

## **DRAFT**

ECPR GENERAL CONFERENCE 2015, MONTREAL.

PANEL: CONFLICTS IN THE ARCTIC-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY

“COMPARING AND EXPLAINING THE ROLE AND THE POLITICS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA REGION AND IN THE ARCTIC REGION.”

BERTEL HEURLIN, UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN (bh@ifs.ku.dk)

DRAFT, 04.08.15, TO BE REVISED BEFORE SUBMITTING

### 1.INTRODUCTION

#### MARITIME STRATEGIC POLICY DYNAMICS

Taking the instant temperature of the state of the world displays a critical situation. Military conflicts and civil wars seem to be a new normal. It happens in Africa, in the Middle East, in Europe. Geopolitics, military conquest of cities and of territories, the drawing of new borderlines is apparently the order of the day around the world, and has been so for many years. Civil wars on the ground intensified after the end of the cold war- based on nation building processes and their consequences: territorial claims or based on activities of “rogue” states” involving severe breaking of international laws, actions which were met with international interventions, with or without clear UN mandate.

Comprehensive maritime military conflicts have been absent. Wars after the cold war have generally been constrained to land operations .The United States has used its carrier fleet as platforms or bases but exclusively for support of military operations on land. Why is it so? Basically due to the fact that the United States - as the remaining superpower – is controlling and commanding the global commons at sea with its huge navy and maritime bases. Add to this the activities of the vast US- commercial fleet, which requires military and political strategies and equipment to secure free access to oceans and waters globally. In this way a basic maritime stability and security realm is established globally.

Maritime policies are however an increasingly important part of international relations. Changing maritime conditions involve access to resources, securing seaways, development of transport capabilities, climate change. This means important and for many countries vital political choices and priorities. In the period after the cold war the return of global maritime strategic policy has, however, in general until now not provoked any military actions which could qualify to be called war. Maritime strategic policy emerging as an unavoidable consequence of the on-going globalization process- embodies itself in cooperative as well as conflicting dynamics. Overall competition as well as the existence of economic interdependence are the fundamental factors guiding the nations involved.

Some strategists have begun naming the 21.st century “the maritime security century.” Maritime security and strategy are in the last couple of years being highlighted all over the world. Not least the US and China have adopted new maritime strategies in 2015. In March

2015 the US published a new version of its maritime strategy, “Cooperative strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century sea power” (CS-21R). The last version was from 2007. The strategy calls for all domain access, for US forward naval presence, cooperation with allies and facing global maritime challenges, not least the anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) attempts that are introduced by China. China is considered the key challenge: primarily due to the maritime expansion and the maritime territorial claims. ( Abhijit Singh, 2015).

Together with its release of its new Military Strategy in May 2015, China likewise has emphasized new changes in the national maritime strategy. The highlights are generally that China now is a maritime as well as a land country. China has – or has claimed jurisdiction over 3 million square-kilometre sea-areas. And 90% of Chinas foreign trade is taking place through sea-lines. The strategy underlines that to be a maritime country requires first, that there is a shift from “offshore defence “ to “offshore defence *and* open seas protection.” Second that China has to safeguard national sovereignty, maritime rights and interests and overseas interests. It is emphasized that 4/5 of Chinese trade is transported through the Strait of Malacca and that there are 20.000 Chinese enterprises worldwide and 1.360.000 students studying abroad. Third that is necessary to provide strategic support for building China into a maritime power. Fourth: China insists on the overarching policy of peace, development, mutual benefit and cooperative maritime security.

So, these American and Chinese statements are clear demonstrations of the fact that maritime security strategy will dominate not just the relations between the two powers, but also will have a comprehensive impact globally.

The most crucial fact is, as mentioned, that until now disputes concerning claims on maritime territorial areas– despite heavy skirmishes, physical encounters, proper fighting, diplomatic crises and almost armed actions- global maritime strategic policy has not exploded in real war. Still the policy is characterized by a certain restraint to avoid escalation. Why is the world more prone for war on land than for war on sea? Are we in a situation where the difference in actual use between the two kinds of war is shrinking?

#### THE US AND CHINA

The basic claim is that in the current world order the United States enjoys the superiority at sea globally. The American military global reach is active and visible on all the oceans of the world. It is even enhanced through the Asia-re-balancing policy.

The US is still a global land power, but the conduct of military interventions on the ground is increasingly unpredictable and complicated, even for a superpower. The United States is strong as concerns Global Commons attached to oceans, international waters, air, space, cyberspace using air and sea military forces, including high-tech military tools. Global commons on land are practically non-existent. Local and sub regional circumstances are thus giving the US-ground forces heavy challenges, as demonstrated in the Balkan, Afghanistan and Iraqi wars. (Barry R. Posen 2003.)

