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Small State Strategies in emerging Regional Governance Structures: Explaining the Danish advocacy for China's inclusion in the Arctic Council*

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Abstract

This article departs from the puzzling observation that of the five littoral arctic states the Danish realm has been the most consistent backer in China's quest to gain observer status in the Arctic Council. Small states are generally assumed to adapt to changes in the international system such as spatial re-configurations and alterations in the distribution of capabilities. Yet Denmark's enabling role in relation to China seems to contravene that assumption. Why would a small state invite one of the world's leading powers to enter its regional domain while its principle allies and regional partners – including USA and Canada - were still indecisive or outright hesitant? This article explores three possible explanations for the Danish support for China: 1) a domestic politics explanation featuring strategic use of discourse to entice Chinese investments in Arctic mineral extraction. 2) a securitisation explanation suggesting that unease with growing Canadian securitisation of Arctic issues has prompted courting China as a balancing act. 3) a foreign policy identity explanation focussing on the normative desire to enmeshment China into a liberal Arctic order.

Keywords: Arctic Council, China, Denmark, Greenland, regional governance, small state

Introduction

In 2009 China applied to upgrade its ad hoc observer status (held since 2007) to regular observer state in the Arctic Council. This was not granted at the time, but in late 2011 China renewed its bid – as a ‘near arctic state’ – for a formal position in the Arctic governance structure. Somewhat surprisingly the Arctic Council accommodated China’s wishes at their Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna in mid-May 2013 (for further discussion Willis & Depledge, 2015, p. 399-401). The upgrading of China’s status in the Arctic Council is of limited formal importance as it merely consolidates an already well-established practice of China being invited to Council ministerial and working group meetings. Yet China’s wish for, and granting of, observer status is of great symbolic significance. This is evident by the active participation of high-level Chinese delegations in Council activities and in statements in and outside the Council urging the upgrading of its membership. The official state visits prior to China’s most recent application by the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Iceland and Sweden and by President Hu Jintao to Denmark – the first state visit by a Chinese President in the country’s history – also all bear witness to the importance attached to the issue by China (see also Jacobson & Lee, 2013). At the same time, an application on behalf of the European Union (EU), which had otherwise followed a comparable trajectory to that of China’s, was rejected: A rejection that – due to a turn of events - is not causally reversed given the strained relationship between the EU and Russia following the situation at the Crimea. Together this underline that decisions on allowing access to Arctic governance is not taken lightly and institutional choices made in an emerging regional governance structure may well have lasting implications for power relations and political outcomes.

This article departs from the puzzling observation that of the five littoral arctic states the Danish realm has been the most consistent backer in China’s quest to gain observer

status in the Arctic Council. Why did Copenhagen deem it to be in its interest to proactively promote China's stake in Arctic affairs? While minor and middle powers do at times exhibit diplomatic entrepreneurship, small states are generally assumed to adapt to changes in the international system such as spatial re-configurations and alterations in the distribution of capabilities (see Archer et al., 2014). Yet Denmark's enabling role in relation to China's quest for observer status in the Arctic Council seem to contravene that assumption. This begs the question: Why would a small state invite one of the world's leading powers to enter its regional domain as the latter is no longer sheltered by a virtually inaccessible ice cap? Why would it do so while its principle allies and regional partners were still indecisive or outright hesitant?

The article is organised as follows: the second section presents and theoretically grounds three explanations emphasising respectively: 1) a domestic politics explanation featuring strategic use of discourse to entice Chinese investments in Arctic mineral extraction. 2) a securitisation explanation suggesting that unease with growing Canadian securitisation of Arctic issues has prompted courting China as a balancing act. 3) a foreign policy identity explanation focussing on the normative desire to enmeshment China into a liberal Arctic order. The sections three, four and five investigating in turn the explanations empirically follow this. The sixth and final section concludes on the reasons for the unlikely Danish advocacy for China's inclusion in arctic governance. But first we shall explore the immediate implications of China's bid for the Danish Realm.

China's Arctic Bid and the Danish Realm

Popular explanations for Denmark's support for China's Arctic Council bid have emphasised material gains as reflected in the coverage of major dailies (see Jørgensen,

2011; Lü, 2012; Wamsler, 2012). China has won diplomatic favours through financial aid or investment in a number of instances around the globe. The recipients of aid or investment and grantors of favours have typically been economically precarious or vulnerable developing countries. By contrast Danish nominal GDP per capita is on par with that of Canada and USA, the balance of trade and the current account exhibit consistent and healthy surpluses, unemployment is modest, public debt manageable and top graded by S&P, Fitch and Moody's with stable outlook (Danmarks Statistik, 2017). Additional increments of wealth accrued from granting China political favours are likely to be of marginal value for Denmark and have to be measured up against the potential cost of deviating from its traditional foreign policy position vis-à-vis traditional allies and partners such as the US and Canada (interview with former Ambassador of the Republic of Finland to the Arctic, 8 October 2016).

