its both vulnerable and commanding position in the European North-West, placing much more political, business and diplomatic focus elsewhere in the world (see for example Rogers, 2012: 47, Grímsson, 2013, Cole, 1954). Fear of encroaching on other states’ sovereignty is certainly a factor, as is a fear of motives being misinterpreted by further engagement in the region. Smaller, Northern European states may feel intimidated by a full-blown, militarily powerful UK strategy aimed at the Arctic, as has been argued by Depledge and Dodds, such a document may be found to be too provocative. The reality is, however, that the UK’s commitment is austere, with no targets or efficient review of the approach, showing the overall weakness of the APF (Depledge and Dodds, 2014: 30). Scotland, being a much smaller nation than the collective UK, can generally be expected to place greater political emphasis on more immediate geographical surroundings than a large state would do (Fleming and Gebhard: 2014: 12). This is apparent when considering the cooperation already in place between Scandinavian countries and Scotland. This includes the Northern Periphery Programme and cooperation with Norway on aquaculture and energy such as the Hywind project and the North Sea Network Link (NPA, 2014).

Scotland’s role

Geostrategic location

Scotland’s geostrategic location at the north-western tip of Europe offers a lot in terms of security in the High North, giving the UK a unique commanding position overlooking the vast

expanses of the north-east Atlantic and North Sea. Its extensive coastline includes many natural ports and the land has large areas of sparsely populated terrain suitable for military planning (Bailes et al., 2013: 12; Spaven: 1983: 9). Depledge and Dodds (2014) also recognize that the UK's geographical proximity to the North Sea and the Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap (GIUK) would demand that the UK be involvement in any security crisis in the Arctic, as it once was during the Cold War era. Since that time, UK military interests in the High North have somewhat been "displaced by the interests of scientists" in Arctic matters, as a peaceful period in the region has prevailed (Depledge, 2013: 166). Recently however, the period of calm has been questioned as, "the interest shown by the Ministry of Defence [MoD] ... in the Arctic has perhaps not been greater since the end of the Cold War" (Depledge and Dodds, 2012: 74). The military based in Scotland offers many of Britain's frontline defence capabilities such as the Trident nuclear submarines and three of the Royal Air Force's five Typhoon combat squadrons (another two Typhoon jet squadrons have been confirmed (Allison, 2015)) (Critchlow, 2014). Until recently, ocean search and rescue (SAR) had been carried out by the military in Scotland, however, these capabilities have been brought to an end following a decision to privatise the service in 2013 (BBC, 2016). As a result, the Sea Kings used by the RAF have been retired in place of new helicopters with reduced passenger capacity, meaning fewer people can be transported from perilous situations at a time. The range of the helicopters is also set to decrease from the current capabilities of the RAF, effectively meaning the distance from the coastline in which SAR operations conducted by the UK will be significantly reduced. This forms part of the budget cuts implemented in Scotland over the last number of years, making it more complicated for the UK to support northern partners with operations like SAR in the High North (MCA, 2008; Johnson, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Chalmers, 2015). As a result, concerns have been raised about the ability to effectively help if a large ship were to sink off the coast of the UK (Idowu, 2009). With traffic in the Arctic potentially increasing and likely to consist principally of large ships with large crews, reducing the capability of SAR operations appears to be a move in the wrong direction if the UK is to engage with potential problems in the High North.

The UK's prominent status in international relations means that it is more heavily implicated in operations with a wider global reach and is often amongst the first nations to be involved in humanitarian and peace keeping operations (Ritchie, 2011: 357). This can partly explain why there is a lack of active forces based on UK soil, as well as the apparent reliance on Trident as the chief deterrence against attack. However, deterrence is not the sole responsibility of the military which has an important role in providing active support such as SAR in the High North.