With the assumption of US as the master at sea this paper will analyse how two regions- the Arctic region and the South China Sea region play different roles in the security policy of the United States and in the security policy of China. China is the rising power par excellence and could in due time have capabilities to challenge the US-lonely superpower position.

The two regions are differently positioned in the national strategy of the two countries: *The US* is an Arctic country and therefore the Arctic is a natural part of the national strategy with a

certain, but not the highest priority. But also SCS has priority, due to the fact, that US is considering itself an Asian power.

*China* is the main littoral state for the South China Sea-region and is considering the sea -as indicated by the name -exactly a sea primarily belonging to China. The Arctic region is for the globalized China a source for necessary future resources, a source for easy global transport possibilities and finally a challenge for the changing global climate.

For these reasons it is important to analyse and to explain the different policies that the two countries are pursuing towards the two very different regions on the background of the conditions set by the maritime strategic policy dynamics.

The paper is centred around the maritime policy dynamics and the role of the two different regions, which for some time generally have been assessed as diametric contrasts security wise: the Arctic region as the zone of peace and accommodation and the South China Sea as the zone of conflict and tension. This contrast seems however to diminish according to the increasing conflict between Russia on the one side and Europe and the United States on the other in connection with the Ukraine and Crimea issue.

An investigation like this involves many political variables: political, economic, geographical, military and societal. The main research question, however, can be boiled down to the following: how to explain the political role and the position of and development for the two very different regions in the American and the Chinese strategic understanding?

## THE STRUCTURE

The paper is structured following three steps: first step is to present a map of comparison between the two regions. The next is to analyse the strategy of US and China, the superpower and the main rising power towards these regions, and finally, based on these insights, to explain the political outcome and the perspectives for the regional and global order.

First we will explore two very different maritimely defined regions: the Arctic region and the South China Sea region. How to define them and in what way do they differ? The point of departure for a comparison is to look at the capabilities of the two regions using an analytical model normally applied to political units, nation states. Is this a viable method? The argument for doing so is that just as land based sub regions and regions could be considered "security complexes" in the Barry Buzan- understanding, (Buzan and Wæver 2005) maritimely defined regions also could be treated as a specific realm inside which certain distinct security dynamics exist. Maritimely defined regions are not units; they are not actors in international politics. They are closely defined arenas inside which different political units are playing their power games, subordinated certain structurally defined behavioural restraints. Nevertheless these arenas, as they are characterized by generally accepted borders and are considered arenas having an importance, which qualify to be subject to national strategies obtained by individual countries (in this case US and China), can successfully be measured capability wise with the purpose of identifying dissimilarities and similarities.

One marked dissimilarity is the role of security and tension. During the cold war the Arctic region was one of the main centres of tension and threat in the East-West conflict. It was the area where the US-USSR exchange of intercontinental missiles was supposed to take place should nuclear war occur. After the end of the cold war the situation changed dramatically:

The Arctic became a peaceful region, and area where most of the Arctic countries to a high degree reduced their military presence and left the region to look like an area, where low tension reigned. In many ways this is still true, despite shadows of the signs of a new East-West cold war.

Quite the opposite is the case in SCS-region. In the last years of the cold war and long into the post-cold war period, East Asia in general and SCS in particular could generally be considered "a zone of peace". (Robert Ross) But at the beginning of the second decade, around 2010 the situation changed. Conflicts took generally over in the SCS; instability and insecurity became the order of the day. The SCS region became conflict ridden, a global powder keg.

## 2. COMPARISON THROUGH CAPABILITIES

The classical way to compare the relative position of units in the international system is to use the very simple model designed by American Political Scientist, professor Kenneth N. Waltz. (Waltz, 1979:131). He suggests that capabilities of competing units have to be measured according to the combined volume of the size of territory, of the population, of the resources, of the economy, of the military, and of their political stability and competence.

He uses the categorization as a means to assess capabilities across countries in order to rank them as units in the international system. I use the analytical framework as a tool for mutual comparison, attempting also to measure other characteristics than the mere size of the categories.

### TERRITORY

Regarding territory the differences are huge: The Arctic region could be described as the surface of the earth positioned north of the polar circle; or as the countries being considered arctic countries (i.e. having territory north of the polar circle). The third possibility is to look at the Arctic Ocean and include the littoral countries only. If we take the last choice the size will be overwhelming: the arctic countries encompasses the three biggest countries on Earth, Russia, Canada and the US; further the largest island globally, Greenland. Sticking to the more common and realistic polar circle criteria the Arctic region covers as much as 11% of the surface of the world. The region is a mixture of land, oceans and an icecap, which still is being reduced. Basically most of the region is sea. Maritime policy will have the priority in the long run. The specific characteristics of the Arctic region territorial wise are the fact that rapid change of physical circumstances is occurring. The size does not change. The content characterizing the Arctic will.