From the perspective of Greenland the potential rewards, however, may be significant. Not least in view of its substantial unexploited mineral riches. China has a proven track record in mineral extraction at sites considered inaccessible or otherwise risky and has leveraged various instruments such as development assistance to ensure required infrastructure roll-out to handle logistical challenges and ensure provision of utilities in remote locations.

The Danish realm includes Denmark, the North Atlantic Faroe Islands and Greenland. The two dominions have been granted Self-government in all issues save foreign and security policy. The distribution of the expected income from future resource extraction was negotiated between the Danish and Greenlandic governments and expressed in the agreement on Self-government made in 2009. On an annual basis, the first approximately US\$13m (DKK75m) goes to Greenland; any income above this is

divided equally between the two governments, where the Danish share takes the form of a reduction of the yearly block grant to Greenland. This is currently approximately US\$600m (approx. DKK 3.5 billion). Should the block grant be reduced to 0 then the agreement is to be re-negotiated (Law about Greenlandic Self-government, 2009).

While the Danish and Greenlandic governments both hold out the prospect of gains from the agreement, it is clear that the expected income is of much more significance for the Greenlandic economy (see also Keil, 2013). The Greenlandic government must be expected to have a strong preference for exploiting this opportunity and attract international partners for this purpose. Yet the institutional constraints in having Copenhagen in charge of foreign and security policy means Greenland need to exert pressure on the Danish government in order to pursue its interests' vis-à-vis China.

How can we explain the Danish advocacy for China's inclusion in Arctic Governance?

Our approach to exploring the Danish advocacy for China's inclusion in arctic governance follows Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009) argument in favour of methodological pragmatism and analytical eclecticism when dealing with complex and novel research questions. The aim of our pragmatic approach is to enable the generation of systematic analytical insight into reasons for the Danish advocacy for China's inclusion in arctic governance. Our analytical eclectic version of pragmatism developed below will thus draw on a range of research traditions from comparative politics and International relations. International relation theory has traditionally separated the international system from domestic politics; the former being the object of analysis (Wendt, 1999, chapter 1). However, analysing the case at hand it is especially important to include a focus on

domestic politics. That is, a focus on the special nature of the Danish realm including in principle two separate governments with potentially very different geopolitical interests. The three different explanations we engage with are not necessarily competing, but nonetheless have their origin in different strands of literature. Using discursive institutionalism, the first explanation reflects popular depictions which have dominated press coverage of the issue in Denmark. The second explanation leans on Regional Security Complex theory which is uniquely positioned to zoom in on constitutive dynamics of a region emerging from the receding icecap while enticing ‘penetrating external powers’. Finally, small state literature and constructivist foreign policy analysis emphasise small states reliance on, and enthusiasm for multilateral, governance mechanisms while also appreciating that the entailed normative package may impact behaviour to an extent that challenge what a more confined rationalist calculus would stipulate as being in a given small states ‘national interest’. Hence the puzzling observation that Denmark seemingly failed to align its position with more cautious key allies may be accounted for by ‘normative capture’.

The domestic politics explanation

The domestic politics explanation puts a spotlight on the relation between Denmark and Greenland within the Danish realm. Greenlandic political pressure can here be viewed as a potential determinant of Danish Arctic policy. This perspective takes its cue from the literature on discursive institutionalism (Lynggaard, 2012; Schmidt, 2008). The discursive institutional perspective offers the conceptual means to understand how the Greenlandic government may exercise pressure on the Danish government, even under

the condition of the hierarchical relationship between the Danish and Greenlandic government on foreign policy issues.

Discursive institutional theory accentuates that actors are guided by discourse setting out a 'space of possibility' for viable political activity. Political actors most often operate without much further reflection according to a set of internalised discourses. However, sometimes actors may also use discourses strategically to bring about or, indeed, hinder certain policy goals (Lynggaard, 2013). To understand the discourses guiding the relationship between central Danish and Greenlandic governments, we need to look to the discursive constitution of the Danish realm. It has been suggested that the Danish realm discourse is characterised by two apparent paradoxes: (i) that the end goal of the Realm is its own dissolution and (ii) that it is made up by equal partners, even though it is clearly a hierarchical relation, historically and present (Gad, 2008). Our central claim is here that the paradoxical nature of the Danish realm discourse is especially fit for strategic use: first the realm paradoxes work so as to explicate the discourse for the involved actors; second, it allows for, if not multiple, then a range of meanings to be attached to the political relationships in the Danish realm. Both are conditions conducive for Greenlandic strategic use of discourse to exert pressure on the Danish government to support further involvement of China in Arctic governance.

