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# Anticipating the Arctic and the Arctic Council: pre-emption, precaution and preparedness

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper considers the role of the Arctic Council (AC) and its relationship to the future or even futures. Factors such as sea ice thinning and melting permafrost, alongside globalisation, have been cited as consequential in transforming the Arctic region. While we might be cautious about the novelty of change *per se*, there is a need for further debate about how the ‘future’ is imagined and put into practice. Exploring different logics, including precaution, pre-emption and preparedness, consideration is offered on how the AC attempts to anticipate the future. The contentious role of observers is investigated by way of an example, and it is concluded that there is more work to be done in terms of how different futures are assembled, mobilised and put into practice.

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## Introduction

The Arctic is undergoing significant change. In the years to come, these changes will present Arctic stakeholders with a line of new challenges, as well as opportunities, as the region gradually begins to open up as a result of climate change. How will this trend affect the peoples living in the Arctic? How will it affect the fragile biodiversity of the region? And how will the Arctic states and its peoples address the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow in the Arctic? (Nuuk Declaration 2011).

As the ice withdraws, technological advances are creating opportunities to open transport routes across the Arctic Ocean and exploit the natural resources of the Arctic. These developments must be managed in a responsible and sustainable manner so that they benefit the region and do not lead to undesired side effects. The Arctic Council (AC) should display the shared future vision of the Arctic states so as to consolidate the good co-operation in the region. Its work should be guided by openness and flexibility to enable it to address topical issues (Sweden 2011).

Debates over Arctic governance, and specifically the inter-governmental forum the AC, are underpinned by an *explicit* sense that the geographical transformation of the Arctic region is a driving force (for example, Nuttall 2008, Crate and Nuttall 2009, Stephenson, Smith and Agnew 2011, Young 2012). A special issue in the Swedish journal *Ambio* on ‘tipping points’ which brought together social and physical scientists discusses, with great conviction and vigour, the un-settling prospect that the Arctic region is facing ‘turbulent times’ (for example Nuttall 2012; Wassman and Lenton 2012; Young 2012). In their sourcing and sighting of ‘tipping points’, the aforementioned authors coalesce around the following objects, spaces and processes; thinning and disappearing sea ice, ice sheets, melting permafrost, boreal forests and circumpolar climate change (Wassman and Lenton 2012). Making matters worse economic globalisation, for others, is also implicated in this unsettling of the Arctic (Anderson 2009; Ebinger and Zambetakis 2009; Smith

2010). As Oran Young recently asserted, ‘It is beyond doubt that the Arctic is in the midst of a transformation, driven by the combined forces of climate change and globalization and *expected* to lead to increased human activities in the region in such forms as oil and gas development, commercial shipping, industrial fishing and ship based tourism’ (Young 2011: 327, emphasis added).

The word ‘expected’ here is probably the key one because it leads onto a discussion about how various actors and institutions might prepare for a changed and changing Arctic (on the futures, see Wallman 2002). For Young at least, the AC needs to play its part in contributing to the development of an Arctic regime complex so that it can face ‘the foreseeable future’, and he proposes a series of modest reforms such as promoting ecosystem-based management and strengthening the financial footing of the organisation itself (Young 2012). Reforming, however, is one thing. The role of preparation and anticipation with reference to how various actors are positioning themselves, in the midst of this profound transformation, is another matter. While we might hope that the AC is well placed to create, circulate and nurture particular Arctic futures, they might neither be shared nor respected. The Arctic Climate Change Impact Assessment (ACIA 2005), for instance, provides an interesting case study of how a particular future was imagined, modeled and represented but it ultimately ended up being just that, an assessment rather than a strategy because there was insufficient agreement over contemporary and future facing representations of the Arctic.

While there is clearly a reformist agenda regarding the AC as a decision-making organisation, my sense is that we need to step backwards and think more fully about how the ‘future’ is conceptualised and mobilised in these discussions (Anderson 2010, Anderson and Adey 2011). It is not simply a matter of, on the one hand, disentangling co-operative and conflict-based trends within the Arctic itself, and on the other hand, hoping for a more cooperative vision to prevail with the AC as centrepiece. We need to be mindful of how the ‘for-seeable future’

is also put to work discursively and materially. It is a powerful resource to shape debate, influence practice and capable of generating emotions such as fear, hope and/or anger (Crate and Nuttall 2009; Moisi 2009; Nuttall 2012). Take the example of the May 2008 Ilulissat Declaration. Guided by appeals to the Law of the Sea but not be it noted to the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention because of the non-accession of the United States, it outlined a shared vision, ‘The Arctic Ocean stands at the threshold of significant changes. Climate change and the melting of ice have a potential impact on vulnerable ecosystems, the livelihoods of local inhabitants and indigenous communities, and the potential exploitation of natural resources. By virtue of their sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in large areas of the Arctic Ocean the five coastal states are in a unique position to address these possibilities and challenges’ (Denmark 2008).

