

Comments on Finland's Arctic Strategy from a Finnish point of view

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About the process

1) The Strategy is ambitious and shows that Finland has done its homework, and thus, Finland is back!

Even more, the Strategy defines that "Finland as an Arctic country is a natural actor in the Arctic region". This is very true but often forgotten: Despite the two successful initiatives, the Rovaniemi process and the EU's Northern Dimension, Finland has not always been so active in the international northern cooperation due to its interests in the Baltic Sea region, inside the EU, and toward Russia. Now I hope that Finland will keep this track for a longer time, which is beneficial for Finland, and an active Finland is beneficial for the High North.

2) It is easy to agree with the Strategy that there is a global interest toward the Arctic and it has a growing global importance. Further, that the High North is in a (environmental, geopolitical and geoeconomic) change, although it is stable and peaceful, and consequently a holistic approach is needed. This can be interpreted to mean that the post-Cold war period is over.

The strategy can be interpreted to be a Finnish comprehensive response to the current situation and newest change, which is partly due to the interplay between science and politics within the process of the Strategy.

About the content

3) The four substantial main sectors and the related goals are no surprise but rather expected. They can be interpreted as national responses and be according to Finland's long-term national interests and the de-facto northern policy (see the Parliaments' Report "Finland and the Arctic Region" in November 2009). All this looks good, but raises a question that what might be the real priority, or the top two/three priorities, of Finland.

4) The Strategy starts by the environment and emphasizes the special features and risks of the fragile arctic ecosystem. Indeed, it is important to bring back the term "fragile", but even more important is to protect the ecosystem.

The Strategy supports arctic research and monitoring as a basis for decision-making and particularly the nuclear safety of the Kola Peninsula, which has, however, been under control for a few years. Also climate change and the diversity of nature are mentioned, but there is no mention of the uncertainty related to climate change.

5) The Strategy is also business-oriented and emphasizes economic activities, which are mentioned together with expertise. There is, however, an inner contradiction, since for example, the Strategy says that "an increasing human activity will also increase a risk of environmental degradation", and also that "it is important that every kind of economic activity will be increased both in big harbours and areas of oil and gas deposits in Norway and Russia".

Which one is a priority here: whether more strict environmental protection or mass-scale utilization of natural resources?

6) Further, some of the goals (e.g. dealing with oil and gas drilling in the Barents Sea) are more hopes and expectations, than realistic goals. I have here a 'deja-vu' remembering that when the Snöhvit gas field was developed there were big expectations among Finnish companies, but very little was gained from the project (see the lesson: don't try to skin a bear before it has been shot!).

7) The strategy would like to promote and strengthen Finland's position as an international top-expert on arctic issues in several fields (e.g. technology-based knowledge on winter shipping and ship-building); here I would include political sciences and international law. This sounds logical and sensible, but might not exactly be the case, when evaluating Finnish research in the context of international scientific cooperation on northern issues, or that we do not know exactly what the situation is today.

Unlike, the proposal to launch a study program with interdisciplinarity and international cooperation on northern issues is very welcome and needed.

8) The Strategy also supports traffic and infrastructure, which are among the key priorities of Finland in the Arctic. Indeed, there is a real need to develop the logistical network of, and in, the Barents region as well as in North Finland. I am not, however, sure how useful is to have a list of proposed traffic / transportation corridors without a priority, when the reality is that maybe only one will be implemented.

Unlike, from the point of view of Finland it is very important to emphasize the safety of navigation in the arctic seas, despite that the increase of sea traffic might not be the biggest threat to the arctic ecosystem comparing to the mass-scale oil drilling.

9) The Strategy mentions Indigenous peoples, particularly the Saami, and their participation in international cooperation including a support in funding.

Here I miss the goal that Finland will ratify the ILO169 Convention.

10) All in all, my interpretation is that the highest priorities of the Strategy are economic interests, and those of traffic and infrastructure which are with concrete action-proposals. In a way, this is understandable, since this is a national report with strong national interests or hopes of business stakeholders and organisations with pursuit of regional development and economic interests (see HS 22.8.2010). This is also much according to the strategic point of view which emphasises the importance of the High North in world politics both security-politically due to its high strategic position and (global) energy security, economically due to its rich natural resources and potential for transportation (new global sea and air routes), and scientifically due to the region as an environmental linchpin and 'laboratory' for research.