The securitisation explanation

The second explanation utilizes regional security complex (RSC) theory and suggests Denmark is enlisting China as a balancing act in response to growing Canadian securitisation of the Arctic region. Having the smallest military footprint of the five Arctic

littoral states, Denmark struggles to assert its sovereignty over Greenland including disputed borders with Canada.

Whereas Denmark has relied on Washington for its security in Europe, the Arctic RSC presents a different ball game. The US is likely indifferent with regards to the exact location of the Greenland-Canadian border, as a shift in either direction does not seriously alter the Arctic balance of power, moreover US is a regional hegemon in the North American continent and harbours a fundamental disdain towards extra regional players, thus producing a natural pro-Canadian bias also evident by the extensive collaboration through the joint North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Denmark cannot turn to Russia as an Arctic ally since Russia poses the main existential threat to the European part of the Danish realm. This makes enlisting China as a balancing act a plausible option for Copenhagen.

Denmark has a stated intention of preventing a militarisation of the Arctic. This is hardly surprising given that the country is a minor power in a region otherwise populated by major and great powers. Yet as a small power, Denmark's possibility for decisively influencing the level of Arctic militarisation is limited. In this context prudent small state strategists need to plan for eventual intensified security rivalry and seek to expand its options in case demilitarization fails to carry the day.

RSC theory including the concept of 'Securitisation' (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Wæver, 1995) analyse security as a speech act, where the issue is not if threats are objectively present, but rather how a certain issue (troop movements, migration, or environmental degradation) can be socially constructed as a threat. The approach seeks to bridge constructivist and realist inspired IR and accordingly also takes material factors into account. The theory acknowledges neorealist traits such as polarity, balancing and

the need for great powers to possess certain capabilities. But in addition emphasise that great powers are defined by their behaviour. In security terms regions can be placed on a continuum on the basis of the prevalent patterns of interaction ranging from a traditional realist logic to a post-modern logic ((Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 32, p. 75). While regionally focussed extra-regional actors may be enticed to enter a specific RSC:

The standard form for an RSC is a pattern of rivalry, balance-of power, and alliance patterns among the main powers within the region: to this pattern can then be added the effects of penetrating external powers. (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 47)

RSC theory crucially links material factors with discursive practices by stipulating that e.g. asymmetric capability distributions, the general operating mode of a given RSC, which could include involvement by extra-regional penetrating powers, impact if and how securitization unfold (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 86-87). What we propose is admittedly an elaborate string of arguments. The claim is that unease with growing Canadian securitisation of Arctic issues has prompted Denmark to court China as a balancing act. But in order for securitization to take hold, Denmark must respond in kind. Our investigation will therefore initially establish if rhetoric on Arctic issues in Ottawa and Copenhagen exhibit signs of securitization. Only if this can be established shall we endeavour to ascertain if Sino-Danish collusion may be designated an alliance.

Foreign Policy Identity and normative agenda's

Our third explanation combines traditional 'small state' preference for multilateralisation with the Foreign Policy Identity literature which emanates from constructivism. Identity

can broadly be defined as “images of individuality and distinctiveness (‘selfhood’) held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time) through relations with significant ‘others’” (Jepperson et al., 1996, p. 59). In its discursive connotation, identity is concerned with the justification of foreign policy rather than its causation (Hansen, 2002, p. 8). As such it is considered the deepest discursive layer providing the foundation of argumentative legitimations of foreign policy.

Stahl et. al. (2004, p. 426-27) depicts a post-World War II Danish foreign policy identity which breaks with its previous path of isolationism and neutrality only to find itself captured between two co-existing discourses exposing a ‘preference for Nordic cooperation’ and ‘an openness to multilateral collaboration’. The Arctic Council offers an ideal acid test for this diagnosis since it promise a venue of multilateral collaborating which can be grounded in Nordic cooperation.

As a founding member of the UN and all major ‘Western’ regimes, Denmark’s consistent aspiration to strengthen the formalisation and institutionalisation of international relations is well documented (Branner & Kelstrup, 2000; Schouenborg, 2012). This behaviour is consistent with small state theory (Katzenstein, 1985; Toje, 2010) and can be seen to reflect an example of the ‘creative agency’ of ‘Small State Diplomacy’ (Bishop, 2012, p. 950-51). In this vein, Copenhagen deems Chinese engagement in the Arctic inevitable and thus seeks to enmesh the country in a budding regional governance structure. Elevating China to a stakeholder may ensure compliance from state backed mining groups vis-a-vis environmental and labour standards.

