

Briefing Note

The Arctic Super Week in May 2019: From Rovaniemi to Shanghai

Lassi Heininen

May 2019 witnessed a ‘super week’ in the Arctic. I name it a super week on Arctic affairs (or the Arctic Super Week) due to the intensity of several international meetings and gatherings on the Arctic in Finland and China, and big interest towards the Arctic, in particular the Arctic Council, by international media, which was revealed during the week. It started by the Welcome Reception on the occasion of the 11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting (hosted by Minister for Foreign Affairs Timo Soini and the Mayor of the City of Rovaniemi Mr. Esko Lotvonen) at 6 pm on 6 May 2019 at Lappia Hall in Rovaniemi, Finland; or, actually two hours before the speech of US State Secretary Michael R. Pompeo in Rovaniemi. The Arctic Super Week ended by the Closing Plenary Session at Arctic Circle China Forum at 6 pm on 11 May in Shanghai, China. In between, there were the 11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting on 7 May in Rovaniemi, and two international conferences on the Arctic in Shanghai: 7th China – Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium (7-9 May) and the Arctic Circle China Forum (10-11 May).

For me the week was busy, even hectic, due to my original plan to be present and give contributions in each of these events. In order to implement the plan, as I did, I had first, to have an access to these events - as a (keynote) speaker in the two scientific conferences, and an observer (member of the “Chairmanship” delegation) at the Ministerial and the US State Secretary Speech; and second, to design a travelling schedule making it possible, as I did, from Helsinki to Rovaniemi and back to Helsinki, and further to Shanghai, and again back to Helsinki.

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The week, due to the fact that no joint ministerial declaration of the Arctic Council, together with the speech by US State Secretary, raised the question, if international politics with turbulence & uncertainties, even “Great power rivalry”, has overtaken Arctic geopolitics with high geopolitical stability and Arctic governance with constructive (inclusive) cooperation. On the other hand, the events in the rest of week showed, that it is not necessarily the case, or at least it is too early to know, and that the situation too vague to reply.

Instead, I would like to describe and analyze these events as I experienced, and interpret, them by using participatory research as a method to put emphasis on personal experiences and findings, such as attitude of events, chats during breaks, and body-language, behavior, tone. This, together and supported by simulation, has been my method, which I much recommend, when trying to draw up a holistic picture on grand challenges (e.g. the combination of pollution and fast climate change), and in particular when implementing the interplay between science, politics (incl. civil society) and business. The success is, of course, depending on if you manage to have an access into Ministerial or other high-level political meetings. This was also my challenge here - though being an observer, as a part of the Chairmanship delegation, in each SAO Plenary meetings during Finland’s chairmanship - and I had to work hard to get an invitation to the Ministerial (already tried a few other options).

Speech by US State Secretary

The speech by US State Secretary Michael R. Pompeo on 6 May 2019 at Lappi Arena in Rovaniemi was titled “Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus” (see US State Department website). It was neither long nor a masterpiece, but mostly hawkish ‘Great power rivalry’ rhetoric on China and Russia, for example, “China’s pattern of aggressive behavior elsewhere in the – excuse me – aggressive behavior elsewhere should inform what we do and how it might treat the Arctic”, and “These provocative actions are part of a pattern of aggressive Russian behavior here in the Arctic”. Partly an effort to convince that “America is the world’s leader in caring for the environment”, by facts which deal with climate change, without mentioning the term/words –‘climate change’. And finally, praising with a bit unclear example that “Courage and partnership is what the region [The Arctic] depends on” referring to the heroic exploration period of the Arctic.

