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European perspectives on Arctic security: Analysis of the 2019 policy statements of Germany, France and Scotland

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European non-Arctic states are intriguing cases as they are represented both as a group (through the European Union and its Arctic policy) and individually through their scientific, military and diplomatic involvements in the region. In this policy brief, Arctic policy documents released by Germany, France and Scotland¹ in 2019 will be analyzed so as to compare their perspective on competition and cooperation, the perceived security threats, and the solutions put forward. Germany and France's take on the Arctic might very well be influential in shaping the upcoming European Union's Arctic strategy, scheduled for 2020.

¹ These documents are: "La France et les nouveaux enjeux stratégiques en Arctique", published by the Ministère des Armées, "Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines, released by the Federal Government of Germany, and "Scotland's Arctic Policy Framework, issued by the Scottish Government.

Perspectives on competition and cooperation

France's statement clearly presented the Arctic as an arena of increasing tension and future confrontation, spurred mostly by the opening of new shipping routes and the growing appetite for resources². Hence, the strategic Arctic environment was characterized as more contested and less predictable (Ministère des Armées, 2019; 3). A similar assessment was made by the German government, with resources and sea routes framed as reasons for potential conflicts. The growing global instability is also putting strain on Arctic cooperation, with "multilateral standards and norms, codes of conduct and conflict resolution mechanisms are increasingly called into

² Ironically, France is also an active participant in capturing these resources as Total is now a partner in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in the Yamal Peninsula (Russia).

question worldwide” (Federal Government of Germany, 2019; 23). The right to exploit the Arctic seabed as well as the status of both the Northwest and Northeast Passages represent sources of potential conflict and diverging interests. In terms of the latter, the insistence by both France and Germany that the freedom of navigation must be upheld and ensured is a prolongation of their long-standing stance that the Arctic passages have to be considered as international straits.

Cooperation was mentioned by France, Germany and Scotland, stressing the future opportunities that are to arise, such as innovation in greener shipbuilding, natural gas developments, tackling marine plastic and the development of sea routes and hubs. However, Germany and France perceive cooperation as tenuous and fragile. For example, the German government raised the specter of an arms race and the emergence of a security dilemma if states, especially Arctic states, are not sufficiently prudent. We find in this assessment a common narrative of European states listing Arctic developments as reasons to be more involved and to press for further rule-making in the region (more on this point in the solutions section). This, for example, allows Germany to position itself as a potential helpful fixer that could play a role of mediator and conflict prevention actor in potential Arctic disputes (Federal Government of Germany, 2019; 24). Likewise, Scotland suggested the role of intermediary for itself by putting forward the natural harbor of Orkney’s Scapa Flow as a

future near-Arctic hub (Scottish Government, 2019; 38).

Threats to Arctic Security

On the other hand, the threats perceived by European Non-Arctic governments are diverse in nature. France’s Ministère des Armées was the most straightforward at pinpointing threats to Arctic security: Russia and China were clearly depicted as the main causes of rising Arctic insecurity. As described in the statement, “the interest generated by Arctic economic opportunities, Russia’s remilitarization in its North, and China’s investment policy favor a sovereignty-assertion pattern movement by coastal states” (Ministère des Armées, 2019; 4)³. These two states were deemed to bring Arctic states to more vigorously assert their sovereignty. Germany and France also both agreed, although implicitly rather than explicitly, that sovereign states denying the freedom of navigation in Arctic waterways are to be considered threats⁴.

Germany also stressed that states partaking in military buildup should be considered threats to Arctic stability. Although the German administration refrains from naming any particular state, the emphasis on dual-use capabilities and “technological progress and strategies for external interference” (Federal

³ Translated by the author.

⁴ No specific state is named on this point.

Government of Germany, 2019; 23) point implicitly to Russia. Germany also pushed for adopting a purely defensive stance, positing that the pursuit of an offensive posture and capabilities will destabilize the region. This stance is very much in line with NATO's position as expressed during and after the Trident Juncture military exercise held in Norway (Landriault and Macdonald, 2019).

While military security was conceptualized by France and Germany⁵, Germany and Scotland devoted much more attention to environmental threats. Sustainable development, climate change and pollution occupied a more substantial proportion in their respective statements. Here, Arctic security is overwhelmingly centered around risks and dangers of an environmental rather than military nature. For example, the German government conceptualized climate change as a risk to Northerners' livelihoods, traditions and culture while the Scottish Government explicitly refers to the climate issue as an emergency. Further, Scotland defined marine pollution, especially with plastic products, as a threat to Arctic ecosystems (Scottish Government, 2019; 29). Moreover, the German government linked environmental threats to more traditional ones. Environmental disasters and accidents were posited as potentially able to exacerbate "latent tensions between Arctic

actors", although this link is not fully explained and the connection seems dubious at best.

Solutions and Contributions

No policy statement would be complete without the submission of concrete solutions or contributions to define the role that a government wants to play in a policy area. While France's document was not focused on detailing at great length multiple solutions, it reiterated the roles of the French military in the region. The French military would be used to provide search-and-rescue capability and response to environmental accidents (think oil spill). France also asserted the right to secure energy supply routes destined to Europe (Ministère des Armées, 2019; 9), mainly coming from the Russian Arctic.

For their part, Germany and Scotland pressed for further cooperation, multilateral action and increased partnerships with Arctic actors. Multilateralism was urged to tackle more seriously environmental challenges, such as black carbon, plastic pollution and persistent organic pollutants. Germany's statement pushed Arctic states to ban the use of heavy fuel and to create additional marine protected areas. This emphasis on supplementary environmental actions and norms has been criticized by some Arctic observers as representing a potential obstacle for businesses to conduct their operation in the region (In Tømmerbakke, September 6 2019). However, many ideas raised in Germany's statement are

⁵ Scotland is not a relevant case on this point since defence matters are outside its constitutional jurisdictions.

reflected in Arctic states' latest statements, such as the recent Canada's Arctic and Northern Framework (for plastic pollution and marine protected areas for example). Scientific research is linked to these sustainable development initiatives, with all three countries highlighting their research capabilities to contribute to a better understanding of the Arctic ecosystem.

The quest for additional multilateral cooperation is oriented towards already-established institutions, such as the European Union and NATO. For example, Germany has called upon NATO member states to organize additional military exercises in the region. This call is intriguing since Germany is emphasizing that only defensive military capabilities must be promoted in the Arctic. While defensive in nature, these drills have been interpreted by the Russian government as being both offensive and targeted at them.

Impacts on Canada?

Overall, France, Germany and Scotland framed their action in the region as that of support cast or helpful fixer, able to contribute on different dimensions to Arctic governance. However, they have developed with these statements a more assertive stance pushing for additional rule-making in the region. The balance economy/environment is definitely tilting more on the environmental protection side, with implications on prospective economic development. Their assessment of Arctic

security is focused on their own backyard (European Arctic). These policy statements have been strongly influenced by an assertive Russia and initiatives proposed on the security spectrum have mainly in mind the Russian military and Russian economic activity in the Arctic.

What about the connections with Canada's Northern and Arctic framework? These countries share similar interests with Canada on environmental protection, sustainable development, rural development (with Scotland), scientific research and connectivity issues. Canada should reach out to these governments to further cooperation on these issues. Common ground is also present to support NATO military exercises of a defensive nature in the Arctic region.

On the other hand, there are significant disagreements on the status of Arctic sea routes, including the Northwest Passage. However, although these European non-Arctic states have stressed the importance of freedom of navigation, they were not adamant into enforcing their position nor were they likely to impose their preference on Arctic coastal states.

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