Economy

The areas of devolved powers to Holyrood listed in the Scotland Act 1998, includes sectors such as fisheries policy, environment policy and economic development. These are all crucial in noting to understand the extent to which Scotland can capitalise on economic opportunities which may arise due to the changing dynamics of the High North. In discussions on Scotland's independence pre-referendum, there were suggestions that "turning attention to the Arctic could provide the opportunity to pursue radical economic policies that might boost

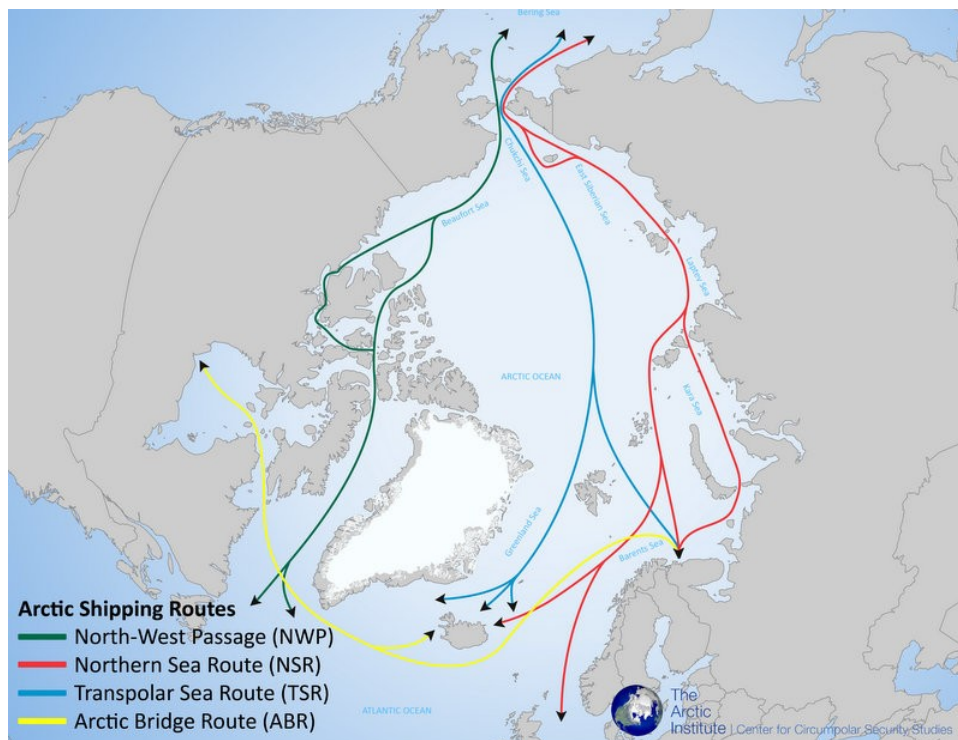
performance” (Sinclair, 1999: 12). Through the devolved areas mentioned this could still be a possibility to consider for Scotland.

Energy

As some states do pursue oil and gas resources in the Arctic, other projects such as ones initiated by Norway have recently been put on hold (Holter, 2015; Seglem, 2014), suggesting that a ‘race’ for Arctic hydrocarbon resources is not as immediate an issue as perhaps may have been anticipated. This is despite large amounts of oil still being discovered in the Arctic (Gunnarsson, 2013: 38), showing the importance of effects such as global energy market trends on hydrocarbon exploration. Another reason why the idea of a race for resources may not be a reality is that most of the undiscovered oil and gas in the Arctic lies within the jurisdiction of bordering states, meaning disputes over who will grant exploration licenses is unlikely, if at all (EIA, 2012). Coupled with the fact that the hydrocarbon sector is not a devolved matter, the natural progression for Scotland seems to be towards the growing renewable energy sector.

There are examples of Scotland already cooperating with Arctic states in the renewable sector, such as through the groundbreaking floating windfarm project which started construction this summer in a joint venture with Norway (Statoil, 2014).

Transport



Map 1: Humpert and Raspotnik, 2012.

Iceland has recognized one of the most pressing issues facing increased navigation in the High North, in that there is a lack of deep ocean ports and repair facilities for shipping

containers passing through the area (Østreng et al., 2013). The Finna fjörður project in alliance with Germany provides infrastructural support and is a good example of non-Arctic/Arctic cooperation to benefit from the increasing sea traffic in the High North (Barents Observer, 2015). This suggests that there are clear possibilities and also that increased cooperation with Arctic countries is an important aspect of capitalising on the economic opportunities presented in the High North.