After finishing his speech the US State Secretary almost escaped from the podium, and US Ambassador to Finland Robert Pence, who had the opening words, did not show-up. By contrast, the audience did stay for a while, partly being confused by the tone and contents of the speech, and partly due to many questions and requests of several (foreign and Finnish) journalists in the room (for example, I was interviewed by four media from Canada, Nordic countries, USA in my way from the Lappi Arena to my hotel). The first question, which was raised immediately after the speech, if this will cause a damage to Arctic cooperation and the work of Arctic Council, and if this will mean a turning point in Arctic geopolitics and governance. Or, if this will be remembered as an odd episode, and the constructive cooperation in the Arctic Council will be continued and high geopolitical stability maintained. As a Finnish citizen I had another question:

Why did the Finnish foreign ministry allow a hawkish US State Secretary to take the floor and have such a “major address outside of those formal proceedings”, as State Secretary Pompeo said in his speech, just a day before the Ministerial, which ended Finland’s chairmanship of Arctic Council? Neither the speech nor the request was nice but rude and provocative toward the hosting country, in diplomacy this would be interpreted as a hostile action.

I admit that this context and the content of the speech managed to provoke me - probably a few others too in the audience – to examine more carefully if there is increasing high military tension, or even “Great power rivalry”, in the Arctic region, as journalists too often assume and some scholars try to argue. Or, if this is sort of *déjà-vu* from the Cold War period, when the Arctic continues to be exceptional in world politics and IR due to common interests between the Arctic states, as several of us (e.g. Heininen 2018) have argued and the first preamble of the latest AC Ministerial Declarations show (as well as that of the Rovaniemi Joint Ministerial Statement 2019). I already started my examination, or mission if you wish, a couple days later in my presentations in Shanghai, and will continue here.

11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting & Finland’s Chairmanship

The original event and context was the 11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, scheduled (at 10:30 am – 12:30 pm) in 7 May 2019. The meeting and its documents were well prepared in SAO Plenary meetings in March 2019 and October 2018 of Finland’s chairmanship, which I was able to experience as an observer in the four SAO Plenary meetings^{1,1}. The Finnish AC (civil servant) chair and Finnish team, as well as AC working groups & secretariat, worked hard, were pragmatic and efficient, and had support of Permanent Participants representatives and the rest of SAOs. Though there were no expectations of any breakthrough of the chairmanship, and that it would be challenging to agree on everything, it was mainly thought and hoped that there would be a productive meeting with a joint declaration. In particular, since the meeting attracted (for only the second time) the foreign ministers of each eight Arctic state to attend.

After the US State Secretary’s speech, we in the audience however started to hesitate and speculate if there among the Arctic states would be political will and agreement enough for a joint declaration mentioning exclusively climate change; it was well known and remembered, how hard it was to agree two years earlier, when the Fairbanks Declaration at the 10th AC Ministerial was drafted. The speech, if not a game changer, clearly and strongly indicated the Trump Administration’s unwillingness to recognize and admit climate change as a reality and existing wicked problem in the Arctic region. The final outcome was that there was no compromise on a joint declaration: the USA did not accept to mention climate change, and the ministers of the other seven Arctic states did not accept a declaration excluding climate change. Though, a big majority voted for, and only one against, no joint declaration, since the Arctic Council is a consensus-based body.

By doing this, the USA was left alone, or actually it isolated itself. This was clearly experienced, felt, and even seen, in the Ministerial meeting itself. After the chair, Minister for Foreign Affairs

of Finland, Timo Soini informed a change in agenda item – that instead of a Rovaniemi joint Ministerial Declaration there will be a Rovaniemi joint Ministerial Statement - there in the venue became a bit strange atmosphere (like there would be an ‘elephant’, an unpleasant thing which the others don’t want to talk/point to, in the room, and everybody knows what that is). Followed from this, the addresses by most of the AC member-states and Permanent Participants (six minutes each) mentioned or emphasized climate change as a real thing in the Arctic region. Some representatives strongly stated that they do not understand those who deny rapid climate change caused by human activities. Several representatives also required immediate action against impacts of climate change, and all, except the USA, accepted and supported the Statement by the Chair including “Environment and Climate” as the first and rich topic.