The declaration as a concrete object serves as a courier for the rhetoric that it contains. The claim, for example, that ‘The Arctic stands at a threshold’ performs a great deal of rhetorical work. In just three sentences, for example, we have the Arctic 5 parties (Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and the United States) set up a predicament, enroll ‘scientific facts’, and then invoke the legal as an opportunity for redress in the present, and the future. Their ‘unique position’ is taken for granted and privileged as a *de facto* model of governance (a point of contention to the other ‘Arctic states’ – Finland, Iceland and Sweden who together make up the A8). Broader questions relating to climate change and fossil fuel exploitation in and beyond the Arctic region are put to one side in order to invoke a future in which what is fore-grounded is the need to develop procedures for orderly conduct and development – and thus convey a hopeful vision of the future rather than something to be feared or dreaded. With further rhetorical flourishes directed towards both geographical proximity and state-sanctioned capacities (whether legal and or infrastructural) to intervene where appropriate in the Arctic Ocean, it is hoped that a ‘shared future vision’ will emerge and be securable (see also Sweden 2011).

Taking ‘Arctic futures’ seriously means addressing *inter alia* the role of anticipation and the way in which liberal-democratic states (and other actors including indigenous organisations) prepare and pre-empt uncertainties, and even threats to life in general (Anderson 2010; Anderson and Adey 2011; Nuttall 2012; Smith 2012). Acting in advance of the future is an integral part of liberal-democratic life whether it is in the fields of climate change, terrorism and/or trans-national epidemics. The idea of the ‘future’ itself deserves reflection. How is ‘the future’ in the context of the Arctic region known and rendered actionable? What consequences follow from acting in the present on the basis of the future and who is included in that future? With reference to the AC, I consider the contentious role of observers as indicative of how ‘Arctic futures’ are not necessarily shared ones. In that sense there may be futures we

desire, we hope for, we wish to avoid and/or attempt to prevent.

This last point is important because my concern is that the kind of ‘shared future vision’ that the Swedish chairmanship programme for the AC 2011–2013 articulates is one that makes us think about how the Arctic, as a complex geographical space, is conjured up (Sweden 2011). As the geographer Doreen Massey has noted, our views of places and spaces can be considered both as bounded spaces (which might then encourage fears about outside influences and actors) and be seen to be shaped by processes and relations that make and re-make those very places (Massey 1995). Depending on how one conceptualises the Arctic as a place then some actors, processes, organisations and social relations might be more welcome than others, and it is not clear how the AC will assemble a ‘shared future vision’, given that emphasis is placed (at least evidenced from the Swedish 2011 statement) on the interests of ‘Arctic states’ while some pages later it is suggested the view of indigenous peoples will be ‘listened’ to. Building a ‘shared future vision’ will also, as the Swedish statement implies, depend on whether the parties concerned can agree on ‘a shared perception of the situation in the Arctic region’. This may prove troublesome given that, on the one hand, the ACIA suggested that the Arctic Ocean could be seasonally ice-free by the end of the 21st century, and the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) concluded that somewhere between 2030–2040 was more likely (ACIA 2005, AMAP in the form of SWIPA 2011). A gap of some decades in these two assessments poses its own particular challenges in terms of building a ‘shared future vision’. On the other hand, the SWIPA (Snow, Ice, Permafrost in the Arctic) report, moreover, concludes that the period between 2005–2010 featured record warming in the Arctic and that, ‘the observed changes in sea ice on the Arctic Ocean and in the mass of the Greenland Ice Sheet and Arctic ice caps and glaciers over the last 10 years are dramatic and represent an obvious departure from the long-term patterns’ (SWIPA 2011 in preface). The report concluded that governments in particular might well need to respond more quickly to these changes, and prepare for an acceleration of warming with corresponding consequences for sea ice and permafrost.

Before turning to how we might conceptualise the future (or perhaps futures plural), I address my understanding of the AC because this organisation has often been imagined to be indicative of a more hopeful Arctic future; one based on interested state parties engaged in co-operation and co-ordination and explicit recognition of permanent participants as members of the AC. As an organisation it seeks to be a spokesperson for the Arctic, and specifically the Arctic region. While it strives to represent the Arctic, the Arctic also shapes it as well. As the 2011 Nuuk Declaration, asserted under the title of ‘Strengthening the Arctic Council’ that, ‘Decide that the Arctic Council should continue to work towards solutions

to address emerging challenges in the Arctic utilizing a wide range of challenges' (Nuuk Declaration 2011). The reference to 'emerging' alongside 'challenges in the Arctic' in this context is crucial, suggesting as it does, uncertain futures but also a need to anticipate and act in the here and now to confront a variety of 'challenges' residing in the Arctic region, as the future itself is imagined, deterred, regularised and/or hoped for. As the Nuuk Declaration outlines at the start of the document, both human and non-human elements of the Arctic face 'rapidly changing circumstances', which will necessitate, so it is believed and indeed hoped for, an institutionally strengthened Arctic Council in the future (Nuuk 2011). But what if the AC does not want to face particular kinds of futures and what if the Arctic region cannot be managed in the way that the AC might wish for? I conclude with a brief consideration of the knotty issue of observers to the AC, and use the European Union, as an example to illustrate that there may be also some futures that are simply dismissed because they are considered undesirable.

