

## International cooperation in the Arctic region: a tool to defuse tensions?

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*Abstract:* The current war in Ukraine and the subsequent tensions between NATO and Russia have become the focus of global attention and understandable concern. Simultaneously and unbeknownst to many, this armed conflict is quickly turning the Arctic into a hot spot, thus threatening one of the most sensitive and relevant regions in the world. Plenty has been written about how the war in Ukraine is impacting international relations in the Arctic, to the point that the so-called “Arctic exceptionalism” may be coming to an end. However, it is perhaps time to ask ourselves what the Arctic can do for Ukraine and the global situation. What the Arctic equilibrium achieved hitherto could offer to de-escalate tensions in Ukraine and to defuse current global threats? If the Arctic nations have been able to maintain until recently a unique model for diplomatic, economic, environmental and social cooperation through the unparalleled body that is the Arctic Council, could it be possible for dialogue between all Arctic states (including the Russian Federation) to resume around an issue of common interest to them all in the Arctic region? Could this eventually help preventing the menacing tensions in the Arctic while also serving to de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine? The answer could be what the author of this paper refers to as “the Arctic Model”<sup>1</sup>, a proposal for tension defusing and conflict transformation tailored made tool based on the successful cooperative dynamics in different fields – chiefly in the science diplomacy sphere –, followed, for decades and until very recently, by the States, indigenous communities and governing institutions of the Arctic region.

*Keywords:* geopolitics – Russia – Arctic exceptionalism – Ukraine war – Arctic Model – Arctic cooperation – science diplomacy

### (A) INTRODUCTION

A set of events took place in Ukraine from late 2013 to early 2014 that opened Pandora’s box in Europe. These included Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement in Vilnius (Lithuania) in November 2013, the subsequent “Maidan Revolution” in Kyiv and Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014. These were followed by the uprising of Moscow-backed separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Ukrainian secret service Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) declared in Donbas turned later into Ukrainian Military Joint Forces Operation under the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, plus the change in Ukrainian leadership in 2019, leading all to a dangerous raise in tensions between the Russian Federation and NATO-backed Ukraine. On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine sparking a dreadful, bloody, armed conflict. The

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<sup>1</sup> The “Arctic Model” – as a tool for conflict management/transformation – is part of the author’s doctoral research work which is currently under development and will yield results in the coming future.

repercussions of this war at many levels worldwide are countless, greatly aggravating a global food crisis that extended with the COVID-19 pandemic and is growing into a magnitude still difficult to assess fully.<sup>2</sup>

A place of particular importance and where the Ukrainian conflict is reshaping the fragile system of relations that has allowed maintaining until very recent times a model of *Entente Cordiale*, is the Arctic region. For years, the Arctic has been an oasis in the international panorama thanks to the so-called “Arctic exceptionalism” that has long been the normative concept outlining the Arctic region as a unique space enjoying a sort of immunity from many of the world’s main geopolitical struggles.<sup>3</sup> However, this status is being seriously challenged now to the point that experts in Arctic law, science, security, and cooperation wonder whether the effects of the conflict in Ukraine have brought the mentioned Arctic exceptionalism to an end.<sup>4</sup> This paper will explore different scenarios to answer this open question.

## (B) THE SITUATION IN THE ARCTIC REGION

It is essential to outline a general picture of the Arctic region before entering into the main analysis of this question.

### (1) The Arctic region: What are we talking about?

As the European Environment Agency defines it, the geopolitical “Arctic is formed by the partly ice-covered Arctic Ocean and land areas of the surrounding eight Arctic States: the “Arctic Five” Canada, Denmark (i.e. the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Norway, the Russian Federation, and the US (Alaska) plus Finland, Iceland, and Sweden, as well as their shallow sub-regional seas”.<sup>5</sup> All these States have their capitals located well outside of what is considered the Arctic region geographically. This frozen part of the world is populated by four million people, most of whom settled in northern Scandinavia and Russia. This includes over forty indigenous peoples with the Sami, the Inuit, and the Nenets among them.