Normally the territorial geographical facts are considered constants, "force profondes." This is not the case in the Arctic. The melting ice shapes in practice new frontiers, new maps to be drawn, and new ways of transport, new opportunities. Physically a new world is appearing. What will not be changed even if the temperature will rise a couple degrees is the hard, rough, even violent physical environment where the wintertime is dark, as the sun never rises over the horizon. The life and the physical circumstances in the polar areas are fundamentally different from anywhere else on the globe. Nature is vast: people are few. Human life, if you are using the words of Thomas Hobbes, is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". But again: the general transformation of the world in the direction of globalization, technologization, post industrialization and modernization is slowly taking over. In the future, tendencies to exploit the Arctic Region by taming the challenges of the harsh nature will probably dominate. The Arctic is to be considered a vast "laboratory of the challenges at stake in the 21<sup>st</sup> century"

(Degeorges, Damien, 2013, "Denmark, Greenland and the Arctic", Brief, Royal Danish Defence College: p.5).

Further, in the Arctic region the main problem is not old school grab of territories. There are not any unsolved territorial disputes of vital significance. The Canadian-Danish disputes over Hans' Island and the corresponding US-Canadian dispute over land territories do not affect the general close bilateral relations. The disputes concerning the maritime boundaries such as the final regulations of the EEZ seem to be solved according to international law. Also minor disputes exist in the field of the maritime territory proper, i.e. inside the 200 miles zone. Primarily we have disputes between Canada and the US re the Beaufort Sea and between Canada and Denmark re the Lincoln Sea. The disputes-also as concerns the area around the North Pole, involving not least Russia and Denmark -are primarily long-term disputes expected to be solved according to international regulation and bilateral negotiations.

Concerning territory the SCS region is, as indicated above, very different from the Arctic on most dimensions. They are both – if we use the Arctic Circle definition as point of departure well defined geographically. Both of them occupy vast areas, Arctic with its 11% of global surface is by far the largest. The South China Sea is with its 3.5 Million Km<sup>2</sup> a marginal sea and part of the Pacific Ocean. The Arctic consists of huge landmasses but still the sea area is dominating. The South China Sea, however, is almost exclusively water except its rather limited archipelago. It ends where China proper, Vietnam proper, Malaysia proper, the Philippines proper and Taiwan proper begin. The countries around the SCS are thus bound together geographically with the sea as the main communication tool although the distances from one land to the other are comprehensive. The countries involved look over the same sea full of possibilities and challenges. And the SCS region is directly accessible and there are no huge physical climate oriented transformations like in the Arctic region in the horizon except the long-term effects of the general climate change.

The region includes of course the capabilities and policies of the littoral states, but the critical content of the region is what is *in* the sea: the islands, the reefs, and the resources in, on and under the seabed. So territorially we are dealing with one of the big oceans of the world and the adjacent pieces of territory spread all over the region. Contrary to the Arctic the SCS belongs to the regions where the physical environment, the geography are constant factors. Yes, there are reefs and small islands, which only emerges out of the ocean with certain intervals, therefore could be considered less constant, not least in connection with rising sea levels due to climate change. But all in all: SCS is not experiencing any remarkable physical transformations. Therefore history plays a certain role: nothing has changed geographically during hundreds of years: so, historical references are in many cases considered not only relevant, but also determining.

The regional and global role of the SCS in geopolitical terms has, however, changed dramatically. Add to this the fact that a great part the SCS is a contested area. Islands claimants surround the SCS. Crucial factors such as sovereignty and resources are at play.

Generally seen- land territory plays a greater role in the Arctic than in the SCS region. In the SCS it is obvious where the sea stops and where the landmasses begin. Not so at the Arctic area. The ice cap covers a considerable part of the region, which hides the difference between sea and ground. So, what you are experiencing is one coherent surface of ice on water and land.

When Robert D. Kaplan in his new book, "Asia's Cauldron. The South China Sea and the end of a stable Pacific" is referring to the claim that "Europa is a landscape, East Asia is a seascape", he could as well have included Arctic in his characterization: Arctic looks like a landscape. The problem is, it will not remain so. The sea down under will emerge.

## POPULATIONS

The Arctic region is extremely sparsely populated. The total population of the polar circle is no more than around five millions – a mix of the indigenous population and people from other parts of the Arctic countries. If we count the whole population of the area covered by the Arctic littoral countries- the amount will be 500 million. For the SCS we have the same picture: the sea itself with its small islands has a very small population: the countries around count for 1.6 billion.