#### **The Arctic Council as a future-facing organisation?**

The AC's creation and evolution as an actor in Arctic affairs has been debated widely, with a series of commentators reflecting on its potential to be transformed from a soft law consultative body to something akin to an organisation with distinct legal competencies (for useful reviews, Young 2009; Koivurova 2011). This burgeoning interest in the AC is understandable not least because organisations are fundamental in shaping Arctic geopolitics (for example, Byers 2009; Dodds 2011). The AC and other organisations with regional Arctic interests include NATO, Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Nordic Council and or Barents Euro-Arctic Council. They are sites of, and for, geopolitical strategies, regional co-operation, environmental protection, military activity, and help to shape public opinion over current assessments and future trajectories. Organisations, including the AC, should, quite appropriately, be central to our accounts and interests in the current and future governance of the Arctic negotiating as they do relations between sovereign states, permanent participants/indigenous peoples organisations, and observers including Britain, China and the European Union.

Behind the façade of the organisation itself, with its assemblage of a recently established secretariat in Norway, and associated working groups and networks, there is a plethora of humans and things (making up socio-material networks) that need to be brought together in order for the organisation to be capable of acting in a manner judged to be either coordinated and/or effective (see, for a review, Muller 2011, Depledge 2012). Understanding the 'how' of an organisation not only enables evaluations of why particular future visions emerge from the institutions-as-praxis, but what more than human resources are deployed and arranged in certain ways in

order to stabilise such visions and that are then used to lend credence to particular courses of action. The making of a declaration, for example, would offer a prime example and lend itself well to further ethnographic examination by researchers (see, for a comparative analysis, Neumann 2012).

The most manifest way that the AC brings itself together is through the existence of ministerial meetings and Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings, with the latter in particular helping to co-ordinate the organisation's business and sense of purpose. The adopted rules of procedure (1998) stipulate requirements and expectation on all parties. The co-ordination, production and circulation of reports, including the SAO reports, as well as others such as the ACIA (2005), while they contribute to policy and academic-related impact also help to assemble and reinforce the AC as network-actor. This does involve people (SAO), documents (SAR reports), and a sense of durability regarding the future (on an actor-network approach to this constellation, see Muller 2011). Institutional reform is thus linked to 'the challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic' in the future. As a recent SAO report to ministers noted:

Since that time the rapidly changing circumstances in the Arctic have increased the challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic in both volume and complexity. The establishment of a Secretariat will strengthen the capacity of the Arctic Council to respond to these challenges and opportunities. The Secretariat will enhance the objectives of the Arctic Council through the establishment of administrative capacity and by providing continuity, institutional memory, operational efficiency, enhanced communication and outreach, exchange of information with other relevant international organizations and to support activities of the Arctic Council (SAO 2011).

Declarations are another public element in the working of the AC. These are declarative and deliberative in nature. The 2009 Tromsø Declaration is a case in point as it helps to publicise the working goals of the Arctic Council in the here and now as well as in the future. As the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre told reporters at the time, 'As human activity in the Arctic increases, we need new policies. I am therefore delighted that the Arctic Council today has agreed to focus on search and rescue in the Arctic, to recommend safety standards for maritime transport and oil and gas production in the Arctic, and to establish a task force to limit emissions of non CO<sub>2</sub> drivers of climate change, such as black carbon and methane, recognizing their importance in Arctic climate change' (Store 2009).

Such a potent declaration represents a powerful discursive intervention. What follows from the apparently taken for granted claim 'As human activity in the Arctic increases' is to justify and legitimate further interventions by the Arctic Council in areas that are at once localised such as maritime transport and hydrocarbon exploitation but also globalised in the sense of being tasks that

have attracted global and intergovernmental interaction. Liquids and gases, as evoked by the Norwegian foreign minister, help to constitute an imperative to act and thus lead to the claim that, ‘we need new policies’.

Organisational agency is something that is assembled, and potentially, re-assembled in order to appear coherent. We should not assume, therefore, that the AC simply exists. It is brought together by a variety of big and little things including words such as ‘the Arctic Council’ and material investment and organisation such as SAO meetings, ministerial and deputy ministerial annual gatherings, summits, working groups, drafting reports, declarations, website/virtual presence, and the like. It is, like all organisations, precarious and capable of being weakened as well as strengthened; as reflected in continuing debates about its status as a soft law inter-governmental forum. There is nothing inevitable about the trajectory of the Arctic Council as organisation both in the present and in the future. It could be weakened and indeed one might consider more explicitly what would it take for the organisation as such to fail or simply become considered inert, restructuring gone wrong for example (more generally, Agnew 2007, Muller 2011).

The activities of the working groups attached to the Arctic Council have taken on considerable importance in debates over Arctic governance because of their acknowledged capacity to project ideas and influence, as spokespersons for the Arctic (for a related example, see Depledge 2012). If the AC needs to display flexibility and adaptability (as suggested by the Arctic Governance Project 2010 report) then what kinds of big and little things does it need to bring together in order to demonstrate those kinds of qualities? This might be, as much about something termed ‘institutional re-organisation’, as say simply using words and language that emphasise innovation, experimentation and relevance in the present and in the future. Finally, it also depends on securing sufficient consensus and interest from parties that the AC is incorporated into discussions and actions pertaining to the making of the future of the Arctic.