The strategic importance of this region has grown due to increased access to natural resources through new transport routes, as sea ice blocks melt sooner and snow conditions undergo rapid change. Economic developments are as well accelerating dramatically. Some would celebrate these developments as beneficial for the region and the world, while others vigorously wave a red flag arguing that if this changing scenario

<sup>2</sup> Infographic “How the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further aggravated the global food crisis” <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/how-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-has-further-aggravated-the-global-food-crisis/s>

<sup>3</sup> Transatlantic relations. Arctic and world order

<sup>4</sup> Tomasz BRAŃKA Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0011-1240>. DOI : 10.14746/ps.2022.1.22

<sup>5</sup> Eee.europa.eu.publications. The arctic environment. Framing the European Arctic.

is not managed carefully, the repercussions for the Arctic's fragile environment could be the beginning of the end for the planet as we know it today.<sup>6</sup>

Since Mikhail Gorbachev's 1987 Murmansk speech referring to the Arctic as a "zone of peace", this region "has been considered an exceptional 'area' of peace and cooperation in security studies" hitherto.<sup>7</sup> However, as Exner-Pirot suggests, the Arctic exceptionalism is not a static idea<sup>8</sup>, but rather the result of the efforts by the Arctic international society to form an order aimed at promoting norms and institutions rarely seen before: a sort of "negotiated exceptionalism"<sup>9</sup>. The main piece of this game of implausible juggling is a body of unparalleled nature: The Arctic Council. This was established in Ottawa on September 19, 1996, as a high-level intergovernmental forum to enhance cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States "with the active involvement of Arctic Indigenous Peoples and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues"<sup>10</sup>. It is important to remark again that this body has been a model for diplomatic, economic, environmental, and social cooperation ever since. But the consequences of the conflict on Ukraine have dramatically changed this outlook.

In order for us to understand better the situation in the Arctic we can refer to the words of Professor Klaus Dodds<sup>11</sup>, who stated that "Geopolitics of the Arctic is not the same as Arctic geopolitics". According to him it is important to make this distinction, because the first one is determined by geographical and/or political criteria; while the second owes much of its impact to what he calls: the "narrative power". According to Professor Dodds, this "narrative power" speaks to us of two clearly identifiable lines: the so-called "Arctic exceptionalism" on one hand, and the geopolitics of the great powers, on the other. Authors like Pavel Devyatkin point out to the open clash of both concepts

<sup>6</sup> The distant dream of fully navigable routes across the North Pole is fast becoming a reality. The Northern Route that borders the Russian coasts is the most realistic, and actually the most used one. It is followed by the Northwest Route that goes from Alaska to Canada. In the future, with a completely thawed North Pole, the Central Route that would go from the Bering Strait to Iceland and from there to Europe, thus offering another option that could transform world trade in the near future. The struggle to dominate the maritime trade routes in the Arctic, together with the possibilities of exploiting energy resources that open up with the rapid thaw are two of the reasons for the growing international tensions in this region. It is estimated that the Arctic region could house up to 22% of the world's oil reserves, half of which would be in Russian territory. As for gas, it is estimated that 30% of the world's reserves would be found under the Arctic ice, 80% of all these resources being found offshore, on the continental shelves or on the seabed. Minerals such as gold, lead, nickel, platinum, silver, tin, molybdenum and diamonds are also found in the seabed or in Arctic mines, but they are still very difficult to access. Fishing must be added to the list, with current catches accounting for nearly 4% of world fishing and with an exponential increase once the Arctic ice melts. Following these developments, some experts warn of a potential Arctic Gold Rush, "with states competing against one another to exploit oil and gas reserves and to claim the natural resources in sea areas by expanding the legal definition of the outer limits of their continental shelves".

<sup>7</sup> Gunhild Hoogensen Gjør, Kara K. Hodgson. "Arctic exceptionalism or 'comprehensive security'? Understanding security in the Arctic". 2019.

<sup>8</sup> The Arctic Institute. Regional Order Arctic Negotiated exceptionalism

<sup>9</sup> Exner-Pirot, H., & Murray, R.W. (2017). "Regional Order in the Arctic: Negotiated Exceptionalism". *Politik*, 20(3).

<sup>10</sup> The Arctic Council History. Arctic-council.org

<sup>11</sup> Klaus Dodds, "La Geopolítica del Ártico". CIDOB International Yearbook, ISSN 1133-2743, No. 1, 2021, pp. 144-145

nowadays.<sup>12</sup> Some would argue against that reflection. But, what seems clear to all is that the Arctic is a vibrant chessboard, on which some of the most improbable geostrategic, environmental, economic, legal and international cooperation games have started being played.