Small state behaviour typically conforms to either patterns of adaptation or activism. With the demise of the Soviet threat and the end of bipolarity, Denmark replaced adaptation with activism (Pedersen, 2012, p. 333). Danish foreign policy activism has

been associated with ‘internationalism’ and ‘multilateralism’ entailing an increase in Denmark’s engagement in international organizations and alliances (Holm, 1997). This activist path is fuelled by aspirations to *‘promote liberal ideas and impose liberal values regionally and globally’* and entails *‘a strong defence of an international order, rule of international law and reinforcement of the role of international organizations in the international system’* (Pedersen, 2012, p. 332). Our claim is then: Extending the liberal order and embedding regional manifestations of the order by explicitly enlisting the most prominently rising power would seem a meaningful course of action for a small state like Denmark.

Below we shall examine each of the three proposed explanations in turn. Our analytical strategy is based on the triangulation of data and methods, where our key analytical points are based on at least two sources (typically more) and, if at all possible, two types of methods. For this investigation we use document analysis, interviews and existing empirical studies. Documents for the analysis such as Arctic strategies and government report have been selected so to capture positions of governments or governmental units. Relevant national law, international law and declarations have been conferred so to capture – legally or politically – sanctioned behaviour among the involved. Additional independent reports have been conferred so to contextualise the former. Media reports reflect public debate, but also different party positions. The sensitivity and current nature of the topic rendered traditional interviewing difficult and is probably also important reasons for an additional number of planned interviews not materialising. Yet, nine in-depth off-the-record interviews and additional three less formalised ‘personal communications’ have been conducted in Nuuk, Copenhagen, Bruxelles, Washington and Reykjavik with centrally placed politicians and administrative

personnel directly involved in case at hand. Respondents represented the political strata, diplomacy and the military command. The interviews and communications were all conducted with two interviewers present allowing for intensive note making and varied in length between approximately half an hour and two hours. Most respondents asked for full or some degree of anonymity. To be sure, in some instances it has not been possible to triangulate, sometimes unique, insights obtained through interviews. Essentially the sometimes narrow timeframes for an elite interview directed us at first pursuing distinct insights from the respondent and second, if time allowed it, pursuing perspectives on points obtained in preceding interviews or from other types of sources. Our analysis is sensitive to these concerns.

Greenlandic political pressure as determinant of Danish Arctic policy?

Especially two events have offered the opportunity for Greenlandic strategic use of discourse to put pressure on the Danish government to support the Chinese quest for formal affiliation with the Arctic Council: (1) the Danish chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2009-2011 and (2) the elaboration and implementation of the Danish realm Arctic Strategy 2011-2020.

Although Greenland (and the Faroe islands) is formally represented through the Danish government in the Arctic Council, the chairmanship was both presented and practiced as a close collaboration with the Greenlandic government. The Danish realm chairmanship 2009-2011 thus offered a significant opportunity for Greenland to promote an agenda for the Arctic vis-à-vis Denmark and internationally. The agenda set by the Danish chair did in fact encourage a broader consideration of the status of ad hoc members in the Council and states:

The increased international focus on Arctic issues has...inspired many other non-Arctic states and organisations to seek closer ties with the Council. Observers and ad hoc observers are assets, and the Arctic Council should look for ways to further involve those that are ready to cooperate under the premise that the primary role of the Arctic Council is to promote sustainable development for the Peoples of the Arctic and the Arctic States (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2009, p. 8).

In spite of having agreed on an informal ‘umbrella programme’ in 2006 with the preceding Norwegian (2006-2008) and subsequent Swedish (2011-2013) chairmanships, the call for further involvement of Arctic Council observers was unique to the Danish efforts (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006; Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2011). Greenlandic officials were certainly aware of the opportunity to influence the Council agenda through the Danish realm chairmanship. Yet if there were any pressure from Greenland to open up the possibility for a closer involvement of the Chinese, it was in a much more indirect way. Greenland was particularly keen to push an emphasis on the economic and social conditions for the arctic populations in the preparation of, and during, the chairmanship, rather than the otherwise one-sided and traditional focus of the Arctic Council on natural preservation and environmental matters. This is evident in annual Foreign Policy Strategy and Reports (Government of Greenland, 2010, 2011) and expressed here – not without irony - by then Prime Minister of Greenland (Kuupik Kleist) at the Council Ministerial meeting in 2011 marking the end of the Danish realm chairmanship: *‘[The] Arctic is not just about polar bears and ice. What is often*

missing from the debate is the human dimension in the Arctic and conditions under which we live' (Kuupik Kleist, 12 May 2011, own translation).