The AC, as a lively and indeed precarious organisation, is to acknowledge its role as a major producer of discourse and materials, and its capacity to act as an affective agent (it seeks to reassure and reaffirm). On the first point, the AC through press releases, official website, declarations, reports, and public statements plays a major role in producing discourse about itself and its role in the making of Arctic governance. These are quite literally ‘organisational texts’ in the sense of both representing the organisation and organising representation of the Arctic region. The 1996 Ottawa Declaration would be *primus inter pares* when it comes to acknowledging such ‘organisational texts’ and its role in establishing a high level forum designed for ‘promoting, co-operation, co-ordination and interaction among the Arctic states, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environ-

mental protection in the Arctic’ (Ottawa Declaration 1996).

Developing this high-level inter-governmental forum, in the aftermath of the 1996 Ottawa Declaration, depended on a series of elements that enabled the AC to appear as a coherent entity. The most notable of which were the working groups such as AMAP and the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME). A plethora of smaller elements, including the agreed rules of procedure play a vital role in creating the AC as organisation. As an organisation in a constant state of becoming, the goal or reference point for the AC remains multi-faceted including sustainable development, peace and security co-operation, and the promotion of polar science. Over the last fifteen years, there have been a variety of goals/end points referred to in declarations and statements by the AC membership.

The AC, and its membership in particular, seek to assemble and appeal to both human and non-human elements of the Arctic for the purpose of working together towards a shared future. A rapidly changing Arctic region, with due reference given to climate change in particular, is as significant as appeals to indigenous knowledge and/or the co-operation between various members of the AC including permanent participants, states and observers. The staff that make up the secretariat, the scientists who serve on working groups and the officials and ministers who populate AC meetings and summits help to assemble something that can be termed the AC. Objects, practices and processes including a medley of things such as climate change, sea ice thinning, pollutants, and the presence of aircraft and ships play a role in helping to animate the agency of the AC. The latter acts, or is seen to act, in response to and even anticipation of, further sea ice thinning, more ship-based movement and possible environmental emergencies in the future, and those kinds of actions are themselves dependent on a huge amount of work conducted in the Arctic region and elsewhere in the world including peer-reviewed work, future mathematical modeling and the like. We, thus, need to be attentive concerning how and why such things become enrolled to make claims on how particular future visions of Arctic governance become framed and legitimated, but also recognise that objects and practices can resist such endeavours. As far as we know the Russian flag placed at the bottom of the central Arctic Ocean remains in place for example and images of said flag continue to circulate on the web (Dodds 2011).

As an organisation, the AC contributes to the spatial ordering and temporal arrangement of the Arctic region. The establishment of summits, the release of reports and the updating of websites (including the official AC website) help to circulate, order and enroll elements into a socio-material network. The interaction of objects, texts and people are critical in creating solidarities, claims and articulations of ‘authority’, especially through the release of declarations and statements. As a producer and circulator of ideas and representations, the AC helps to

spatially order the Arctic region, something that a raft of scholars have considered more broadly (most notably, Keskitalo 2004 but also Heininen and Scott 2010). Public declarations frame the Arctic as a vulnerable and lively space, as a space of co-operation, and as a space needing further intervention both in the present and in the future, especially in the face of search and rescue and oil spills prevention. The remit of the AC Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR) highlights this explicitly in its strategic plan. Inhabitants and physical environments especially the Arctic Ocean itself are weaved and connected together to enable the AC to act and intervene, and its reports and declarations help to spread ideas and practices.

Circulation and connection is a critical element in the work of the AC. 'Good circulation' is one in which those ideas and practices associated with the AC move freely, and influence networks of governance. The AC as an agent, with a capacity to act and intervene, also reminds of the importance of those inscription devices such as maps, figures, and tables that help to produce the Arctic region in the first place. If the AC has organisational power it is perhaps most evident through its capacity to act as a centre of calculation/evaluation that can dispatch reports/declarations (immutable mobiles) within and beyond the Arctic region that help to invoke the current and future state of the Arctic. The Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA), released in 2009 under the auspices of PAME, is one of the most striking examples to date of this capacity of the AC to act as a geopolitical agent. The report does so in a number of different ways; by issuing statements by which 'the future' as abstract category is disclosed and related to and then facilitate the generation of a series of scenarios relating to future maritime use of the Arctic Ocean; by deploying a series of practices including acts of imaging, mapping and performing so that futures are made present; and finally, through deploying a series of logics that involve promoting action that aims to prevent, mitigate and/or deter specific futures such as emergencies, disasters and environmental catastrophe.

AMSA is not alone in this matter. As another working group of the AC notes, 'In all work done in the Arctic area, it is vital that the people living there are taken into account [rather than relying say on peer-reviewed scientific research]. In the identification of emergency response assets, risk assessments and response actions, the involvement of local and indigenous people should be increased. The increase of public awareness and of public participation is invaluable for emergency prevention, preparedness and response actions (EPPR 2012). This has wider implications for how we understand the AC, and its place in debates on the future governance of the Arctic.

### **Mobilising the futures**

The AC, as an organisation composed of socio-material networks, remains at the heart of continuing discussions

of Arctic futures. Its presence provides the motivation and rationale for the AC and its selected chairs to look to the future. As the Swedish Foreign Minister, Carl Bildt stated, 'Arctic countries need enhanced co-operation on many future challenges in the Arctic, not least prevention, preparedness, and response to oil spills. As incoming chair we will press forward with this agenda' (Sweden 2011). This agenda, pertaining to oil spills, is what interests me in part about both the future of the AC and the Arctic region itself. What might be involved in acting to prevent, prepare and respond to future challenges including oil spills? In the midst of the 2010 Deep Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, we have glimpsed a possible Arctic future, which was arguably more disturbing than the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* shipping accident because of the real-time imagery of oil seeping, in a seemingly unstoppable manner, into the marine environment (Steinberg 2010). Transposed to a high Arctic environment, with the presence of both sea ice and pack ice, the oil spill accident as disaster is all the more poignant, oil trapped in and under the ice-filled waters of the Arctic Ocean threatening microscopic and large scale life.