## (2) Since the Ukraine conflict started

On top of over 6 million refugees having fled Ukraine (UNHCR reports),<sup>13</sup> and 5.1 million of internally displaced people in the country (IOM reports)<sup>14</sup>, the consequences of the Ukraine conflict have affected an estimated 1.5 billion people in need of food supply and fertilizers worldwide. Their access to these was interrupted by the conflict in Ukraine, also driving up the prices of gas, oil and other raw materials everywhere as well as leading to a global inflation of uncertain proportions.

As far as the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the Arctic region is concerned, we are currently witnessing one of the deepest rifts in circumpolar relations and in the cooperation in the northern region since the Cold War. Finland entered NATO and Sweden requested to join too. In addition, Russian so-called “hybrid tactics” have raised the level of alarm in NATO members like Norway and nearby states<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, the Arctic Council’s functioning has been strongly shaken. Even though this body has no authority to make binding decisions, since its foundation it has evolved into the cornerstone of the Arctic institutional panorama, the major producer of knowledge about the environmental changes in the Arctic and a platform for Arctic science-policy dialogue, and the biennial meeting place for Arctic ministers of foreign affairs. The Arctic Council have never dealt with military matters and its main focus have been the environmental protection and sustainable development in the region. However, on June 2022, the Arctic Council issued a joint statement on 3 March 2022 as a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine calling for a strategic pause in the works of the Council and its subsidiary bodies as “modalities for future cooperation in the Council are being considered”. Three other Arctic diplomatic institutions have followed suit: The Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of the Baltic Maritime States and the Euro-Arctic Council of the Barents Sea. A limited resumption of the Arctic Council’s works in projects that do not involve Russia’s participation was announced later on. But with Russia out of the game, “Technically speaking, there’s no ‘Arctic Council’ as it is reminded by Svein Vigeland Rottem, senior research fellow at the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen Institute.<sup>16</sup>

Under this situation, Professor of International Law Luis Valentín Ferrada, wonders to what extent the effects of the war in Ukraine are making the end of the Arctic exceptionalism a reality and whether we must now “choose carefully our partners when making decisions

<sup>12</sup> Pavel Devyatkin (2023) “Arctic exceptionalism: a narrative of cooperation and conflict from Gorbachev to Medvedev and Putin”, *The Polar Journal*, DOI: 10.1080/2154896X.2023.2258658

<sup>13</sup> Ukraine Refugee Situation. Operational Data. UNHCR

<sup>14</sup> Migration Portal Data. Internal Displaced People. Ukraine Crisis Movements

<sup>15</sup> The Russian Arctic Threat: Consequences of the war in Ukraine . Center for Strategic and International Studies

<sup>16</sup> Rottem, S.V. (2020). “The Arctic Council: From Environmental Protection to Geopolitics”. In: *The Arctic Council*. Palgrave Pivot, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9290-0\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9290-0_1)

about Polar governance”<sup>17</sup>. This question is not a trivial one, given the situation of polarization and growing tension that Europe, and by extension the world, is experiencing.

Despite the current state of affairs, the Arctic Council should be still considered an exceptional benchmark with a clear goal.<sup>18</sup> Its exceptionalism differs from the one of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) and the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCMs) in the fact that in the Arctic region the national law of the Arctic States prevail. There is no “Arctic Treaty” to legally regulate in a comprehensive manner the interaction of the Arctic actors. Despite that, the Arctic international community, through the Arctic Council overall, has successfully managed all this time to articulate a peaceful, somehow organized interaction of the Arctic States and actors in the region. This is indeed exceptional. So the Arctic Council is a real referent; albeit perhaps a too passive one nowadays. The Norwegian presidency of the Arctic Council has ascertained that its top goal is to ensure that “the Arctic Council survives”. This body, as well as the Arctic International community, is no stranger to the hazardous international reality and, like any international and multidisciplinary body that lends itself, proves its ability to react in moments of danger, be it true or perceived.