Following from this, it is logical to state that Finland’s chairmanship of Arctic Council (2017-2019) was no success, but more a failure. Yes, it was a disappointment, when it comes to the final and most visible outcome: No joint ministerial declaration, first time in the history of the Arctic Council, and instead two statements: a joint Ministerial Statement and Statement by the Chair. The former is a short with the signatures of the eight foreign ministers, and the latter one long with the same structure as the joint Ministerial Declarations used to be.² Furthermore, no breakthrough with an Arctic Summit, which idea President Niinistö had mentioned a few times in different international gatherings, such as the international Arctic Forum, “The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue” in 2017 and 2019. Instead, an International Arctic Forum in April 2019 in St. Petersburg included a plenary session, a sort of mini-Summit if you wish, hosted by President Putin, where heads of five Arctic states – the presidents of Finland, Iceland and Russia, and prime ministers of Norway and Sweden – had an intensive, mostly constructive, discussion of almost three hours.

There were, however, important achievements, and concrete and pragmatic outcomes at and by Finland’s AC chairmanship: The most important (immaterial) achievement was that the eight Arctic states, including the USA, reaffirmed their “commitment to maintain peace, stability and constructive cooperation in the Arctic”, as the first preamble of the Rovaniemi joint Ministerial Statement 2019 put it, instead of promoting the exclusive club of the Arctic Five. Among concrete and pragmatic outcomes, the chairmanship’s priorities – environmental protection, connectivity, meteorological cooperation and education – managed to connect with each other. For example, connectivity with meteorological cooperation on climate change to develop satellite technology and strengthen expertise. As a new, concrete thing, an award of new innovation on how to decrease black carbon was launched. Even though the slogan “Exploring common solutions” was not clearly materialized, it was brought onto the agenda of a global Arctic with an ambitious aim to search for a balance between economic activities and environmental protection bound with political stability.

Finally, the most successful concrete and pragmatic, as well as highly supportive, achievement was an implementation of a sustainable meeting model, meaning no printed papers, no plastic water bottles and coffee cups, water from the tap, local food, etc... This model will also be

implemented in Finland's EU Presidency in the 2nd half of 2019. As a conclusion, Finland's AC chairmanship was a combination of continuity of maintaining peace, stability and constructive cooperation and practical, functional action, i.e. keep cooperation going! This was much according to Nordic principles and pragmatism, which is a good foundation for Iceland to continue, the 12 years' period of the Nordic (plus, Russian) chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

7th China – Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium

The theme of the 7th CNARC Symposium, Shanghai Ocean University and Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC) as co-conveners, was “Arctic Fisheries, Polar Silk Road, and Sustainable Development Practices” (see CNARC website). The theme was discussed by several presentations in two plenary sessions and nine breakout sessions by scholars from China and the Nordic countries (the biggest delegation from Iceland and less from other Nordics). A general feature in most of the sessions was a lack of allocated time for open discussion. It becomes a problem in academia, when listeners cannot ask a single question, let alone have an opportunity for constructive dialogue.

In spite of this, the China – Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium (CNARC) is an emerging highlight of China-Nordic Cooperation as an important platform to jointly discuss Arctic development and promote pragmatic cooperation. Arctic cooperation is an area, where China and the Nordics have their in-depth cooperation at bilateral levels, or actually more hybrid (bilateral based on multilateral). Sino-Nordic Arctic cooperation is defined as a new kind of multilateral cooperation & partnership strengthening good relations between the Peoples' Republic of China and the Nordic countries; the Nordics were among the first Western countries to recognize the PRC in 1950s. At the multilateral level, taking the Nordic region as a unifying actor, China will greatly enhance the efficiency & effectiveness of dialogue with the Nordic states. All parties demonstrate great prospects to cooperate in entrepreneurship, business & investment, sustainable development, research & education, civil exchange & social welfare.

It was natural for the Nordics to have joint action and take a lead in environmental protection (biodiversity, climate change, green technology), as well as increase societal security based on knowledge. The Nordic cooperation & stability can be interpreted to be one of the foundations, if not the one, for modern international Arctic cooperation, as I analysed in my presentation. The Nordic Region (Norden) - as a political construction for multilateral, regional and functional cooperation, and modern region-building - is academically interesting and politically attractive, even favorable, in the globalized world. Behind is the deep cooperation and integration based on several 'Nordic models', which refer to several terms of cooperation & integration, among others that of governance, democracy, peace as well as welfare state and strong civil society. By virtue of their legacy, the Nordics and their cooperation & models are valuable outcomes and learned lessons in globalized world. Further, by creating potential win-win situations they have a unique

potential to play a proactive role in world politics, in particular, in confidence- and peace-building, and be influential in the global Arctic.