The challenge facing the AC, in the context of responding to future accidents, is in part one about how the future is made discernable. At the same time the search and rescue agreement (SAR) was announced in May 2011, a report was released detailing the role that so-called black carbon, ground level ozone and methane contributes to observed warming in the Arctic region. In both cases, the possibility of the oil disaster and the prospect of further warming, contribute to an uncertainty about how to respond to the future. The very openness of the future, some things may not happen such as the Arctic-equivalent of Deep Horizon (but also recall the 2010 Icelandic volcanic eruption and its disrupting effect/affect), brings forth a sense of contingency, shock and uncertainty leading some commentators to speculate about the need to institutionally strengthen actors such as the AC so that they are better able to cajole and mobilise others either to prevent undesirable futures and/or mitigate (rather than prevent) against likely future disasters including oil spills and airplane crashes (Adey and Anderson 2011; Steinberg 2011). In any event, anticipating let alone deterring unwelcome futures, may also mean that the some lives/regions of the Arctic may have to be abandoned, damaged, destroyed, degraded in the future in order to enable other areas/lives to be protected and saved. Climate change is already implicated in claims that some coastal communities in Alaska such as Shishmaref are increasingly imperiled by severe winter storms made worse by a diminished presence of sea ice that used to protect the coastline from direct degradation (Nuttall 2012; Wassman and Lenton 2012). Other communities in the Arctic may welcome a warmer future, if it leads to enhanced possibilities for food production, resource exploitation and perhaps easier living conditions in general.

The relative openness of the future underpins appeals to preemption, preparedness and other forms of anticipatory action. Making the future potentially actionable depends, *inter alia*, on a series of objects, practices and affects such as the generation of insights, trends, scenarios, and modeling; the production and circulation of images and reports; and the mobilisation and distribution of anxieties, fears and hopes (for a longer reflection, Anderson 2011, Anderson and Adey 2011). Arctic futures, as articulated through AC working group reports, highlight how models, images and affective reactions contribute to making-present the future and the future-present. The uncertainty of the future, and the manner in which it is made present, is brought to the fore by a series of practices including calculation, imagination and performance and once these are appreciated it is arguably easier to tease out the underlying logics of preemption, preparedness and the like.

The practice of calculation is critical to the estimation of an uncertain future. AC working groups have been at the forefront of producing reports that use impact assessment, trend analysis and modeling to take measure of the Arctic region. Tables, charts, maps and graphs help not only to articulate and calculate the present but also trace possible futures whether in the form of warming, shipping and/or resource exploitative trends. Combined with risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis, the net effect of these calculative devices is to offer a series of possible scenarios depending on particular variables such as likely temperature rises, shipping frequency and/or levels of resource extraction, which can then be mapped and ranked in terms of likelihood and possible severity. Numbers, whether expressed in centigrade, voyage numbers and billions of barrels of oil, have a visceral impact and contribute to a particular neo-liberal and rationalist strategies of rendering spaces such as the Arctic governable.

The role of the imagination is also critical in making the future present. Creative practices such as scenario planning help to articulate and represent future events and states of affairs by deploying images, symbols, and stories that in turn may move and mobilize those who read, listen and learn about them and their contents. The AMSA was organised around four possible scenarios for the future of marine activity and use up to 2050. With a 120 driving forces and factors identified, the report then selected two primary factors influencing the so-called axes of uncertainty. These were resources and trade on the one hand and governance on the other. Armed with these parameters, four scenarios were articulated; the 'Polar lows' (low demand and unstable governance) scenario, the 'Arctic race' (high demand and unstable governance) scenario, the 'Polar preserve' (low demand and stable governance) scenario and the 'Arctic saga' (high demand and stable governance) scenario. The fourth scenario, for example, is characterised as a future of high resource demand for Arctic natural resources, significant increases in Arctic marine traffic and a stable and developed

Arctic governance regime for multiple marine actors and activities. According to one of the authors of the report, 'This Arctic world leads to a healthy rate of Arctic development that includes broad concerns for the preservation of Arctic cultures and ecosystems, as well as shared economic and political interests of the Arctic states. . .[and significantly] The AMSA scenarios proved a powerful way to communicate to a wide audience the complexities influencing the future of Arctic marine navigation' (Brigham 2011: 313). It does so, precisely, by offering not only a narrative about possible futures but also a sense of how each future might look and feel. An 'Arctic saga' scenario is, at the very least, explicit in recognising the importance of storytelling (richly illustrated throughout including multiple images of voyaging ships), which seeks to harness the imagination.