## ECONOMY

Economically there are differences and similarities. All the Arctic countries are categorized as developed countries. The US is number one economic power globally, and the other countries belong to the richest in the world measured by per capita of GNP, placing Norway on the top. The Arctic Circle region is, however, positioned in the economic periphery of the Arctic countries, which means that the living standards and the income in the areas north of the Arctic Circle are lower than in the southern parts of the Arctic countries. A center-periphery-relation is at play. Direct economic support for and investment in the Arctic areas are a necessity. The Arctic region is economically unsustainable. Its status is comparable with the developing world.

The South China Sea consists of developing countries characterized by a low GNP per capita. But – compared to the Arctic- all the littoral states are also raising countries economically. We are experiencing an Asian "Wirtschaftswunder"; Asian dragons and tigers around the SCS are all expanding their global share as concerns trading, producing, industrializing and are on their way to become middle income countries, although there for some countries still is a long way to go.

## RESOURCES

Resources in a broad sense refer to physical material enabling production of goods and services. Fundamentally resources are not least energy from fossil sources such as gas, oil, coal, they are minerals of any kind in and on the seafloor, they are food not least fish and other materials used for consumption.

The first big difference between the Arctic region and the SCS is the current state of affairs as concerns the total mass of resources now and in the future: in the Arctic the resources for centuries have been almost insignificant globally. Locally the problem for the population have been lack of necessary resources. Globally the exception was the production of the oil from whales, which up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century positioned not least the Arctic region as an important niche-production angle of global trade.

The general insignificance withered away decades ago: there is now a general assessment that the Arctic will be one of the most important origins of natural resources globally in a not so distant future. But still the possibilities and costs of exploitation are questioned. There are "known unknowns" as well as "unknown unknowns."

The SCS region has for a long time been a significant producer of natural resources and in this way already a region of heavy regional competition. It is obvious that the total amount of

natural resources is still waiting to be seen, and that the possibilities have not been exhausted, but examination of possible sources does indicate that there is a rather clear picture of a rich volume of natural resources ready to be exploited. The SCS is indeed, due to a status quo oriented resource situation, less of a laboratory than the Arctic region.

The second big difference is the distance and seaways. The Arctic on the icy top of the globe is far away from the emerging economic world centre, Southeast Asia. The Arctic countries, primarily rich developed post-industrialized countries do not have the same demand for natural resources as the developing countries around the SCS, which are functioning as a regional factory for the whole post-industrialized world. For many of the SCS countries, primarily China, hungry for natural resources, distance count. So, the prospects for the melting ice to open new shipping routes, the Nord-West or the North-East passage, or even in the long run the passage through the North Pole, reveals a possible fundamental transformation of trading routes, facilitating the unstoppable need for cheap acquisition of natural resources.

The third big difference between the Arctic and the SCS relating to resources is safety and security. Here the general peculiarity is- in plain words -that the Arctic is secure but not safe and the SCS is safe but not secure. The diverse characterization needs an explanation. It is referring to a distinct definition of safety and security, where safety has to do with everyday protection against all kinds of failures, damage, error, accidents and generally not desirable occurrences. Security in a more narrow understanding refers to the threat to the mere survival or core interests of a political unit. In this way the term security in the narrow understanding take you from the normal, apolitical, everyday life into the realm of inter- unit conflict where an action or an occurrence are considered a vital threat. In the IR-literature this process is termed securitization.

In the understanding above of the terms safety and security the Arctic region is secure because there is practically no vital interests at play among the national actors attached to the polar circle area as concerns the natural resources in the region. They have all been settled peacefully through bilateral or multilateral negotiations. That the Arctic region can be characterized as not safe is due to the dangers coming from the harsh nature, the rough climate resulting in the random unforeseen outburst of natural forces. Examples are environmental catastrophes and unsafe shipping routes implying in mass death for tourists after accidents for the huge floating hotels cruising in the Arctic region.

As concerns the SCS the region is safe- due to the well known, tested and controlled circumstances in the waters and the general geographical environment The region is explored and manageable, and carrying a great deal of traffic. Still a lot of knowledge has to be gathered. The SCS still has to be- and will be examined- from the bottom to the top for resources, be it fish or other eatable material. But it could generally be considered safe compared to the Arctic Area.

Also the SCS is not secure in narrow "core-interest-related" sense of the term security. As the Chinese government in practice considers territorial maritime claims in the SCS as belonging to the core interest of China, and thus increasingly occupying the highest priority of the national foreign and security policy, the clash of interest between China and the claimant countries is producing insecurity.