No wonder that the first concrete outcome of the CNARC cooperation is a book (translated & published in Mandarin) about the Nordic Region, cooperation and models in world politics, the Nordic Arctic in a global context, and Sino-Nordic cooperation in the Arctic.³ The mission of the book, which is well taken among Chinese readers, are to tell the ‘Nordic story’ to a Chinese audience, show how experts from different countries/cultures/political & economic systems work successfully together, and carry on fruitful Sino-Nordic cooperation across borders in the Arctic and under global governance.

Here CNARC could act as an important platform to jointly brainstorm future cooperation and new models of global – Arctic governance, has even potential to become a model for cooperation, as the idea and innovative format of the cooperation indicates.

Arctic Circle China Forum

As the latest country forum of the Arctic Circle Assembly, the China Forum with the title “China and the Arctic” was hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources of PRC and sponsored by China Oceanic Development Foundation. It was organized by the Arctic Circle in cooperation with the Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC), Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS) and Chinese Society of Oceanography in 10-11 May at Shanghai Science and Technology Museum in Shanghai.

The sub-themes, “Polar Silk Roads – Science and Innovation”, “Transport and Investment – Sustainable Development” and “Oceans – Energy – Governance”, were discussed in five plenary sessions and 19 (parallel) breakout sessions (see ArcticCircleChina website). It is a big achievement, and a result of hard work, to be able to organize such a political & academic expert meeting in China, and having a Chinese ministry as an organizer. It was a pity that there was imbalance between the session speakers, as most of the speakers of the plenary sessions were policy-makers & authorities (civil servants, administrators, and US Senator Lisa Murkowski) and business-people (directors, CEOs), and most of the speakers of the breakout sessions were scholars and scientists.

A common feature between the two kinds of sessions was the same, as in the previous CNARC conference: no time open discussion, except in few sessions where there was time for questions and comments. The reason for this is, as well as a solution would be, very simple: (too) long a list of speakers (e.g. in the 2nd day’s three plenaries lasting for five hours, including one break, there were 18 speakers), and no strict timeframe for speakers (by session chairs). Though this is not a new but general, even universal, feature in political and academic gatherings, it should not be acceptable due to a few reasons: first, even if presentations are, as in this case a few ones were, interesting including new ideas and inspirations, it is too much to digest even if you try to listen and follow; experimentally I tried to listen to the entire above-mentioned marathon plenary session, and found it hard to follow after the first two hours, in spite of the fact that there were

new information and good ideas for me (next time most probably I will not waste my time). Second, this means (too often) a missed opportunity for the interplay between science, politics & business (in particular since most of the policy-makers & business people do not attend the breakout sessions and listen to researchers' presentations), as well as that new findings would not be discussed and developed, when they are fresh, and syntheses are not done. Third, this traditional format does not cause a shift, not even aim, in the top-down power structures, and thus, again, there is a missed opportunity, when trying to gather all possible expertise to facilitate and support policy-shaping, enhance processes of empowerment, and find solutions for big challenges & wicked problems. I am emphasizing this, because the social relevance of science requires us in Academia try to do that.

I was invited to present my paper, "'Another' in Arctic politics & Governance – from Russia to China, what about USA?" in the "Arctic Governance and Ocean Cooperation" breakout session organized by China Institute for Marine Affairs and Ocean Policy Research Institute of Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan. Here 'another' is someone who is coming from outside, representing something strange, does neither believe in 'win-win' nor share common goals, and the point of my presentation was who is 'another' in the globalized Arctic. Behind are different interpretations on motives and accusations to blame Russia and China as 'another' in the Arctic/Arctic affairs, such as inward-looking in protecting its legitimate interests, expansionist & revisionist to resist Western 'encroachments' (on Russia); or inward-looking in protecting its foreign investments & national interests; expansionist due to hunger for resources; mildly revisionist power with 'legitimate interests' in & 'emerging policies' for.

