



DEEP SPACE AND ARCTIC SECURITY ISSUES

Date: September 21, 2023

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On September 21, 2023, Dr. Hema Nadarajah from the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada led the monthly digital roundtable for the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies Vancouver. Dr. Nadarajah identified geopolitical views and key actors relating to the Arctic and Deep Space, examined Canada's own role, and emphasized that the regions are not isolated entities.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Nadarajah asserted that the challenges and considerations to global security posed by the Arctic and deep space are unparalleled, little-known, and evolving to be of increasing significance. Amidst weak governance and uninfluential policy and treaties, power held in these areas is shifting from the hands of governments to private companies. This is reflected in the unstable status of the Arctic Council, which suspended cooperation with Russia. Frontiers are additionally affected by increased interest and economic opportunity in these regions. Worsening environmental impacts likewise pose consequential effects. Other areas of conflict like space junk are unable to be assigned to specific countries due to their undefined nature complexity. Canada's own arctic region is underdeveloped in terms of transport, health, and military infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Nadarajah began her presentation by stating that the worsening state of the Arctic due to climate change has led to increased geopolitical tensions, characterized as a new area to assert global dominance within. She additionally defined the geopolitical tilt as the arctic and space not being discrete or isolated entities in international relations and thereby posing spillover effects in other

frontiers. The arctic and deep space have shifted from commonly being viewed as compartmentalized regions to ones that are constantly changing, with various overlapping issues. A heightened, worldwide recognition of potential disputes in the region has led to various states developing their military interests in the arctic region.

Dr. Nadarajah stressed that contemporary global affairs pose significant influence on the regions, illustrated by increased collaboration with Russia and China amidst the Russia-Ukraine war. Deep space likewise poses unique security challenges, such as a high potential for weaponization, an absence of clear legal frameworks, and unregulated exploration and commercial missions. Key drivers in arctic geopolitics include climate change, natural resources like oil and gas, critical minerals, and fisheries, and the development of shipping lanes.

Next, Dr. Nadarajah explained arctic exceptionalism as a unique form of governance in which the arctic is detached from global political dynamics and regional governance, with a series of overlapping issues in arctic governance gathering global scrutiny. She noted, however, that this theory does not quite hold given recent events such as the Russia-Ukraine war. Keeping this point in mind, she analyzed the structure of the Arctic Council, deciphering the role of arctic states like Canada, the U.S., Russia, etc. and of arctic observers like France, Germany, Italy, and more.

Dr. Nadarajah outlined outer space as experiencing a new era with unprecedented technological advancement, diminishing costs to launch space objects, and vast expansion of the commercial space industry. She stated that governance in space is characterized by treaties that were negotiated during a period that spoke to a different set of political anxieties, and that these treaties have become stagnated over time.

Dr. Nadarajah ended by outlining critical issues in outer space to be space junk, orbital crowding, military and cyber space security, and the emergence of new actors. Many geopolitical areas for reform exist, including by updating outdated treaties, defining consequences for countries that violate treaties and international law, shaping space governance through forums like the UN, and more. Ensuring security in both the Arctic and deep space requires recognition that the arctic and deep space are unfixed, demand clearer regulations, and require diplomatic efforts to prevent tensions and conflicts from escalating in these critical domains.

Question and Answer

The question period centered on questions of military strength and intelligence, global cooperation amongst Arctic countries, observer states, and generally within the global arena, and Canada's role in the region.

Are there any methods in which Canada can improve its arctic defence strategy without increasing its physical presence?

Canada has the potential to strengthen its military capabilities in the Arctic, build diplomatic relations with other countries, etc. especially considering the vast amount of Arctic territory owned by Canada.

How can Canada involve Canadian arctic communities within Canada's arctic foreign policy?

The Canadian Arctic presents vast room for reform and opportunity, namely through developing Indigenous relations, such as through improved infrastructure.

What, if any, collaboration can you predict between Canada and the US in terms of protecting arctic security?

Collaboration must be emphasized to strengthen policy, build cooperation between arctic council members, focus research on emerging topics of climate and military security and develop stronger enforcement mechanisms. Russia, the United States, Canada, Denmark, and Norway all lay claim to parts of the Arctic, leading to potential conflicts over borders and resource rights.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- The Arctic and space are not isolated entities in IR, comprise weak governance, and events within these frontiers are multifaceted.
- Governance in space is characterized by treaties that were negotiated during a period that spoke to a different set of political anxieties. These treaties have become stagnated over time.
- Canada contains the largest arctic territory and needs to incorporate a focus on infrastructure in the North and Canadian arctic policy as well as build military intelligence and diplomacy.

- Largest geopolitical influences of the Arctic include development of shipping lanes throughout the Arctic and resulting environmental impacts, status of the Arctic council and its states/observers, outer space issues like space junk and orbital crowding.
- The Arctic council was previously regarded as efficient in facilitating international cooperation; Russian cooperation was suspended and followed by increased connections with Russia and China and Russia resuming personal projects in isolation.

FURTHER READING

Nadarajah, H. (2023). An Arctic in Flux: Singapore's Perspective. *Asia Policy* 18(1), 39-48. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2023.0006>.

Nadarajah, H. (2020). Prevalence of Soft Law in the Arctic. *The Yearbook of Polar Law Online*, 12(1), 285-307. https://doi.org/10.1163/22116427_012010018

Nadarajah, H. (2020). Soft law and international relations: the arctic, outer space, and climate change (T). University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0394919>



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