Arctic Geopolitics – Before and after Ukraine

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Introduction – way ahead

1) The Arctic imagination and Arctic geopolitics
2) Arctic geopolitics before Ukraine
3) Arctic geopolitics after Ukraine
4) Conclusions or, so what for the future?
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The Arctic is an imagined region/a frontier region/something not quite there yet:

- potentiality in resource extraction
- potentiality in transport
- and, potentiality for geopolitical confrontation
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- Disputed territory/contested sovereignty
- Existence of natural resources
- Great power presence

Potential for:
- Competition
- Confrontation
- Conflict
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Before Ukraine:

- From 2006, cooperation more than confrontation, and diplomacy more than military issues have characterized Arctic international politics

- Three examples:
  - Illulisat Declaration
  - Strengthening of the Arctic Council
  - Pragmatic bilateral cooperation
The 2008 Ilulissat Declaration:

• Five costal states as primary actors
• Underline importance of int. law
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Strengthening of the Arctic Council

- Binding agreements
- Making it into a ‘real’ organization
- Potential for cornerstone regional regulation
- Institutionalized diplomatic forum
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Pragmatic bilateral cooperation

- Hans Island
- Barents Sea delimitation (2010)
- In general ‘agree to disagree’
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Why?

Because economy is primary interest for all state actors

Consequently, and contrary to imagination

The inherent regional conflict potential in the Arctic is rather low

Key issue is therefore, ‘spill-in’ of other extra-regional security issues
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After Ukraine

a) the case for Arctic conflict

- Radically reduced trust (in Russia/in int. law)
- New significance of military activity
- Sanctions
- Provocative diplomatic/symbolic acts
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b) The case against Arctic conflict:

- Active attempts at isolating the Arctic
- Russian diplomatic pragmatism
- Stand-up of ‘Arctic Coast Guard Forum’
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Conclusions – or so what for the future?

Will the cooperative order prevail?

My guess is yes, but:

1) Shift in Russian policy – change in economic priorities

2) Western (that is US)/Russian confrontation goes nuclear and thus north