At the same time, there are the following interpretations: comparative, almost the same, with other Arctic littoral states (e.g. 'sovereignty', regional development) (on Russia); and responsible major country on the basis of "respect, cooperation, win-win result and sustainability", doing Arctic research and promoting peace (on China). All this is much based on what is your perspective and/or discourse, as well as the general, much trendy, narratives and perceptions on the Arctic: e.g. 'Homeland' (for Indigenous peoples), 'Eldorado' (for a race for resources), 'Zone of Peace' (based on high geopolitical stability and constructive cooperation), 'Tipping point for the entire Earth System' (due to faster speed of warming), or 'Global Arctic' (due to growing interest towards and increasing importance in world politics).

For me it matters more, what are the criteria - for example if the main criteria is ratification of UNCLOS or climate change – to interpret someone as 'another' based on the deeds, not only rhetoric. When evaluating and comparing these three major powers - Russia, China, USA - globally we have for example the following findings: They are among the major nuclear weapon powers (Arctic Ocean as sanctuary), biggest producers of pollution and GHGs emissions, have signed the Paris Agreement on climate change, have Indigenous peoples within their country, as well as are among major supporters of research, including Arctic research. Russia and USA are amongst the biggest producers of hydrocarbons, and USA and China the two biggest economies, etc. When evaluating and comparing them in the context of the global Arctic we have for

example the following ones: all are involved in the Arctic Council, either as a member-state or observer country; are parties of UNCLOS (Russia, China) or follow the rules (USA); interested and involved in the utilization of hydrocarbons in the Arctic; supporters of Arctic research. Russia and China have common interests, and are users, in northern sea routes (Russia as the gatekeeper), recently in particular due to Yamal LNG. I left the final decision on “who is ‘another’ in Arctic politics & governance?” to the audience. Instead, I had the conclusion that Russia, USA (as Arctic states) and China (as observer) could play a more active and constructive role in the global Arctic, but have been reluctant to apply the recent and fast changes. In addition, USA has not ratified UNCLOS, as the most important binding international agreement on the Arctic, and has denied climate change and aims to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.

As a conclusion, the broad participation from all over the northern hemisphere (mostly from East Asia, North Europe and USA) and rich variety of titles of the presentations strongly show that the Arctic is globalized, as the TN on Geopolitics and Security had analysed when the *GlobalArctic* Project was launched in 2014 (see *GlobalArctic.com*). This state will be strengthened, and the project followed, by the GlobalArctic Mission Council at the Arctic Circle Assembly⁴, launched by Chairman of the Arctic Circle Olafur Grimsson (the former president of Iceland) in the closing session of the China Forum.

All in all, the Arctic Super Week showed the growing international interest towards the Arctic – as the parameter of global warming, and international platform for high geopolitical stability & competition and potential tension between ‘great power rivals’ – and towards the Arctic Council, as most of international media was not accredited to the Ministerial due to the speech by US State Secretary (its content was not known before), but the Ministerial meeting itself. Furthermore, these gatherings and their sessions and presentations, as well as lively chats and connections made during coffee & tea breaks, in Rovaniemi and Shanghai, showed, even manifested, that, indeed, the Arctic is globalized, and that there are experts and actors (individuals, organizations, movements, countries) from the Arctic and from outside the region, who are interested in and motivated to be involved in Arctic cooperation and affairs. This does not, however, necessarily mean a turning point in Arctic geopolitics and governance toward rivalry, since the high geopolitical stability based on constructive cooperation between the Arctic states has shown its benefits and is resilient.

1. SAO Plenary meetings during Finland’s chairmanship of Arctic Council: October 2017 in Oulu, March 2018 in Levi, November 2018 in Rovaniemi (included the Model Arctic Council 2018 which I led), and March 2019 in Ruka.
2. These two documents, and most of the addresses at the Ministerial are found at <https://oaarchieve.arctic-council.org>.
3. “*Sino-Nordic Arctic Cooperation: Objectives and Approaches*” (in English) by 21 Nordic and Chinese authors and edited by Lassi Heininen and Yang Jian.

4. Aiming to become an international platform and network of expertise on the Arctic and global affairs for clear-thinking across disciplines and sectors, as well as beyond national borders.