### (C) EXPLORING FUTURE SCENARIOS IN THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

As a simile with the human body and the animal world in general, the body we have been referring to (the Arctic Council) should adopt a response to an unexpected situation that can change its reality in a sudden and irreversible manner. The fight or flight reaction is a physiological response to the perception of harm, attack, or threat to survival. It was first described by Walter Bradford Cannon,<sup>19</sup> stating that animals react with a general discharge from the sympathetic nervous system, preparing them to freeze, flee or fight.

What will be the Arctic community’s reaction, through its flagship the Arctic Council, to the current state of affairs? Will it freeze, flee or fight?

#### (1) Freeze: Maintaining the status quo

The world’s main powers have their eyes on the Arctic Council. Its movements could set the course in that region. Worryingly so, it seems that the path of schism is prevailing. However, a successful management of the Arctic challenges does not seem possible without Russia. An efficient and sustainable governance of the Arctic is essential, and this must necessarily be based on cooperation. It has been the cooperative and peaceful environment in the hostile lands of the North Pole that allows efficient management of the environment and its resources. However, the negative effects of the Ukraine conflict on Arctic governance, research, diplomatic, scientific and economic activity will only dramatically increase over time. So far, the fact that the remaining seven Arctic States

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<sup>17</sup> Luis Valentín Ferrada Walker, Lawyer and International Law Professor, University of Chile. “Emails exchange with the cited Professor”

<sup>18</sup> About the Arctic Council. Arctic Council .org

<sup>19</sup> Brown TM, Fee E. Walter Bradford Cannon: Pioneer Physiologist of Human Emotions. *Am J Public Health*. 2002 Oct;92(10):1594–5. PMID: PMC1447286.

denouncing Russia have suspended all activities related to the Arctic Council indicates a rapid change that seriously challenges Arctic governance.

The decision of the Arctic Council to keep a low profile by minimizing or even avoiding any kind of cooperation with Russia could be well interpreted as a freezing strategy that could in fact work. It is perhaps a way to maintain the current status quo: to continue functioning but without engaging Russia (or not too much, *a priori*, although the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO) fisheries agreement in late November 2022 was adopted by consensus by all Arctic States, including Russia, as it is reminded by Timo Koivurova and Akiho Shibata).<sup>20</sup>

At the moment it seems plausible, but for how long? Freezing, not moving, is an action in itself. A reaction of sorts that helps setting the path. This perspective could be effective with the aim of gaining some time though time is precisely what we are short of if we want to prevent an escalation of the conflict in the Arctic region.

### (2) Flee: Can the Arctic Council survive?

The loss of human lives in the conflict in Ukraine is increasing. The images of massive destruction and unbearable suffering of civilians follow one another in the Western public opinion. Under this panorama, re-evaluating the situation and considering options for cooperation becomes more difficult every day. In this scenario, can the Arctic Council survive? And if so, which role will it be able to play?

As tension grows, some authors believe this will bring back the Cold War dynamics, when “the Arctic was divided into two armed camps and regarded largely as a theater of operations for advanced weapons systems”<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, there is a growing tendency to look at the Arctic as a field to exercising power politics. The Arctic Council is compelled to reduce its activity to a minimum or even stop existing as we know it today. Perhaps the dissolution of the Arctic Council could be contemplated as a flee response. The Arctic would again be a space without a common system to operate under. Some may want to build cooperation without Russia, though realistically speaking, Moscow controls more than 50% of the Arctic landmass and waters so, how can any being survive being stripped of half of its own self? Without half of the Arctic territory, the risk of militarization of the area could be exponential and could also lead to the infeasibility of fair, efficient and effective management of the new maritime routes that are opening up and of mineral and fishing resources, not to speak about the impossibility to share key data for preserving environment and biodiversity in the Arctic Ocean.

### (3) Fight: From Armed Conflict to Cooperation

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørø and Kara K. Hodgson highlight that, from the security perspective, considering the Arctic as an exceptional region could imply a risk in itself.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Timo Koivurova and Akiho Shibata, “After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022: Can we still cooperate with Russia in the Arctic?” March 17 2023, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Ran Young, “Can the Arctic Council Survive the Impact of the Ukraine Crisis?” December 2022

<sup>22</sup> Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørø and Kara K. Hodgson, “‘Arctic Exceptionalism’ or ‘comprehensive security’? Understanding security in the Arctic”

The Arctic States sharing this privileged region are interconnected in a way that expose them directly to the potential menace of aggression by one of the neighboring nations in the Arctic region, should the Ukraine conflict dynamics reproduce themselves there, while at the same time preventing them from promptly implementing a well-designed military response. Military offensive-defensive actions in the Arctic scenario would ultimately be the literal expression for the “fight reaction”.