While the openness of the future is acknowledged throughout the AMSA, there is through the scenarios themselves an attempt to order and categorise the Arctic not least for the purpose of proposing a 'roadmap forward' (Brigham 2011: 318). Indeed, such scenarios matter in the sense of underpinning a call to arms, within the AMSA report, with regard to developing a mandatory polar code of navigation, an Arctic SAR, a circumpolar response capacity agreement among the Arctic 5 states in particular, and the implementation of an Arctic Observing Network designed to share knowledge about Arctic marine infrastructure and scientific knowledge. The 17 recommendations of the assessment under themes such as safety, protection and infrastructure make sense only in the context of the invocation of uncertain futures.

The final element that underpins preemption and preparedness is the area of performance. Activities such as exercising, gaming and/or acting play an important role in making the future present (for further reflection, Anderson 2010). AC members such as Canada engage, on an annual basis, in sovereignty and patrolling exercises. The idea of the exercise, whether real-life or tabletop, is to participate and learn from a future event such as oil spill disaster or resource-related conflict. Participants are assigned roles and the sovereignty exercise in the case of the Canadian north is as much about testing equipment and personnel as it is evaluating decision-making procedures when confronted with a disaster or emergency (Dodds 2012). The future is played out, therefore, in an embodied sense as well. Bodies are mobilised for the duration of the performance, and affectively the future might be felt to be some combination of stressful, exciting, nerve-wracking and even boring. Either way, bodies and objects are tested in order to evaluate capacities and responses (Anderson 2010). Role-play and exercises generate experiential knowledge (for example surprise and concern over a lack of preparedness) and second they help to galvanise action to improve and enhance preparedness. The exercise itself then becomes a site for experiencing how a future event, such as oil spill or aircraft crash, might look and feel like. The 2011 SAR amongst the eight Arctic states notes, 'Emphasizing the

usefulness of exchanging information and experience in the field of search and rescue and of conducting joint training and exercises'. Training and exercises will thus play their part in contributing to the performance of the future (SAR 2011).

Each of these elements, calculation, imagination and performance, plays an important role in understanding Arctic futures. The role of the graph, the scenario and the experience in the form of the exercise all contribute to bringing forward 'the future'. The articulation and experience of particular futures (for example dominated by rising marine traffic, resource exploitation and/or disaster) contributes to demands, justifications and implementation of particular actions in order to secure the ecosystems and peoples of the Arctic. This does not guarantee action *per se* but it does create a context in which, actors such as the AC can feature strongly in the calls to prepare or prevent particular futures.

If the AC looms large in debates about Arctic futures it does so in part through a series of logics, in which interventions in the here and now in the name of the future are guided, legitimated and enacted. Arctic ministers, such as the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, have drawn attention for the need of Arctic countries to prevent, prepare and respond to uncertainties in the Arctic. As such logics such as prevention, precaution, preemption and preparedness invoke certain interventions and strategies designed to adapt, avert, mitigate even stop particular futures. Of most relevance to the AC and debates about futures is arguably the logic of prevention and preparedness. If prevention seeks to prevent the occurrence of an undesirable future (for example oil spill disaster) then preparedness addresses the aftermath of events. It does, in short, not aim to stop the future from happening. The emphasis here is on stopping the impact of an event such as a disaster from disrupting the circulations and interdependencies of the Arctic region.

The discussion surrounding the capacity and remit of the AC is underwritten by precautionary and preparedness logics. Central to this ensuing discussion has been a willingness of the AC to speak of the Arctic in a particular way with emphasis on vulnerability and state change. The dependence on infrastructures (often modest and dispersed) and interconnections between human and non-human communities and processes (for example the role of sea ice and permafrost in shaping animal distribution) needs thus to be recognised explicitly. But the Arctic is not just 'vulnerable', it might also as a consequence of processes such as sea ice thinning actively resist and undermine attempts to action specific future visions. While we may be well used to reading and reflecting on the need to build adaptability and resilience among indigenous and northern communities, the preparedness of the AC for an uncertain future is also an important element. Preparedness techniques, such as issuing agreements and calling for further action, is in part about building an infrastructure capable of responding to potentially disruptive futures.

We might in any discussion of the future of the AC consider how different logics such as precaution, prevention and preparedness co-exist with one another. How might those logics be resisted or re-negotiated? The reaction of states such as Iceland and Finland to the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration might be one indicator of how a preparedness logic provoked opposition and dissent, as the five Arctic Ocean coastal states argued that they were best placed to manage and indeed respond to future emergencies and stewardship. As the Declaration noted:

The Arctic Ocean is a unique ecosystem, which the five coastal states have a stewardship role in protecting. Experience has shown how shipping disasters and subsequent pollution of the marine environment may cause irreversible disturbance of the ecological balance and major harm to the livelihoods of local inhabitants and indigenous communities. We will take steps in accordance with international law both nationally and in cooperation among the five states and other interested parties to ensure the protection and preservation of the fragile marine environment of the Arctic Ocean. In this regard we intend to work together including through the International Maritime Organization to strengthen existing measures and develop new measures to improve the safety of maritime navigation and prevent or reduce the risk of ship-based pollution in the Arctic Ocean (Denmark 2008)

The recent search and rescue agreement (2011) might be seen as a mechanism for re-integrating all eight Arctic states into an arrangement which gives them all a stake in shaping future challenges, in this case involving potential disasters and emergencies. All the A8 parties have their distinct areas of responsibility, both maritime and inshore regions. So the invocation of future challenges, in the context of AC development, play their part in this specific example of institutional development, and the strengthening of co-operation.