## MILITARY CAPABILITIES

The military capabilities in the two regions are evidently different. The Arctic was during the cold war an area of tension, confrontation and of the highest strategic importance. The Arctic was part of the inner centre of a virtual war fought between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The war being virtual never materialized as a destructive inferno. No shooting and no escalation up to the use of the hyper destructive nuclear weapons took place. It was a war where the battlefield was a competition on weapon systems. It was an arms race, which included the invention, the implementation, and the deployment of still more sophisticated and threatening nuclear weapon systems. At the same time also truces took place between the fighting parts: intense negotiations on arms control and disarmament run parallel with the sophistication of weapon systems and rearmament. The process could be considered a "virtual war". The Arctic played an important role in this East-West game based upon a doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD. Three crucial dimensions made the Arctic the centre of MAD. The trajectories of the nuclear-armed intercontinental missiles were planned to pass right through the Arctic, the anti ballistic missile systems of both sides needed land based tracking systems- not least in the Arctic region. Also the nuclear-armed submarines were playing a crucial role in the MAD- situation as they often were manoeuvring in the Arctic sea. The Arctic had the highest strategic priority during the East-West virtual war during the cold war.

This situation disappeared almost over night after USSR surrendered in the virtual cold war by dissolving the Soviet empire and in the end the Soviet Union itself.

To day the Arctic region is demilitarized compared to the cold war. There are for example practically no weapons in Greenland besides hunting equipment. The Arctic powers do of course have military bases, military equipment, and military personnel in the area. But for most Arctic powers the geographical distribution of their military forces does not prioritize the Arctic area. On the contrary. In general military forces and military bases are very few in the vast Arctic region. There are, however, signs of a remilitarisation. The Arctic countries are enhancing their military presence. This goes not least as concerns Russia. Russia is indeed emphasizing its intentions to upgrade its military forces in the Arctic considerably. But still there is a Russian will not to use the rearmament in the Arctic as a tool to threaten the low-tension status quo situation in the region. The Russian Arctic ambassador expressed the point of view in the following way (The Arctic Journal, Oct.12, 2014). He said that co-operation among Arctic countries is "evident; co-operation does not necessarily equate to increased militarisation. Instead it is mere a symbol of a changing world." He referred to the fact, that formerly the Arctic Ocean was protected fully by the ice and severe climate. With the new climate it is necessary to secure the country from illegal border crossings, illegal emigration, organized crime. It was Russia's obligation to assure safe navigation for the developing Northern sea routes.

There is, however, in connection with the intensifying of the Ukraine crisis an obvious fear of a spill over effect of West-Russia tension to the Arctic region. This is demonstrated by president Putin in a statement August 29, 2014: "The Arctic plays a very important role for us in terms of guaranteeing our security too. It is regrettable the case that US attack submarines are concentrated in that area not far from the Norwegian coast and the missiles they carry would reach Moscow within 15 minutes, just to remind you."



The opposite is the case in the SCS. In SCS the maritime military forces of the strongest military powers in the world – not least the US -are massively if not permanently present, yet permanently passing by.

The SCS is an area densely populated with ships. Sixty thousand ships are each year passing through the Strait of Malacca; not least tankers carrying energy related resources (Kaplan, 2014: 178). Probably the SCS has the world record of having the highest amount of military ships on a yearly basis.

First of all, the United States is the only power in the world which -as part of its global reach policy -possesses a hyper powerful military command close to the region, the Pacific Command. The United States is an Asian power, the largest, the most influential, having the most superior military forces and having an indispensable impact on all the nations around the SCS.

The United States is in the possession of 12 aircraft carrier groups. Half of them are almost permanently assigned to the Pacific Area, indicating that the American superiority in sea power is formidable. No other nations have carrier groups of the same size and sophistication. China has recently introduced Liaoning, an old carrier ship bought from Ukraine and refurbished. Any comparison with a US- carrier battle group reveals a fundamental asymmetry. Add to this: the United States has permanently- if you are counting the forces in the vicinity of the SCS (South Korea and Japan) – up to 100.000 American soldiers and sailors ready to fight. Likewise United States has 12 guided missile cruisers –again half assigned to the waters around China; China has none. So – in maritime military understanding the US has a superior upper hand. The other states connected to the SCS- do have reliable navy forces. They cannot, however, be measured on the same vain as US-maritime forces. This also goes for the growing and ever more modernized and sophisticated Chinese navy, the PLAN, Peoples Liberation Army, and Navy.