It might, however, be a short-sighted policy to have economics as the main priority in a strategy which is said to focus "on external relations" and thus, signalling more outwards than inwards. Further, in the Press release of the Strategy (7.6.2010) it is said that "arctic policy issues have risen to the centre of attention in international politics in recent years because of the climate change", and the Strategy defines climate change as one of the most severe challenges in the Arctic. Consequently, it would be logical that the environment under a threat of rapid climate change would be defined as the biggest challenge, which would also bring a global perspective. Or, to have more

balance between sectors by crossing sectoral borders and having economic activities together with the environment and the people in the same sector.

Behind is an alternative interpretation why the High North might play an important role in world politics, which emphasises the diversity of a nature and that of Indigenous cultures, and interprets the region is a ‘workshop’ for interdisciplinary research as well as the interplay between knowledge(s), and science and politics, and a place of innovations in governance, political and legal arrangements, and that of stability and peace.

Means of Arctic policy

11) The statement that the Arctic Council is now, and should be in the future, the main forum on arctic affairs and policy is very important and timely. Even more important is that the mandate of the Council will be renegotiated and broadened, because now there is political ‘inability’. This would be a good reason for a proposed Summit and the main item on its agenda (the ‘beef’), if such a summit will be organized.

12) It is no surprising that according to Finland UNCLOS is enough for to discuss on arctic issues, and that there is no need for a new international, legally-binding agreement or regime. This might be realism but is rather traditional and narrow state-oriented approach, when the real challenges are comprehensive and global, and request the global community.

13) The Strategy emphasizes importance of the European Union’s arctic policy and the role of the EU in the Arctic region, and calls the EU a global arctic actor. Further, that the EU should take into consideration the special features of the Arctic and increase its contributions in the region, and consequently, that the EU’s arctic policy would be developed.

This could be interpreted that Finland has claimed itself as a / the advocate or defender of the EU in arctic affairs. This sounds logical from the point of view of Finland but has its risks in the context of arctic cooperation, since among the Arctic states and peoples there are different opinions and hesitation about the EU as an Arctic actor.

About the ‘Strategies’ of the Arctic states

14) Enclosed are priorities, objectives or highlights of the Arctic strategies / policies of seven arctic states (plus the EU)¹, which I have done based on the following inwards and outwards-oriented indicators: (1) Sovereignty and national security, (2) Economy and Transportation (incl. economic development and utilization of natural resources), (3) Environment, (4) Governance and Rescue, (5) Peoples, particularly Indigenous peoples, and (6) International Cooperation (incl. AC, BEAR/BEAC, EU, IMO, Littoral states, Nordic countries, Scientific coop, UNs) (see Heininen, *Arctic Strategies and Policies – Comparative Study*, draft of June 2010).

Table: Priorities, Objectives or Highlights of the Arctic Strategies / Policies

	Sover	Econ/Trans	Envir	Gov/Res	Peo/Ind	IntCoop
Canada	x	x	x	x		AC, Arctic states
DK/Gr	x	x		x	x	Littoral states
Finland		x/x	x		/x	AC, EU
Iceland		x/x	x	x/x	x	Nordic, AC, Scien

¹ Canada’s Northern Strategy in 2009, Denmark/Greenland’s (draft) Strategy in 2006, Finland’s Strategy in 2010, Iceland’s Report in 2009, Norway’s Strategy in 2006, Russia’s State Policy in 2008, USA’s Strategy in 2009 and EU’s Communication in 2008.

Norway	x	x	x	x	x/x	Russia, BEAR
Russia	x	x/x		x/x	/x	AC, BEAC
USA	x	x/x	x	x/x		AC, Scien
(EU		x	x	x	x	AC, UNs, IMO)

15) The national Arctic 'strategies' fall somewhere in between the classic, and the looser contemporary, definitions of the word: First, they mostly cover civilian fields of international relations, but also a field, where military force is not entirely out of the picture, but might also be used in a variety of more 'peaceful' ways (e.g. for search and rescue); Second, a part of the policy challenge they address involves calculating one's position in relation to other 'powers'; Third, like earlier military strategies, these documents are about mapping future uncertainties and preparing both guidelines and instruments to deal with them; Fourth, they are designed to mobilize, steer and coordinate the national communities that they cover; and Fifth, two features of these papers strike a more modern note: a) the wide range of the substantive issues they cover, and b) their role as public documents.

16) As a conclusion, when taking into consideration this the Finnish Strategy covers most of the features of a modern strategy. Further, it has a holistic approach and much emphasises the value of (multilateral) international cooperation. Final, the three main conclusions of the objectives emphasize both the importance of the current multilateral northern cooperation, and that the EU will develop its arctic policy strategic. If this means that politics comes first and goes over economics, it is a good sign!