Western countries agree on branding the Russian Federation and its allies as the common enemy, but, in the Arctic region, does the fighting reaction necessarily have to be a literal battle against Russia in Arctic forums?, or should the fight be aimed at the survival of the Arctic? Perhaps it is time to recalculate the battlefield and the objective and begin to join efforts to protect the environment of peace and cooperation in this unique polar space. Interestingly enough, Michael T. Bravo reminds us that scholars treat the Arctic “as a regional security complex with its own, independent, political calculus that is poorly explained by conventional realist theories of international relations”<sup>23</sup> adding Exner-Pirot that “the Arctic is exceptional in that the environmental sector dominates circumpolar relations,” making it, indeed, a regional environmental security complex.<sup>24</sup>

The *fighting reaction* can also encompass seeking solutions that do not imply military force but rather prevent conflict through cooperation. Opting for this option as the most plausible one, again several positions can be deployed:

(a) *Rethinking the Arctic legal framework*

The Arctic is essentially a maritime, frozen space, ruled by International Law, being the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982 the main foundation of legal order. In addition, it is regulated by different regional systems, as Elena Conde explains, (particularly the Law of the European Union in some Arctic States), and the internal law of the Arctic States together with the aboriginal customary law of the indigenous populations of the Arctic<sup>25</sup>.

As established by UNCLOS, the five Polar States that border the Arctic Ocean have the right to establish their territorial sea up to 12 nautical miles and an exclusive economic zone up to 200 nautical miles. This regulation assures the said Arctic States sovereign rights to exploit the resources of the sea and the oceanic floor, including the subsoil.

This implies that, unlike the system of the Antarctic Treaty that regulates the antagonistic polar space, there is no single legal regime for the Arctic region, but rather a plurality of regulations. This amalgamation of disparate standards makes it difficult to articulate legally binding decisions on an area generating new needs for governance, what has been called the “new Arctic” and the increasing need to explore the prospects for

<sup>23</sup> Michael Bravo, “The Postcolonial Arctic” (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Heather Exner-Pirot, “What is the Arctic a Case of? The Arctic as a Regional Environmental Security Complex and the Implications for Policy” *Polar Journal* 3, 1 (2013): 121-22.

<sup>25</sup> Elena Conde, (2017) pag 410. Instrumentos y regímenes de cooperación internacional / coord. por Carmen Pérez González, Alicia Cebada Romero; Fernando M. Mariño Menéndez (dir.), 2017, ISBN 978-84-9879-718-3, págs. 407-426

the development of an "Arctic regime complex" that encompasses a sizeable collection of individual elements not related to one another in any hierarchical fashion and likely to increase during the coming years.<sup>26</sup>

*(b) Back to Cooperation*

The current panorama of open warfare, although geolocated for the moment in Ukraine, extends its tentacles to almost every corner of the socio-economic, political, diplomatic, and virtual world that we know. International research and scientific cooperation spheres are no stranger to this either. In fact, one could say that more than collateral damage, scientific cooperation and environmental protection is a clear victim in this armed conflict, as we have witnessed on the Black Sea since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and to present (i.e. Kakhovka dam).

Professor Lassi Heininen, a prominent defender of the Arctic exceptionalist thinking, reminds us that, like in the Arctic, in every tensioned area or conflict scenario there are always common interests. In this sense, He states that "there are other regions that share common interests and cooperate between major powers that, in other instances, behave more belligerently towards each other. In this light, the Arctic is just one of many political contexts in which such cooperation in common interests exist."<sup>27</sup> The exceptionalism of the Arctic region is not rooted in politico-military relations ongoing in the area, but rather on the ecological, environmental, resource-like value hidden on and under its frozen waters and territory. In fact, apart from the Antarctic, no other region in the world has the capacity to influence so dramatically on the marine streams through the rapid Arctic ice melting falling into the ocean waters, with the potential for climate disaster worldwide. Therefore, in this very region, how and for how long can the Arctic International Community (through its main body the Arctic Council) sustain the current and previously mentioned disruptive cooperation policy? In this sense, it is worth highlighting the key finding mentioned in the JUSTNORTH Arctic Governance Policy Brief when it says that "institutions within which decision-making takes place both democratic/representative and technical/expert are among the most important avenues for conflict resolution".<sup>28</sup>

