



DISARMING ARCTIC SECURITY

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Confidence and Security Building in the Arctic: proposals from the 2014 Arctic Yearbook

The 2014 [Arctic Yearbook](#) is the third edition of what has become an important vehicle for publishing the results of current Arctic scholarship on a range of themes. Topics covered include regional governance, circumpolar relations, the geopolitics of the region, and security. In the latter section, one interesting offering explores possibilities for adapting confidence and security building measures developed in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the Arctic.¹

Regional confidence and security building measures are neither disarmament nor demilitarization measures, instead, they are arrangements and initiatives intended to reduce tensions and the risks of direct conflict by promoting openness and transparency with regard to military capabilities and intentions, and thus build mutual confidence within a particular region. Measures for the exchange of verifiable military information and regularized opportunities for cooperation among regional military forces promote confidence and reduce threat and threat perceptions.

Author Benjamin Schaller, whose article is based on his Master's Degree thesis at the University of Uppsala, makes it clear that his attention to the promotion of confidence building in the Arctic is not premised on any assumptions about rising tensions. Instead, it is based on the need for Arctic states to be deliberate in adopting ways to preserve and deepen confidence in the commitments to the peaceful settlement of disputes as articulated in the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration and the 2013 "Vision for the Arctic" statement by the Arctic Council. Declaring the further development of the region as a zone of peace to be at the heart of the Arctic Council's work, the "Vision" statement reiterates the spirit of Ilulissat: "We are confident that there is no problem that we cannot solve together through our cooperative relationships on the basis of existing international law and good will. We remain committed to the framework of the Law of the Sea, and to the peaceful resolution of disputes generally."²

Within that political climate of peaceful intentions, which Arctic Council declarations themselves reinforce, the paper points out that it must nevertheless be acknowledged that the military capacities and deployments of Arctic states are on the rise and that measures of openness and transparency should thus be actively pursued in order to prevent misinterpretations of intentions from arising and to keep tensions from emerging.

The expansion of military capacity in the north, if undertaken openly and cooperatively with neighbors, can aid in preserving the region as a zone of durable peace inasmuch as enhanced capacity can aid enforcement of and respect for the rule of law, help to ensure compliance with national and regional regulations, enhance border security, especially maritime approaches to national land territories, and generally foster a sense of the region as a rules-based zone in which compliance with those rules is expected and respected. For that to happen, openness and transparency are essential. The Arctic Council itself, the Search and Rescue agreement, the oil spills agreement, and the Ilulissat Declaration are thus all confidence building measures.

Schaller's paper refers to both direct and structural responses to rising tensions. The former, the direct actions, tend to be responsive to already emerging crises, while structural measures are much longer term efforts designed to create the kinds of conditions that are conducive to stability. Confidence building measures belong to the latter structural approaches by increasing transparency and by developing clearer and mutual understandings of each state's military intentions. In the Arctic it is especially important that such measures apply to maritime military deployments and operations.

The paper appeals to the OSCE experience, notably the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document, for compelling models for greater transparency and future crisis prevention and mitigation in the Arctic.

The Open Skies Treaty³ establishes a regime of unarmed observation flights over the territories of State Parties. It specifies the number of observation flights allowed, requirements for notifying states of the points of entry of such flights, and it sets technical details for inspection and sensors. It currently has 34 members, which include all Arctic Council states.

The Vienna Document⁴ commits all States Parties (all 57 OSCE states and thus all Arctic Council states) to exchanges of information on military forces and planned deployments and on defence planning. It also includes provisions for military cooperation in the interests of risk reduction.

Both the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document have played a role in the current crisis in the Ukraine, as noted in an April 2014 account by the Brookings Institute.⁵ Under Open Skies, member states are allowed a limited number of flights over the territories of other States Parties, using imaging technologies and sensors (though these are by mutual agreement technically limited in ways that prevent excessive exposure of details). Even in the context of the Ukraine crisis, flights have been conducted over Ukrainian and Russian territory under the Open Skies agreement. Similarly, the Vienna Document formed the basis of an OSCE observation team which conducted inspections along the Ukrainian border, even though Russia did not allow it to enter Crimea. Russia also did not provide prior notification of military activities undertaken near Ukraine's eastern border.

Despite these limitations, the Brookings analysis suggests these two mechanisms have produced useful information during the course of the crisis. Senior Fellow Ariana Rowberry notes that "Russia has fulfilled its obligation with regard to over flights under Open Skies and has hosted the requisite number of Vienna Document events." She suggests that the result has been enhanced transparency and that these two agreements could yet play a role in helping to de-escalate the crisis.

Given that all Arctic Council states are parties to these two agreements, their provisions already apply in the Arctic, but Schaller suggests that Arctic specific arrangements, tailored more to the Arctic maritime environment and to relevant equipment and operations, would make them more relevant and active in confidence building in the Arctic. He also suggests that the systems for exchanging verifiable military information on the Arctic could be structured in a way that complements information sharing arrangements linked to search and rescue missions, maritime law enforcement, border controls, and disaster response (whether they be natural or human made disasters).

The article is an important contribution to explorations toward a durable security architecture in the Arctic, just as *The Arctic Yearbook* itself is an important forum through which scholars, especially young scholars from countries of the region or interests in it, engage in the full range of political, social, economic, and military issues of relevance to human security in the region. The yearbook is peer reviewed and the thematic section

of the 2014 edition focuses on “human capacity-building.” The coming 2015 edition will focus on “Arctic Governance and Governing.”

The annual publication is the initiative of the [Northern Research Forum](#) and the [University of the Arctic](#). The Northern Research Forum describes itself as “an international platform for an effective dialogue between members of the research community and a wide range of stakeholders including researchers, educators, politicians, business leaders, civil servants, community leaders, NGO representatives, and resource users and managers.”

In addition to the thematic articles, the yearbook includes a section on geopolitics and security, which is where the article on confidence and security building measures is found, as well as a timely item on Russia’s military build-up in the Arctic.⁶ The latter portrays Russia as determined to defend its interests – politically, economically, and militarily – in the Arctic, however, says author Barbora Padrtová, a research fellow at the Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs in the Slovak Republic, Russia’s military developments “are primarily focused on protection of coastlines and offshore energy extraction installations, search-and-rescue operations and icebreaker capabilities, [and] therefore should not be seen strictly as a militarization of the region.”

The Arctic Yearbook is well worth a look and is available online at www.arcticyearbook.com.

Notes

¹ Benjamin Schaller, “Confidence- & Security-Building Measures in the Arctic: The Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe as a Role Model for the Area?” *Arctic Yearbook 2014*, www.arcticyearbook.com.

² Vision for the Arctic, Arctic Council Secretariat, 15 May 2013, Kiruna, Sweden. www.arctic-council.org/.../425-main-documents...vision-for-the-arctic

³ OSCE. <http://www.osce.org/library/14127?download=true>

⁴ OSCE. <http://www.osce.org/fsc/86597>

⁵ Ariana Rowberry, “The Vienna Document, the Open Skies Treaty and the Ukraine Crisis, Up Front, Brookings, 10 April 2014. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2014/04/10-vienna-document-open-skies-ukraine-crisis-rowberry>

⁶ Barbora Padrtová, “Russian Military Build-up in the Arctic: Strategic Shift in the Balance of Power or Bellicose Rhetoric Only?” *Arctic Yearbook 2014*, www.arcticyearbook.com.