Along the North-West Passage route, there is only one deep-water port at Nanisivik available, capable of supporting and refuelling large vessels (Kendrick, 2014: 67). The Northern Sea Route is much better equipped with seven ports along Russia's coast able to service, refuel and dock large vessels, which contributes to making it the route with the "highest potential to enable economic activity in the Arctic" (Buixadé Farré et al., 2014: 301). Norway has a number of container ports with one in Narvik in the Arctic Circle able to accommodate some of the largest vessels in the world of Panamax class. Scotland however, only has one container port in Aberdeen and none which can accommodate very large vessels (SeaRates, 2015). This shortage of ports through which to support increased commercial activity in the High North shows there is clear scope for development of services in Scotland as the "UK's gateway to the Arctic" and the closest EU region to the European end of the NSR (Bailes et al., 2013: 9).

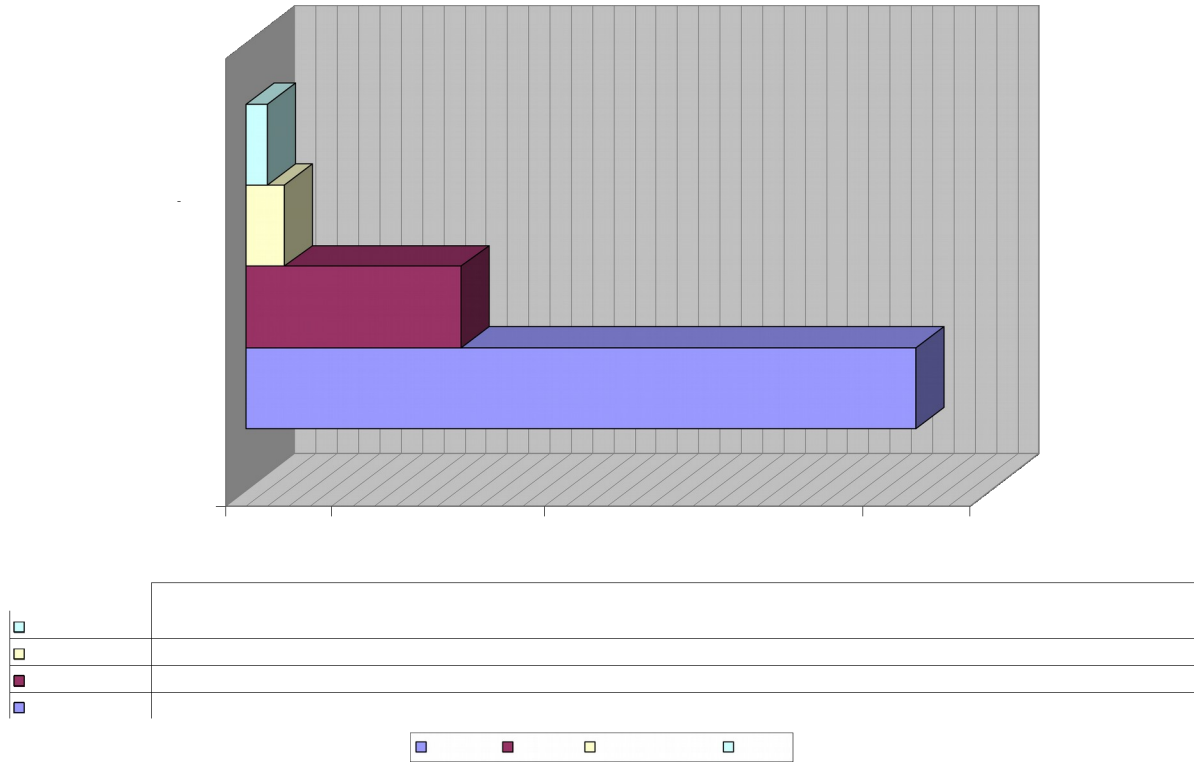
Scotland does not have a major freight shipping fleet of its own, but provision of transit shipping hubs to support Arctic industry is a strong possibility (Johnstone, 2012). Ports in Scotland along the eastern coast could become viable hubs for trade with the Far East through the NSR, accommodating a moderately significant northward demand shift (Souter et al., 2012: 68). Investment on a massive scale would be necessary on mainland Scotland if it were to consider becoming a destination for cargo shipping. Huge road or rail restructuring would need to be extended to the Highlands, which has always been economically underdeveloped and has seen a decline in industry (Danson, 1991; Carter, 1974).