Nowadays, environmental protection continues to be a powerful tool for academics, scientists, researchers, diplomats and experts in peace negotiations when trying to articulate a reset of international relations. In particular, the effort to seek solutions to bitter political conflicts through science and the environment is framed within disciplines such as the so-called Environmental Peacebuilding or Science Diplomacy, a direct support of diplomatic processes combining science, technology and international relations in order to meet global interests, increase prosperity and promote understanding between countries, regions, societies and parties to a conflict.

<sup>26</sup> Oran R. Young (2012) "Building an international regime complex for the Arctic: current status and next steps". *The Polar Journal*, 2:2, 391-407, DOI: 10.1080/2154896X.2012.735047

<sup>27</sup> *Supra* note 22, p.225.

<sup>28</sup> [https://justnorth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/JUSTNORTH\\_POLICYBRIEF-6\\_FINAL.pdf](https://justnorth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/JUSTNORTH_POLICYBRIEF-6_FINAL.pdf)



“Science Diplomacy has proven functional to balance global and common interests, encouraging scientific collaboration, and preventing conflicts even in the Cold War period”<sup>29</sup>, reminds us Ebru Caymaz. Therefore, Science Diplomacy could be an answer. Tim Flink however advises “science diplomacy actors from democratic states and institutions, from both academic research and public policy, to stop dreaming about soft power influence on authoritarian states and regimes but rather face new geopolitical realities”.<sup>30</sup> But perhaps we could recall Exner-Pirot previously mentioned thesis and argue that the Arctic is not only about geopolitics, but about science and global environment much more than anywhere else (amen the Antarctic region), therefore Science diplomacy may still be a relevant mediator to re-establish or redesign constructive relations in the Arctic region.

In fact, exploring conflict prevention and resolution modalities based mostly on the environment seems rather sensible and could help to allow the Arctic to continue being a model of reference, potentially serving as a guide in situations when disruption of effective channels for dialogue between neighboring powers occurs in other parts of the world bordering conflict or already turned into scenarios of active armed conflict. Such reference would entail what I call in this study “the Arctic Model”.

#### (D) WHAT CAN THE ARCTIC DO FOR UKRAINE?

From High North News and the Center for Strategic Analysis to the EU External Action and the Arctic Institute, among others, plenty has been written on how war affects neighborly relations in the Arctic.<sup>31</sup> But maybe it’s time to ponder ourselves what the Arctic can do to defuse the conflict in Ukraine and potentially calm the global situation.

If the Arctic, with its remarkable Arctic Council, has successfully functioned as a superb model for diplomatic, economic, environmental and social cooperation until very recently, why not using it as an opportunity to rethink global international relations in a holistic manner?<sup>2</sup> Could we redirect communication between the seven NATO Arctic States and Russia around a key issue that would require cooperation from all of them? Could we still activate a new *détente* that begins in the Arctic and whose ramifications reach out to the very core of the conflict in Ukraine?

##### (1) Shaping “the Arctic Model”

As international relations in the Arctic after Russia invaded Ukraine deteriorate, the room for dialogue and cooperation narrows.<sup>32</sup> However, there are always common interests

<sup>29</sup> Ebru Caymaz. Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey. “Science Diplomacy as a New Form of Arctic Governance”. Journal of US-China Public Administration, Jan.-Feb. 2021, Vol. 18, No. 1, 16-20 doi: 10.17265/1548-6591/2021.01.002

<sup>30</sup> Tim Flink. “Taking the pulse of science diplomacy and developing practices of valuation”. Science and Public Policy, Volume 49, Issue 2, April 2022, Pages 191–200, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scab074>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/what-effects-has-ukraine-war-had-arctic-council>

<sup>32</sup> <https://ras-nsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Report-on-the-consequences-of-the-war-in-Ukraine-in-the-Arctic.pdf>

worth protecting in any situation of tension or conflict between parties and this is the *leitmotiv* of “the Arctic Model”, which in itself is a conflict management tool, a proposal for what could be an Arctic Council’s fight reaction. Again, “fighting” understood in terms of advancing conflict prevention/management through constructive dialogue and cooperation over the aforementioned common interests, linked to environmental protection and Science Diplomacy efforts. The identification of these common interests worth protecting, requires an analysis at a higher level, thus taking a step back (zooming out) from the cause(s) that created the tension/conflict. This analysis should comprise an assessment of a range of dimensions or potential fields of cooperation such as human resources, democratic governance, policy-making, transportation, education, infrastructure building, commerce and business, environment and culture (including art and sports).