It counts in the strategic balance that the Philippines, (with a developing navy), and Singapore have military alliance relations with the US, and that also Vietnam, (having tight security policy relations with for example Japan, Singapore and Australia) despite the war in the 60's and 70's has established military ties to the United States. Most important is, however, Taiwan, which has been called the unsinkable carrier. Taiwan- having the closest relations to the US including a defence commitment – although the American government adheres to a One-China policy- is- not least due to US-military supplies and sales- in the possession of a rather large and effective military force, including effective warships.

China plays as the main power, the only littoral power supported by a huge “hinterland”, a natural, but also crucial role in SCS. There is a reason for calling the region for the South China Sea, SCS, although the Philippines prefer another name: the West Philippine Sea. China has indicated through the introduction of the infamous nine-dotted U-line that it is regarding the SCS as its specific sphere of influence. A sphere of influence has to be protected, also with military means. This is the reason for China changing its strategic outlook. China is a militarily powerful country- ranking as number 2 in the world. It has, however, traditionally been a land power up till the end of the 1970's relying on a guerrilla-like war strategy; the Mao Tse Tung inspired Peoples War concept. PLA changed its personnel and its equipment considerably parallel with the Deng- reform and “open up policy”. And in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century also the strategic direction changed. The SCS-approach went hand in hand with the ambition of developing a proper maritime power. This ambition is materialized in new strategic approaches, demonstrated in a change from a “sea after land” to “sea equals land”-

approach. (ADI-paper). Hu Jintao introduced this policy as he in 2009 declared that: “Current threats come mostly from the sea”. (Ib.) Strong policy oriented research centres, such as “National Institute for the Study of the SCS” on the island of Hainan, have supported this policy together with a new centre for Maritime studies in Nanjing.

Hainan is home for the newest diesel submarines, the nuclear ballistic submarines, as well as an important space policy site. To the United States the Hainan activities and bases are of considerable concern. The new Chinese subs are specifically suited for operating in the shallow waters of the SCS. (Kaplan: 173). Also China has strengthened its capacity for maritime surveillance vessels from 2013 and on. 36 new and sophisticated boats have been introduced. (Kaplan, 178, Robert Ross).

But again: looking at capabilities the United States still is not just militarily superior, but is the overarching leading political power in the SCS. But on specific areas China is keen to develop capabilities which in the long run in a more or less a-symmetrical manner can cope with the American military forces, even as concerns technological sophistication.

### STABILITY AND COMPETENCE

How to assess the position for the two different regions with respect to stability and competence? In other words: how can the current stability situation and the international abilities to manage the two regions be valued? As indicated above the Arctic area is generally considered blessed with stability; the situation is politically calm and stable. The Arctic is a low-tension region. All the Arctic states have demonstrated a will to keep the region apart from confrontational activities and policies, which characterize relations in other important issue areas. But is stability identical with status quo? Political stability refers to a situation where relations between political groups all the time are developing in a non-conflict, peaceful way as they are adapting to variations in the environment. This is what to a large degree is the case in the Arctic. There are heavy variations in the environment: first, climate change is transforming basic conditions, causing new openings and opportunities as concerns trade, resources, transport, economy. Second: there are uncertainties regarding the relative power relations between the great powers. Who will rise and who will decline? Still, the situation in the Arctic is benign; the powers have decided to solve all their disputes through negotiations.

How come? One could argue – although simply expressed- that the fact that the resource cake is getting larger due to the ice melting meaning getting more to all- would result in a getting more to the strongest. Until now this effect has not materialized. One reason is that the resources being available due to climate change are located in areas already divided. There is no justification for territorial disputes. (DIIS-policy Brief, Sep.2014). The Russian minister of foreign affairs Sergei Lavrov said August 27, 2014, “The Arctic should be left outside of the brackets of military rhetoric “. Answering a question about “usurp territories” with reference to the Russian flag being planted on the North Pole seabed, Lavrov said, “Nonsense. We don’t want to turn the Arctic into an arena for an armed standoff”. (ITAR-TASS, 23.9.14).

All other Arctic states agree that Arctic issues have to be handled through negotiation and solved according to international law. Among the many examples of peaceful conflict solutions and effective agreements are the Illulisat declaration of 2008 among the Arctic Five Countries and the results of the agreements on territorial borders between Norway and Russia.

Two factors have to be underlined: that stability as it is defined seems to continue contrary to massive changes in the physical environment affecting resources and economy and contrary

to a more heated and conflict ridden general relationship between some of the Arctic countries, not least due to the Ukraine crisis.

There are – naturally- structural forces at play. The current unipolar world order reigns although it is rhetorically challenged by Russia. But we have to do with a Russia born out of the end of the cold war as a loser, as it lost its superpower empire and global position. This is opposite to China, which has benefitted from the American world order. This interpretation could weaken the claimed stability- capability of the region. But again: Russia is by any measure THE Arctic nation, having Arctic soil, ice and water in abundance. According to physical conditions and vested interests Russia is an Arctic superpower, which however need western technology and western markets to thrive and develop. This specific interdependence gives support to and underscores the stability dimension.