Anticipatory activity deserves further reflection in relation to the AC and its place within the future governance of the Arctic. More generally, it is a key means in which liberal democratic states in particular conduct, secure, discipline and regulate national life. The invocation of the future assumes considerable significance when directed towards the Arctic region, especially when the pace and scale of physical and economic change is emphasised. In any debate about the future of the AC, we might attend to the following aspects; the statements that disclose the future; the acts that make the future present; and the logics that justify intervention in the here and now in the name of the future. We might then in the process observe how certain futures appear or disappear. What futures are mobilised, and what are concealed, marginalised and or repressed? How might experiences of the future be modulated by the medium through which it is made present, whether than be through narration or an affective atmosphere (for example fear, hope)?

So when we consider the future of the AC we might consider more explicitly what, and by what means, we

conjure up ‘the future’. We might even seek to recover overlooked or forgotten pasts, and possibly reflect on future trajectories of Arctic governance. Were there moments, even in the short history of the AC and Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS), when possible reformist trajectories addressing possible futures, were rejected or placed to one side? How have different visions of the future shaped the manner in which Arctic governance (and the role of the AC) has been envisaged, longed for and/or actively avoided?

### **Facing up to a future? The role of observers and the Arctic Council**

We have touched upon things that the AC, understandably, wants to avoid such as air and sea disasters and oil spills. But what about other kinds of futures that are going to be harder to avoid such as ones involving other parties like the European Union (EU) and the migratory movements of fish stocks and accompanying regional fisheries policies that will have to address EU fishing fleets and operators?

To whit, one example we might end with is the ongoing problematic regarding the status of observers to the AC, and the avoidance of a particular kind of Arctic future in which observers might occupy a more powerful role to the detriment of permanent participants. It is worth recalling that the rules of procedure of the AC established the category of ‘observers’ and noted their potential membership, role and function:

Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to: (a) non-Arctic states; (b) inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organisations, global and regional; and (c) non-governmental organizations. Observers shall be invited to the Ministerial meetings and/or to other meetings and activities of the Arctic Council. Observer status shall continue for such time, as consensus exists at the Ministerial meeting. Any Observer that engages in activities, which are at odds with the Council’s Declaration, shall have its status as an Observer suspended.

Observers may make statements at the discretion of the Chair and submit relevant documents to the meetings (Arctic Council 1998).

In the last few years, the role (current and future) of observers has attracted more interest and reflection driven in large part by anxieties over the economic development of the Arctic Ocean. When the Arctic 5 met in Greenland in May 2008 to review and publicise their collective approach to the management of the Arctic Ocean, they stressed their stewardship role on the basis of geographical proximity. The meeting and subsequent declaration was divisive and provocative. Some parties such as other Arctic states and indigenous groups/permanent participants were not invited, while others such as the European Parliament called (initially at least) for a new Arctic Treaty (an unwelcome future for the A8). In their radically different ways, indigenous organisations and the European Parliament were drawing attention to the fact

the fate of the Arctic Ocean in particular was not merely a region to be environmentally stewarded by five coastal states.

The rules of procedure did establish a separate *ad hoc* category and enabled the membership to assess whether they should encourage transition to full observer status, a position held by the EU and China. In 2009, the European Commission formally submitted an application to become a permanent rather than *ad hoc* observer to the AC. This follows on from a European Commission document entitled ‘The European Union and the Arctic Region’ released in November 2008, which noted that:

The European Union is inextricably linked to the Arctic region (hereafter referred to as the Arctic) by a unique combination of history, geography, economy and scientific achievements. Three Member States — Denmark (Greenland), Finland and Sweden — have territories in the Arctic. Two other Arctic states — Iceland and Norway — are members of the European Economic Area. Canada, Russia and the United States are strategic partners of the EU. European Arctic areas are a priority in the Northern Dimension policy. Beyond areas of national jurisdiction, the Arctic Ocean contains parts pertaining to the high seas and the seabed managed by the International Seabed Authority (European Commission 2008).

The claim that the EU is ‘inextricably linked to the Arctic region’ is the most important one, as the Arctic is quite literally enrolled into claims that the EU is an organisation that cannot be ‘excluded’ from Arctic matters. In other words, geographically proximate states and indigenous peoples/northern communities alone cannot be allowed to speak for current and future configurations of the Arctic. While the Arctic circle, served as a geographical criterion, for membership of the AC (A8) and the Arctic Ocean with regard to coastal states (A5), the EU’s involvement is both territorial and relational. The EU as actor-network is deeply tied to the Arctic region, as the seal product ban within EU markets demonstrated in 2009. As Koivurova and others (2011: 3) note, ‘The case shows the influence of the EU in Arctic affairs as well as why it is important to include the EU in the Arctic Council’ even if ‘the EU’s land presence is fairly limited in the Arctic, contributing to the image that it is not a major player in the region’. EU competencies and involvement is substantial, addressing as it does a plethora of issues and concerns such as climate change, biological diversity, resource exploitation and conservation, shipping, fisheries and the like.