While the Greenlandic government is eager to promote an agenda of real economic development including Chinese investments, the prime minister also made it clear that: *'They [Chinese investors] must not believe that they can make decisions on behalf of the local population and exploit resources freely in the arctic area, which are regulated by law, treaties, and binding agreements'* (Kuupik Kleist, 3 November 2011, own translation).

Like the Council chairmanship, the Arctic Strategy was presented as a joint project by the Danish realm. The need for a common strategy for the Arctic was agreed between Denmark and Greenland in September 2010 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2010), and the 'Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020' was published less than a year later. The strategy among others states that:

Beyond the Arctic states, other legitimate stakeholders also have increasing interests in the Arctic. These interests are particularly linked to research on climate change, new international transportation opportunities, as well as opportunities to profit from the exploitation of energy and mineral resources in the Arctic. Among these stakeholders is the EU, but also the three Northeast Asian countries, China, Japan and South Korea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2011, p. 54).

While the strategy set out a wide range of objectives and strategies, the backing of China in their quest for a formal status in the Council attracted special attention internationally. Yet, on the domestic political scene the strategy was backed by a broad political

consensus. The Arctic Strategy was thus elaborated during the period a conservative minister (Lene Espersen) was heading the foreign office, representing a centre-right coalition government with the liberal party (Venstre). The centre-left coalition government taking office less than a month after the publication of the Arctic Strategy did not alter Denmark's support for China, which was endorsed on several occasions by the new Foreign Minister (Villy Søvndal), leader of the most left wing party in the coalition (Berlingske Tidende, 2011).

In Greenland, attracting foreign investments including Chinese has clearly been linked to the objective of 'economic self-sustainability', which is seen as possibly the most important condition for seeking full independence from Denmark. Furthermore, according to the then Prime Minister Kuupik Kleist, the Self-government had very keenly been pushing for the Danish government to develop an explicit arctic strategy so as '*to catch up with the other states in the arctic council*' (interview with Kuupik Kleist, 29 May 2013). Yet, the extent to which attracting Chinese investments informed the Danish position such 'shopkeeper' considerations seemed to be more of a concern for the Danish side (interview with Kuupik Kleist, 29 May 2013). Personal communication with a centrally placed Greenlandic politician and a civil servant in the Self-government further confirms that the position on China's observer status was equally backed by the Greenlandic and different Danish governments (Interview with civil servant in the Greenlandic Self-government, 21 February 2013; personal communication with Greenlandic politician, 21 February 2013). In sum the Greenlandic government does not appear to have made strategic use of the Danish realm discourse to pressure the Danish government for a favourable position on China's request for a formal position in the Arctic Council. Rather, the Greenlandic and Danish governments have been in alignment

with a strategy towards the Arctic which includes working for a closer association of China in Arctic governance. This is a condition conducive to the Danish position, yet not a sufficient explanation of it.

Enlisting China as a balancing act

A militarization of the Arctic is favoured by no one (Heininen, 2010). Yet, in spite of ongoing extensive Arctic bilateral collaboration between Copenhagen and Ottawa, a number of events suggest a securitisation of Danish-Canadian Arctic encounters has taken place. Since the close of the Cold War, rivalry over disputed borders have picked up. Sovereignty over 'Hans Island' has spurred successive expeditions in what the international press dubbed the 'Flag War' entailing '*dispatching their navies to invade the uninhabited island to tear each other's flag down*' (People's Daily, 2005). It culminated in 2005, when the Canadian minister of defence landed on the Island, removed the Danish flag and raised the Canadian flag. This eventually prompted the two country's foreign ministers to meet at a UN General Assembly session the same year agreeing to defuse the conflict (CBCNews, 2005; Stevenson, 2007, p. 163).

Following the defusing of the 'Flag War', Stephen Harper's Conservative Party won Canadian national elections in 2006. This boosted the political attention devoted to Arctic issues and heralded a more assertive nationalist rhetoric on the subject. In a speech delivered in June 2007, Harper declared:

The on-going discovery of the North's resource riches – coupled with the potential impact of climate change – has made the region an area of growing interest and concern. Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty over the

Arctic. We either use it or lose it. And make no mistake; this Government intends to use it (Harper, 2007).

