

Chapter 5

Securitization of the Arctic: A Need for a Regional Security Architecture

Sukalpa Chakrabarti

Symbiosis International University (Deemed), India

ABSTRACT

The geopolitical importance of the Arctic is intensifying with the economic and strategic opportunities being unraveled in the wake of the impact of climate change. The chapter analyses the actors and the factors affecting the current security relations in the region and recommends the creation of a regional security architecture (RSA) to deal with the emerging conflict potential of the Arctic. Through the establishment of an effective RSA for the Arctic, the prime objective of building a security environment that protects the region and promotes sustainable economic growth will be achieved. The chapter has been conceptualized under the broad theme of security studies while drawing specifically from the constructivist-structuralist framework of the regional security complex theory (RSCT).

INTRODUCTION

The geographical boundaries of the Arctic region are contentious and there exists a disparity in the accepted definition, even within the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Nordic countries, Arctic indigenous communities, and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on the issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic (Arctic Council, 2018). The Nordic states include the eight countries of Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Russia, the USA, and Canada (Figure 1).

Climate change in the Arctic which has resulted in the warming of the seas and the retreat of ice has made the area more accessible for exploitation of its rich economic potential. It holds new prospects for trade, transport, mining, energy, technology, and research. Consequently, the region is witnessing the opening up of maritime routes right across the North Pole, and countries vying for extraction and mining rights for natural resources. The increased interest in the spoils of the region is visible in the strategies

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Figure 1. Arctic Ocean map
 Source: Geology.com (n.d.)



being drafted by the Nordic states as well as the other powers, such as the UK, the EU, China, India, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, specific to the Arctic. History is a witness that over time, mutual interests in resources, trade, and economic exchange can bring nations together in the spirit of cooperation. A case in point is that, in spite of competitive geopolitical agenda, India and China were both instated as official observers in the Arctic Council.

An increasingly globalized world economy with a mounting population will continue to create demand pressures on the available resources. The rapid melting of the Arctic ice and the resultant newfound resources and maritime routes has prompted the region to emerge as one of the focal points of global geopolitics and geo-economics. The Arctic region, known for mining, fisheries, hydrocarbon, hydro-power, and natural gases will, therefore, need the creation of a strong regulatory mechanism that can respond effectively to the competitive and disruptive changes. Alongside its economic significance, the geopolitical importance of the region is also on the rise and has been instrumental in driving securitization activities in the Arctic. According to Keohane (2005), this is essential because of economic issues, if they are crucial enough to basic national values, may become military-security issues as well.

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