Looking at the SCS through the analytical lenses of stability we see a complete different picture: a region, which in the last four years have been exposed to instability of the upper level. The exception is that the threshold of war has not been taken. Further that one still can characterize SCS as consisting of two kinds of regions, a Security-SCS- region where instability reigns and an economic SCS region, where stability and interdependence are the normal. But again: Robert D. Kaplan is right calling his new book, “Asia’s Cauldron. The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific.” Instability has taken over. Adam M. Crauley calls the region “The most dangerous waters in the world”. And here he is not just referring to piracy and other criminal activities, which are comprehensive. 41 % of world wide pirate crimes are taking place in SCS and its surroundings. ([Time.com/piracy-south-east-Asia-Malacca-strait](http://Time.com/piracy-south-east-Asia-Malacca-strait)). The cauldron-characterization refers mainly to the heavy maritime territorial disputes in the area, having a history marked by heavy skirmishes in some cases escalating to war and a history marked by heated debates on how to determine what are historical facts and what are fictions. Involved are two main features: resources and sovereignty. Resources are energy resources below the seabed and food resources in the sea. Sovereignty can in many cases be interpreted as having a superior meaning: it is not just to control and exploit the valuable resources. Sovereignty is political principle; a demarcation of being a sovereign power with legal and historical rights in a region where the countries have suffered heavy losses and offers due to expansion, aggression, humiliation, defeat, colonization, and unconditional surrender.

Maritime sovereignty in the SCS region and adjacent regions matters despite the general tendencies to globalization and regional integration and a global regulation society. It matters due to fact that the regional balance of power is put into question as the degree of relative rise and decline of the individual countries still have not been unfolding demonstratively. The fundamental question is: will the United States still remain the ultimate Asian power and as such restrain the use of military power among the South Asian countries?

It is a remarkable fact, that wars in the South East Asian region have been absent since the end of the cold war. (Robert Ross) .We have had a kind of a zone of peace in this area, a condition that now seems to be challenged.

All in all: stability as a political capability in the SCS is certainly well below the corresponding situation in the Arctic region.

Summing up on the comparison: in the SCS there are emotional territorial claims based on rising nationalism; this is not the case in the Arctic. There are risks of accidental conflicts that could escalate. Not in the Arctic. There are conflicting claims to potentially rich resources. Not

in the Arctic. There are risks to freedom of navigation in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). Again, not in the Arctic. There are disputes over the interpretation of international law, notably the UNCLOS. This is not the case in the Arctic. (Ref. Bader, Jeffrey et al., 2014, "Keeping the SCS in Perspective", Brookings, Policy Brief.)

The overall result examining and comparing the two regions according to capabilities using an analytical framework borrowed from International Politics theory reveals that the categorization gives a relative full picture of central characteristics of the Arctic region and the SCS region. The differences are immense. What is common is that they both are close inherent and marked part of the current world order. What insight does it give us? After analysing the overarching strategies of the US and China, we will look at explanations according to the world order concept.

### 3. AMERICAN AND CHINESE STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE ARCTIC REGION AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA REGION.

We are -as demonstrated -confronted with two very different regions in world politics. The next step of this article is first to identify the strategy and the behaviour of the world's two most influential powers, the US and China towards the Arctic region. And second to conduct the corresponding examination towards the South China Sea region.

The US and China are also very different countries. This is reflected in what has been called the fundamental strategic doctrines of Xi and Obama. (China-United States-Focus Digest, vol.6, 2015). The Barak Obama strategy states, " We must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will." Or, as stated in the US- 2015 National Security Strategy, "American leadership in this century like in the last remains indispensable". (p.23). The Xi Jinping strategy is, "The Chinese don't have the gene for invasion or hegemony in their blood. The Chinese reject the argument, that a country is bound to seek hegemony once it becomes powerful".

The stage is set. The World leader has spoken: The US will continue its leadership. The hesitating newcomer has presented himself: China is powerful, but will not take over as leader, at least not as leadership has been practiced until now. These fundamental statements are the point of departure for the region-specific strategies below.