The above statement forms part of a pattern. Further evidence to that can be found in ‘The Speech from the Throne’, which opens every new session of Parliament and sets out the broad goals, directions and initiative of the government. In an analysis of two speeches delivered respectively in 2007 and 2010, Klaus Dodds writes: *‘Harper has affirmed time and time again three major themes: the pressing importance of Canadian sovereignty, the economic value of the Arctic, and the symbolic significance of the north to Canadian national identity’* (Dodds, 2011, p. 371).

In the realm of defence, the issue of Arctic sovereignty was addressed in a substantial section of the 2008 Canada First Defence Strategy, which states:

The government recognizes the challenges Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic could face in the future. In the coming years, sovereignty and security challenges will become more pressing as the impact of climate change leads to enhanced activity throughout the region. The defence of Canada’s sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity in the Arctic remains a top priority for the government (Harper, 2008).

This observation led to a commitment for ‘A Stronger Northern Presence’ (Harper, 2008) and in 2010, the Canadian foreign ministry issued its Arctic Foreign Policy Statement, which is subtitled: ‘Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada’s NORTHERN STRATEGY Abroad’. The 29-page document contains three sections the first of which

is presented under the headline ‘Exercising Sovereignty’. This section sets out three priorities the first of which is resolving border issues. In direct references to relations with the Kingdom of Denmark it is stated:

Our sovereignty over Canadian Arctic lands, including islands, is undisputed—with the single exception of Hans Island, a 1.3-square-kilometre Canadian island which Denmark claims...Canada controls all maritime navigation in its waters. Nevertheless, disagreements exist...between Canada and Denmark over a small part of the maritime boundary in the Lincoln Sea (Cannon, 2010, p. 6-7).

In parallel to the above, which does lean towards securitization, the document makes several conciliatory statements such as: ‘*All disagreements are well managed, neither posing defence challenges for Canada nor diminishing Canada’s ability to collaborate and cooperate with its Arctic neighbours*’ (Cannon, 2010, p. 7).

Events seem to back up Canada’s more assuaging posture as the ‘Tentative Agreement’ on Lincoln Sea Boundary was reached between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark on 28 November 2012. This agreement settled a dispute over a 65 square nautical miles area (Baird, 2012). There are, however, limits to Canada’s willingness to extending security cooperation mechanisms to the Arctic. According to a leaked US cable ‘*PM Harper cautioned SecGen Rasmussen [also former Danish Prime Minister 2001-2009] that he saw no NATO role in the Arctic*’ (US Embassy in Ottawa, 2010). A senior Danish military commander interpreted this as a reflection of Canada’s self-perception of being a leading Arctic military power. Involving NATO would diminish her lead and

curtail her autonomy of action in the domain of Arctic security (interview with Danish civil servant, 19 February 2013).

Danish political rhetoric has been somewhat less explicit. Executive proclamations on Arctic sovereignty are rare and in the few recorded occasions they appear understated. Hence in 2009, the then Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller remarked in a London speech *'we will soon have to discuss and decide: who owns the North Pole. That, by the way, I think we do'* (Petersen, 2009, p. 54).

Furthermore, like its Canadian counterpart the first section of the Danish realm Arctic Strategy addressed security issues under the headline: *'A Peaceful, Secure and Safe Arctic'*. It contains three subsections of which the first two are titled *'Basis for peaceful cooperation with emphasis on the UN's Convention on the Law of the Sea'* and *'Enhanced maritime safety'*. The last subsection went under the heading *'Exercising of sovereignty and surveillance'* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2011, p. 13-22). Provided the order reflects a list of priority, the sequence significantly deviates from the Canadian document possibly reflecting the comparatively weaker military position of the Kingdom in the region. The section contains no reference to Canada, Hans Island or disputed borders but emphasise the need for increased surveillance and collaboration with Arctic and NATO partners.

In the military sphere, senior officers and analysts have produced several official and semi-official documents that approach the issue in a blunter manner. Rear Admiral Niels Wang of the Royal Danish Navy has pointed to what he denotes as the fragile state of the Arctic balance of power which will likely tip if external actors sense Denmark and Greenland are parting ways (Langhoff, 2012; Wang, 2012). It essentially makes a case for Greenland remaining in the Realm, which is hardly a surprising point of view for a

member of the defence establishment. However, it also reveals a distinct line of thinking which assumes states are power maximizing entities and peace is best served by maintaining a balance of power, much in line with realist dogma.