Through investment and cooperation, Scotland and Arctic neighbours could provide many areas of infrastructure needed to be put in place to provide safety, emergency assistance, route reliability, and environmental protection in the High North to support increased Arctic shipping (Gunnarsson, 2013: 93).

Fishing

As the graph shows, Scotland is by far the largest contributor to the total UK fishing yield and in 2014, Scottish ships brought in 60% of the entire UK catch worth £861 million. This is greatly significant when considering that Scotland constitutes just 8.3% of the UK population, showing the scale and importance of the industry to Scotland (BBC, 2013; UK Government, 2015). Scotland's ports are important hubs for other fishing countries in the North Sea (Johnstone, 2012: 122). So, as well as maintaining an active fleet of its own, increasing the handling potential of ports such as Peterhead and Scrabster, could offer new economic potentials for Scotland. This would require building of major infrastructure and could only

become a reality if major investment happens to link these northern Scottish ports to the wider European markets (Johnstone, 2012: 122).



Graph 1: Total UK Catch, 2014.

The Scottish fishing industry appears to have an assured future, as it has been noted that the international demand for seafood is increasing (Moskowitz, 2014), in line with steady increases in Scottish production (Scottish Government, 2015a). This suggests there is a strong case for Scotland actively to overcome the challenges faced by climate change and continue to be an important exporter of seafood and seafood products produced in Scotland.

This industry is greatly helped by Norwegian investment which constitutes a large part of the industry, especially in the more sustainable fish farming industry largely operated in Scotland by the Norwegian company Marine Harvest. This relationship also extends to the exporting of fish, which contributes a large part to the 251% increase in food and drink exports from Scotland to Norway since 2007 (Scottish Government, 2015b).

Findings

Scotland has distinct interests from the UK and with increasing political autonomy, has been found to have the capacity for stating its intentions abroad – despite limitations due to the

constitutional position it is in with the UK. Remaining a sub-national state does not exempt it from the possibility of developing an Arctic policy of its own, as other semi-autonomous regions have already done so. The limitations faced largely extend to issues of hard security, leaving multiple areas such as business, renewable energy and politics open for consideration by the Scottish government. Scotland's location and history brings the UK into the wider European High North – making Scotland in essence a bridge between the UK and the Arctic. Despite not having full state powers and more importantly not being an Arctic state, Scotland nevertheless has potential to exert a certain amount of influence on the economic developments in the Arctic.

As militaristic issues are under Westminster's mandate, Scotland has no ability to make decisions on this matter. Therefore, Scottish policy makers may decide that the best course of action to secure powers would be to readdress the question of independence. Aside from this, the only possibility open to Scotland would be to continue to broach security concerns to the UK government.

Commercial shipping has great potential to increase in the Arctic and High North as climate change continues. Several obstacles remain, but the logistical benefits appear to be significant enough that routes such as the NSR will become increasingly utilised. The only uncertainty remaining to be determined is the potential extent and size of the commercial shipping industry in the Arctic.

Scotland's fishing and fish production is a major asset and to secure a stable future and sustain increasing growth of the industry, support in the northern peripheries should be considered. It can be ascertained through the discussion that Scotland's ports could play a crucial role in supporting an increase in transport and changes to the fishing industries. This would create great economic and social benefit to Scotland – if necessary development in mainland transport is firstly carried out.

The consequences of the climactic changes in the Arctic were principally found to bring possible economic opportunities for Scotland. Although challenges will undoubtedly also be presented, if correct planning and investment is made, economic activities can be supported and undertaken by Scotland in concurrence and in alliance with other Arctic actors.

Indeed it was principally found that it will be crucial for Scotland to act in accordance with Arctic states if it is to capitalise on opportunities and to tackle issues which may present themselves in the High North. To do so, Scotland would do well to develop a comprehensive Arctic policy strategy, stating its aims and interests and showing its commitment to the Arctic region.

***Edit:** The original version of this article was written prior to the 'Brexit' vote. Some amendments have been attempted but it is noted that a comprehensive discussion is lacking.

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