The absence of an Arctic shoreline (Greenland left the EU in 1985) is an irrelevance, and will in no way ensure that the EU’s role in the Arctic region will diminish. One of the appeals for the AC of tackling issues such as search and rescue and oil spill response is that it helps to consolidate a territorially bounded future vision of the Arctic. Possessing an Arctic shoreline and/or territorial presence is prioritised not least because it contributes to an Arctic future fundamentally shaped by the presence of

Arctic states and permanent participants rather than observers and extra-territorial actors states and non-state organizations alike. The decision to reject the permanent observer status application of the EU in 2009 by the AC was a gesture towards making a particular Arctic future less likely. A future in which a widening range of actors will play their part in shaping the Arctic region; the EU in all its complexity 'will exercise its competences in the Arctic; if not in the Arctic Council then via other multilateral forums. . . it is time for the established Arctic policy actors to think seriously about how the EU could be included in the discussion of the region's future' (Koivurova and others 2011, Weber and Romanyshyn 2011). And if that challenge was taken seriously then the 'Arctic region' itself would have to be viewed in more relational terms rather than strictly defined by territorial boundaries such as the Arctic Circle. All regions, including the Arctic, are leaky and in a state of being made, remade and unmade.

A more fixed view of the Arctic region, of course, may make for a more attractive 'shared future vision'. Arctic states and permanent participants involved with the AC conceptualise the Arctic region as a fixed container, albeit one that is literally being cracked, melted, and transformed. While indigenous groups mobilise territorial-based strategies and representations of the Arctic to press for an autonomous and self-determined future, others invoke an Arctic region in which space is defined actively in relation to objects and processes, which emphasise connectivity and openness. This is not to claim that the EU as complex organisation does not conceive of the Arctic region in territorially rooted terms or that indigenous peoples and Arctic states are incapable of imagining the Arctic as anything but a spatial container. As the anthropologist Claudio Aporta (2011) noted with reference to Inuit in Canada, Arctic spaces are conceived of as a network of trails linked to memories of previous trips and environmental assessments of snow, ice, as well as prevailing wind and sea conditions. Arctic space is thus both territorially rooted and networked. Some visions of the Arctic (and its futures) are more attractive precisely because of what they include/exclude and open/foreclose. Imaging futures is thus always a political as well as geographical act that configures, locates and projects actions, behaviours and strategies; while some are highlighted others are marginalised.

### Summary

This paper is actually an appeal for those interested and involved in the reform of the AC to consider how the 'future' is invoked and disclosed. A great deal of the debate about reformation is driven, either explicitly or implicitly, by appeals to the future. To wit, therefore, the role of anticipation and alertness is critical, even if interested parties might disagree over what is actually involved in being anticipatory and/or alert let alone prepared. While acting to secure a more hopeful future might be better than simply wishing for a less disruptive

future, indigenous peoples disagree over, for example, the disruptive consequences of future climate change, for some such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) it might be something to be feared, while others might welcome the opportunities that a warmer Arctic might offer. One implication that might follow is that disclosing the future (and of course there are likely to be more than one) also helps to steer debate and indeed action on the future role, structure and purpose of the AC.

Second, the manner in which the Arctic region itself is conceptualised matters. Conceived of as a spatial container, defined by latitude and understandings of proximity to land mass and ocean, the fixed qualities of the Arctic sit uneasily with other understandings of the region as networked and vulnerable (as well as a driver of threats) to events and processes unfolding elsewhere. Thus any discussion about the future of the Arctic Council as organisation and as actor-network is in part dependent on an explicit discussion on how to understand the Arctic region, both territorially and relationally (Muller 2011, Depledge 2012). Mindful of the fact that for indigenous groups/permanent participants any enhanced role for observers in the AC such as the EU is destabilising precisely because it offers a stark reminder of extra-territorial and relational involvement and understanding of the Arctic region itself.

Finally, this paper stresses that the manner in which the future is assembled and anticipated depends on the manner in which the Arctic (as a place) is taken as a given or indeed self-evident. As recent events suggest (such as 2008 Illulissat Declaration and the subsequent Arctic 5 meeting in Canada in March 2010), there are tensions between the coastal and non-coastal parties to the AC, and that includes future visions for the Arctic region. But there are also other tensions as well. While indigenous peoples (as represented by the permanent participants of the AC) reacted negatively to these A5 meetings, there are also tensions between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous northerners in terms of how and where their 'interests' and 'wishes' are represented and acted upon. So disclosing, let alone acting on, the future depends on the constituency involved and accompanying knowledge base, which is in the Arctic context, remains uneven in access, distribution and extent.

When the future is invoked, therefore, we need to investigate carefully how people and institutions use stores of circumpolar knowledge (whether exemplified in reports, declarations and the like) to inform, test and reveal the future possibilities of the AC. Moreover, these debates and interventions are part of the here and now. As anthropologists and geographers recognise, action is taken in the present in the hope of realising a future course of events, and that interest is in how the future is made to figure in the lives of people and the mission statements/directions of institutions, including (but not exclusively) the AC (Nuttall 2012; Wassman and Lenton 2012). In so doing, a focus on anticipation brings to the fore the role that action, agency, imagination, possibility,

doubt, uncertainty, fear and apprehension all play in making sense of rapid change whether it involves sea ice thinning and/or environmental degradation. What actor-network approaches help remind us is that the futures that emerge from particular institutions such as the AC are not necessarily reducible to the internal workings and logics of the institution itself, if certain futures gain traction then the interaction of agencies beyond the AC also matter.

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