A combination of some of these fields of cooperation can likely be identified and implemented shaping a transboundary environmental initiative, potentially leading to a just, win-win framework for all actors implied. This should lead to a renewed cooperation between all Arctic States, paving the way to a restoration of the original spirit of the Arctic “savoir faire”.

When carrying out the combination of dimensions, “the Arctic Model” would focus on initiatives aiming at transitioning towards climate-friendly forms of energy (now stopped due to the conflict in Ukraine) for different modes of transport, centring the attention on the socio-economic benefits for governmental actors as well as the Arctic local communities. In this sense, in the Arctic scenario, the Arctic Model would combine the environmental dimension with the field of transport, chiefly, maritime transportation as the main mean to transit the Arctic region. This would focus on biofuels and dual fuels for ships navigating the area.

Policy could be another field of cooperation taken into consideration in this scenario, to regulate initiatives for production of sustainable fuels at regional and local level. “The Arctic Model” is currently under development and will be structured following a given methodology. Such methodology comprises data collection, through interviews in situ/remote, technical reports and the analysis of different business models (e.g. Norway); dialogue, through the organization of track two modes, including stakeholders (Arctic Council, Industry, Research institutes, Indigenous representatives, among others), and development of a win-win/just framework of environmental protection for peace-preserving in the Arctic.

If, following this framework, the cooperation between all Arctic States in the Arctic region were to be resumed and the trust somehow restored, the same actors could be inclined to address the issue of environmental protection in Ukraine (e.g. the nuclear plant of Zaporizhzhia). This could ultimately lead to contributing to peacebuilding in Ukraine.

The objective of this exploratory study is to actively apply the concept “the Arctic Model” to other conflict scenarios. That is to say, how can a conflict in a certain region be eased through a framework applied in another region where the same actors have common interests? The Arctic Model is not limited to a closed number of dimensions but its application could be explored only in conflicts or conflictive scenarios with

certain characteristics: multidimensional conflicts where science and environment play a key role, requiring the involvement of the parties at regional level and with an active presence of the international community, as well as with the potential for economic benefits for government-level actors and local communities.

This model aims to resume dialogue and cooperation between actors to maximize resource management in natural areas where political dynamics are conflictive. Conflict and cooperation often coexist and the Arctic Model seeks to create space for such hybrid contexts when the circumstances make cooperation efforts appear *a priori* impossible.

## (E) CONCLUSIONS

The war in Ukraine is impacting the Arctic region at many levels, specially reshaping the fragile power balance that existed in the region hitherto. In that sense, the challenge that Arctic governance is enduring leads to rethinking the traditional dynamics in the region. Questioning the survival of the “Arctic Exceptionalism” –envisioning the region as an “oasis of peace and cooperation” difficult to find elsewhere in the world –, is one of the first consequences that the impact of the war in Ukraine is having on international relations. The main body being affected is the Arctic Council which is currently being forced to play a different role, still to be determined.

Deriving from that, different reactions to the current state of affairs can be observed, and the question that this paper considers is what will the Arctic International Community do before the impending perceived danger: will it freeze, flee or fight? This paper has explored different scenarios that could serve as an answer to the proposed question.

Among the alternatives to face the current dilemma, a singular model is proposed: The Arctic Model that could serve as a potential instrument to redirect communication between NATO and pro-NATO Arctic States and the Russian Federation (as another Arctic State) around a common interest. The focus is the protection of the Arctic environment through the combination of different proposed fields of cooperation.

Should this model be successful, it could also be transferred to other tensioned or conflicted scenarios in different parts of the world-starting from Ukraine-, where same actors would have common interests thus allowing them to return to the negotiation table.

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