Three scenarios for capability planning towards 2025 are presented in the Danish Defence Ministry's think tank publication mentioned above. The first is titled the Coast Guard scenario and depicts a politically benign context. The second is called the Crises Management scenario, which assumes that no permanent militarisation of the region has taken place; nevertheless, the Arctic powers are in a state of latent rivalry, which on occasion may spill into a crisis. The final scenario is dubbed the Confrontation scenario with permanent militarization of the region and intense global rivalry between the US and China (Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012). The report warns that preparing for the 'worst case' Confrontation scenario may produce a self-fulfilling prophesy due to the mechanisms of the security dilemma (Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012, p. 62). It rates the likelihood of the three scenarios and ranks the benign Coast Guard outcome as the most plausible sharply followed by the Crises Management outcome. It considers the Confrontation scenario as fairly unlikely.

Yet, the report cautions that planning exclusively for the Coast Guard scenario may signal lacking commitment on the part of Denmark to uphold sovereignty in the other Arctic states. It falls short of outright directing policy makers towards the Crises Management scenario but notes that its capability requirements are fairly close to those of the Coast Guard scenario with the addition that deployed naval vessels are easily reconfigured in the face of escalating crises.

In sum, rhetoric's paving the way for a securitisation of the Arctic can be recorded in Canada. Given geographic and size differences it is hardly surprising that Canadian

rhetoric is more blunt and assertive and is more inclined to directly address Denmark. Denmark, on the other hand, exhibits a more subdued posture and avoids pitting Arctic security issues in a manner suggesting rivalry and neither policy documents, be they official or semi-official, nor political speeches link acts of Arctic securitisation with China's affiliation to the Arctic Council. Moreover, none of the policy makers interviewed for this article pointed to a link between Denmark's support for China's application and balancing concerns – on the contrary several strongly dismissed the idea. In this light the failure to establish an empirical case for securitisation on the one hand and Denmark's advocacy of China on the other warrant a rejection of the second explanation.

Making China a responsible stakeholder in Arctic governance

Being a responsible international actor and a promoter of a normative agenda conform neatly with Denmark's self-perception. Yet Copenhagen has attracted substantial criticism for what its detractors claim is the country's attempt to undermine the Arctic Council. Criticism has been put forth by NGOs representing indigenous people and environmental groups in addition to fellow Arctic Council member states such as Iceland, Sweden and Finland (interview with European Commission civil servant, 17 October 2014; Former Ambassador of the Republic of Finland to the Arctic, 8 October 2016; US civil servant, 2 March 2015; see also Dodds, 2013, p. 121-22; Koivurova & Duyck, 2010, p. 186). The critique particularly concern Denmark's leading role in convening the secluded purely intergovernmental ad hoc group designated the Arctic Five.

In late May 2008 the circumpolar states comprising Canada, United States, Russia, Norway and Denmark gathered at the Arctic Ocean Conference in Western Greenland.

Co-hosts, Denmark's Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller and Greenlandic Prime Minister Hans Enoksen had prepared a document, which after minor alterations was adopted as the Ilulissat Declaration (Petersen, 2009). It established that the five states would settle maritime zones disputes peacefully adhering to the principals of and utilizing the mechanism spelled out by the law of the sea. No explicit reference is made to the more detailed provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as it has not been signed by the United States. It furthermore stated that existing international institutions were adequate to provide the five states with means for collaboratively addressing the challenges that increased resource extraction and shipping would produce in view of growing accessibility due to global warming.

Denmark's lead in convening the Arctic Five may be interpreted as an attempt to demonstrate continued allegiance to the existing hierarchy of global powers and the privileged position of sovereign states in international relations. In addition, the second aspect covered by the Ilulissat Declaration does little to reinforce Denmark's credentials as advocating a stronger role for international organisations in the international system. Hence, the proclamation that existing international law and institutions provide an adequate framework for the circumpolar states to manage the Arctic was aimed at calls by NGOs to establish a dedicated Arctic treaty framework possibly including a moratorium on territorial claims and mineral extraction (for an overview of proposals in circulation see Koivurova, 2008). Thus Denmark's behaviour in relation to the Arctic Five initiative does not initially suggest that the Danish position is informed by a general desire to strengthen and expand multilateral governance. As to the depiction of Denmark's foreign policy identity by Stahl et. al., the exclusion of three Nordic states is particularly noteworthy.

Yet the Ilulissat Declaration bears testimony to the intent of enlisting multilateral frameworks such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in addition to the regional Arctic Council. The latter subsequently facilitated the adoption of the first formalized and binding accord since its inception in 1996 with the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement of 2011. A major enabler was the *modus operandi* relating to maritime zones disputes established by the Arctic Five which paved the way for the insertion of the following statement: *'the delimitation of search and rescue regions is not related to and shall not prejudice the delimitation of any boundary between States or their sovereignty, sovereign rights or jurisdiction'* (Arctic, 2011, p. 3). Hence a benign analysis of Denmark's Arctic Five initiative could present it as a necessary move to boost the momentum of the Arctic Council. This by addressing the contagious issue of overlapping maritime zone claims, which is not a responsibility of the Arctic Council but nonetheless permeates state behaviour in said body, and anchoring conflict resolution in key multilateral mechanisms and established international law.

