Workshop Report

Arctic Future Forum - Confrontation or Cooperation?

On September 29, 2009, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Rideau Institute convened an expert meeting in Ottawa to develop collaborative dialogue on issues of importance in the Arctic and to discuss international common ground. The workshop focused on three areas: Security & Arms Control, Energy & the Environment, and Governance & International Relations. The 45 participants from all areas of Arctic engagement were rotated through different discussion groups as summarized below.

Key Findings:

Security & Arms Control

• There is a human component of security: security of food, culture and language.
• There is a difference between militarization and security. They do not mean the same thing for all peoples and regions, and can even be in opposition.
• The role of the Arctic Council should be expanded and include debate on security/military matters and give Northern residents a voice.
• Cold War era nuclear weapons policies and practices, including the presence of nuclear weapons in the Arctic, remains a challenge. While a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone may not be achievable in the short term, an agreement between Arctic nations not to move forward with new installations could be possible.
• NATO’s Arctic Policy is important because it has the potential to increase tension between Russia and the Arctic NATO members. Non-Arctic countries could act as mediators.
• Access to newly navigable waterways like the Northwest Passage is seen as a national security threat. The challenge is that denial of access could have international implications.
Energy & the Environment

- There is a need for stronger environmental standards, regulations and governance, on a local, national and international level.
- Co-management strategies should be promoted, involving local indigenous people and traditional knowledge.
- Oil spills will become more of a threat with increased shipping. Clean-up methods need to be detailed.
- A moratorium on oil and gas exploration and extraction doesn’t seem feasible. It would result in severe economic and development disadvantages for Northerners.
- Climate change is not an Arctic issue alone. However, the Arctic is especially affected by it, and Arctic countries should strongly promote the reduction of carbon emissions and take a constructive role in the climate change negotiations.

Governance & International Relations

- The costs of governance in the Arctic are high, yet governance resources and capacity are not always adequate. The structures in place deserve praise since they champion consensus as well as inclusion of indigenous players and experience.
- Interaction between state and non-state actors normally results in better governance. At the same time, cross-border relations are crucial for stable governance.
- Emerging new actors and factors need to be taken into account, such as Inuit self-determination or an independent Greenland.
- The Arctic Council faces questions of legitimacy. Not all nations give it the same value, and not all observers are equally committed. The Council’s mandate could be broadened to include non-Arctic states.
- An attitude of self-sufficiency could hinder Arctic states from taking valuable advice and potentially moving in new directions.
- As a world “intersection”, the Arctic is a global issue by nature. It could even be redefined as a “global commons” and eventually an international model of good governance.
Post-Workshop Discussion Forum

- Stewardship is a concept that ties together local governance, security and other issues.
- Non-Arctic players can inform the debates and enrich the discussion. Learn from Australia’s experience with polar stewardship in Antarctica and improve dialogue between Arctic and non-Arctic regions on the subject.
- Indigenous players outside of the nation state can impact foreign policy and must be considered.
- Transportation is a crosscutting issue and could be a major policy topic for debate - brings together resources, environment, security and governance.
- The Arctic issue presents high levels of complexity and interconnectedness - focus on specific aspects is key to upcoming discussions. Informal poll found “governance” was a key topic.

Detailed Report:

The expert meeting brought together both national and international representatives, including those from Canadian government departments, the UN, academia, NGOs, indigenous organizations and foreign missions to Canada. Workshop participants had expertise in various sectors such as the environment, peace and security, and industry.

The expert meeting adopted a “World Café” style, with three discussion groups running simultaneously and participants rotating amongst the groups. The three topics discussed within the working groups were Security & Arms Control, facilitated by Dr. Michael Byers, Energy & the Environment, led by R. Andreas Kraemer, and Governance & International Relations, guided by Dr. Petra Dolata-Kreutzkamp and Jackie Price.

Steven Staples, President of the Rideau Institute, and Pia Bungarten, Representative of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation to the United States and Canada, welcomed participants to the meeting, and Georg Jürgens, Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Ottawa also made introductory remarks. Mr. Jürgens stated that the Arctic is an important region to consider - and acknowledged that the EU is linked to the Arctic through its member states and that the environmental issues facing the Arctic have an effect on European security and well being. Following opening remarks, participants moved to their working groups, in which discussion on the three primary topics took place.
Security & Arms Control

Militarization, the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone, the role of the Arctic Council, and current state responsibilities were debated in this roundtable. The prospect of the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Arctic was brought up, though the feasibility of such a zone did not have much support. The need for such a zone in the Arctic was questioned, as the only Arctic nation with nuclear weapons in the region is Russia.

Another significant matter was the role of the Arctic Council in regional security, and the possibility of expanding its role to include debates on military matters. Current cooperation in the Arctic was highlighted with a lively discussion on the recent Ilulissat agreement signed between the five Arctic coastal states to work within existing legal frameworks to resolve future sovereignty disagreements. Some felt as though the agreement was a step backwards in Arctic cooperation, due to the exclusive nature of the agreement, while others argued it was an important step forward in regional cooperation. From a Canadian perspective, participants discussed the responsibilities the federal government already holds to its aboriginal people in the Arctic.

Energy & the Environment

Several key concepts marked the discussion on energy and the environment in the Arctic, including the possibility of a moratorium on oil exploration and extraction, the importance of involving local indigenous populations in the discussion, and the need to strengthen environmental regulations. A moratorium on future oil and gas development generated much discussion. Some argued the environmental impacts of the industry outweighed the benefits. Others felt that a moratorium in the Arctic would bring severe economic and development consequences for Northerners.

Environmental standards and governance was another important topic throughout the sessions. Participants noted that the fragility of the Arctic environment creates a need for stronger protections and regulations. Promotion of co-management strategies was discussed as a mechanism for involving knowledge of indigenous populations, and increasing involvement of aboriginal populations in existing environmental protection strategies, such as oil spill clean up. Such spills will become more of a threat to the Arctic environment as shipping traffic grows in northern waters.
Governance & International Relations

Governance models were debated during this roundtable, generating discussion on what, who, and how are we governing in the Arctic. The importance of cross-border relations and the Arctic Council framework were also discussed. Terms of governance were raised as a concern, as governance cannot move forward if the parameters are unknown. Emerging models, such as Inuit self-determination and the increasing powers of Greenland are creating new actors who bring new values to existing systems. Improvements of governance models should happen in an environment where both state and non-state actors can interact.

It was noted throughout the discussions the resources needed for effective governance in the Arctic are not always available. The importance of relationships across borders was brought up, and expansion of such ties should be pursued. Knowledge sharing, particularly with Russian counterparts, was raised as a necessary component for effective cooperation among Arctic nations. The Arctic Council was discussed in a number of different contexts. It was suggested that the mandate of the Council could be broadened to include smaller or non-Arctic states. The enforcement powers of the Arctic Council were called into question, as well as how states are using the institution. A final discussion centered on Arctic as a global issue, not a geographic issue.

Presentation of Results & Discussion

Following the three discussion modules, delegates reconvened to the large group to hear the results of the groups’ efforts, as presented by the four guest experts. These points are summarized in the “key findings” section above. Following the presentation of the working group results, a lively panel discussion ensued. It was moderated by former Politics host Don Newman and open to the public.

Ottawa, December 16, 2009

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