This may be the enabling move that transform the Arctic Council into an effective tool of regional governance, which can safeguard the interests of post-independent Greenland. A Danish official in the field thus phrased the motivation for Danish support for China's seat in terms of general support for inclusive and transparent international governance (interview with Danish civil servant, 15 February 2013). By implication, Denmark supported a range of applications for observer status including e.g. the request from South Korea. The Danish official further observed that the Council have few formal powers and often get absorbed in technical details, which in itself ensure that only actors with a serious interest devote the required resources to attend meetings. It was furthermore suggested that China's interest in being attached to what was presented as a

rather impotent body, could largely be ascribed to prestige politics. Particularly since an observer seat does not amount to full stakeholder status and does not accord it significantly more privileges. This indicates that Denmark has little confidence in the governance capacity or indeed potential of the Arctic Council. The Council is presented as a forum of symbolic politics and Chinese interest is seen as driven by prestige considerations.

A prominent observer of Danish Arctic policies, Martin Breum, suggests that Denmark's eagerness to attach China to the Council is rooted in the fear that states outside of the region will use the UN to gain influence on Arctic governance (Breum, 2011, p. 58). Yet in one of the interviews conducted by the authors it was stated that only NGO's and social scientists had advocated a deeper UN involvement whereas this was not an issue among the present or prospective permanently attached states (interview with Danish civil servant, 13 February 2013). However, others suggested that concerns regarding the establishment of alternative fora including a special UN arrangement had been instrumental in changing the US attitude on the issue, which eventually enabled China to be admitted as an observer at the May 2013 Kiruna meeting (interview with Kuupik Kleist, 29 May 2013).

In sum, the explanation conforms neatly to Denmark's self-perceived diplomatic heritage, its small state identity and domestic political culture in general. While Denmark's role in setting up the Arctic Five on the surface suggest the country has no ingrained preference for multilateral governance and some observations offered by senior officials reveals limited confidence in the Arctic Council's potential as a potent future regional governance body which may entangle China into an 'Arctic Order', both the Arctic Five initiative and statements made by all interviewed officials suggest the country

in essence seek to embed intergovernmental liaisons in multilateral frameworks when possible.

Conclusions: Assessing the relative strength of three explanations

Three possible explanations were offered to make sense of Denmark's proactive stance in aiding a rising power gaining a political foothold in a region where Copenhagen is in a vulnerable position as the receding icecap opens up for rivalry over resource access, shipping lanes and territory. It has proved difficult to sustain our first proposed explanation claiming that Denmark's forthcoming approach to China's application for an observer seat in the Arctic Council was the result of Greenlandic pressure. Yet the domestic politics perspective has some merits in that it is conducive to the Danish position that appears to be equally backed by the Greenlandic and different Danish governments in spite of the fact that Denmark risks estranging itself from its closest allies by adopting this stance.

All interview respondents strongly dismissed the second explanation. This is to be expected, as members of the security policy community are keenly aware of the risks involved in conveying signals containing signs of either national weakness or aggressive pretensions. Yet, Denmark's courting of China in the Arctic realm cannot reasonable be explained with reference to Canada's adoption of highly securitised rhetoric as it is evident from our analysis of key government documents, independent reports and analyses that Denmark refrained from embracing similar semantics.

Our third explanation suggests the Danish stance reflects genuine support for multilateral governance. Methodologically this claim contains some bias as all Danish and Greenlandic interview respondents immediately identified with the position.

However, it is a claim supported by several other interview respondents, independent analyses and it conforms neatly to the country's self-perceived diplomatic heritage, its small state identity and domestic political culture in general. Thus, the Danish strategy fit well into its traditional foreign policy identity suggesting that small states are not *just* adapting to changes in the international system including spatial re-configurations and alterations in the distribution of capabilities, but may also adopt diplomatic strategies, if not against, then at least in the face of hesitant interest articulations of traditional allies.

These findings call for further exploration of the conditions under which small states may adopt potentially estranging regional governance strategies. This article suggests that alignment of foreign policy identity and strategy is - unsurprisingly - conducive for small states 'going alone'. Yet, arguably it is particularly significant that such strategy is adopted in the context of a less than institutionalised regional governance structure. Further insight to this is potentially of great importance, especially if we expect that institutional choices made in an emerging regional governance structure may well have lasting – and perhaps sometimes unintended – implications for power relations and political outcomes.

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