#### THE ARCTIC

##### THE UNITED STATES

The Arctic is only mentioned once in the current National Security Strategy, White House 2015. Among the goals is " to reduce the potential for enemy-related conflict in places like the Arctic and Asia". But as the enemies of the US are few-besides North Korea a couple of non-state terrorist organisations-this goal is moderate and easily achieved, the Arctic region is not blessed with any high priority. The Arctic has, however, its own specific strategy. In his National Strategy for the Arctic region President Obama is making the following statement: " The Arctic Region is peaceful, stable and free of conflict". (The White House, National Strategy of the Arctic Region, May 2013). This is the main message. It is an assessment, but also a claim, which has to be verified all the time and has to be maintained. It is a remarkable statement about a region which is rapidly changing, which is packed with vital resources and

potentials and which is open for heavy competition regionally and globally. The US is an Arctic country and is responsible for security for a great part of the Arctic, including Greenland, according to a bilateral US-Denmark-Greenland military agreement. Also the region is covered by the American general global responsibility due to its capacity as world order leader. The content of this statement of an Arctic peaceful region is not new. Since the cold war the US-strategies have reflected this basic stance. During the Bush-years concerns on terrorism and criminal and hostile acts were however part of the Arctic strategies, but the updated 2013- strategy, and subordinated strategies from e.g. the Department of Defense and the general implementation strategy are primarily referring to the unspecified aims of advancing the US-security interests, to pursue responsible Arctic Region stewardship and finally to advance international cooperation. The Department of Defence strategy is underscoring the “existence of a secure and stable region where US-national interests are served, the US-homeland protected, and nations work cooperatively to address challenges.” The challenges are primarily environmental problems, managing the resources, account for indigenous communities, and scientific research.

The strategies are- as demonstrated-rather vague and is leaving the impression that the US – as an involved Arctic country- of course is giving attention to a developing region- but that the Arctic region is not among the highest prioritized issue areas in the American administration. This is reflected in the Implementation Strategy and in the Department of Defense strategy, which states, that the department “seeks innovative, low-cost and small footprint approaches”.

So, there are no signs of any remilitarization pointing back to the strategic importance and nuclear weapons positions from the cold war. On the contrary: in the newest strategies earlier references to missile defence, early warning systems, strategic sealift, strategic deterrence and maritime awareness are not emphasized. Add to this the rather modest general military presence. Also as concerns commands, the Arctic region is taken away from US-Pacific command and is now common without regional responsibilities. A unified command plan implies a sharing between the Northern Command and the European Command. (Lundestad, Ingrid and Øystein Tunsjø, 2014, “ The United States and China in the Arctic”, Polar Record: p.3.)

The buzzwords of the American strategy are general cooperation with all involved, close collaboration with allies and partners, and solution of conflicts by international law. Although the US is not a member of UNCLOS due to congress rejections, it generally adheres to the principles of the convention.

A specific core interest for the US – which also is included in the UNCLOS-, is free international maritime navigation. In this realm the US has legal conflicting relations with Canada with respect to the status of the North West passage. (Ib.p.3)

In general: the US considers the Arctic region as having a certain role with increasing significance because it is a territorial owner and a powerful regional player. This will reflect the US- behaviour as chair for the Arctic Council 2015-17. Still the Arctic belongs to the periphery in American politics. And the US encourages non-Arctic states to join the project of keeping the region safe, secure and stable. (Ibd.)

## CHINA

The China strategy for the Arctic region is non-existent. The reasons are obvious. First: China is not an Arctic state –and not even a near Arctic state. Second: China has no specific vital interests in the Arctic region. Third: China’s interests in the Arctic region have to do with

trade, resources, and climate change. An interest China shares with other Asian Countries, like Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India, now, like China, all permanent observers at the Arctic Council. Fourth: the Chinese administration is not, unlike the US, overloaded with official strategies- or system of strategies. This is not Chinese praxis, and, further, China does not have the American global reach and responsibility.

On the other hand, this policy of not having an Arctic strategy could change over time. There are generally seen two different public and policy oriented views in China and in the world on how to proceed in the Arctic. Taken to the extreme the first is that China is on verge taking over part of the Arctic, not least for example Greenland and Iceland. China has an unstoppable appetite for Greenland's resources, which are vast and tempting and -as the ice is melting -are rather easily accessible. Everything is to be found: minerals, iron ore, and rare earth in abundance, uranium, oil and gas. China is almost about to occupy Greenland: soon one may see 10.000 Chinese workers invading the country, which needs investments and money in order to gain total independence from Denmark. Greenland has a population of 56.000 persons. China calls itself a "near Arctic country", and officials have referred to China's right as having the biggest population and the second biggest economy in the world to sit on the table controlling the richness of the vast Arctic region, being considered the heritage of mankind. China is in this way a natural and important Arctic partner.

The other view is that China does have shown interest in the Arctic area in order to satisfy its need for resources to secure the continuing economic development of China. But it is not specifically the Arctic, which is the object of China's search. The opposite is the case. China is generally going global (Schambaugh 2013), but the whole world is at play, with no explicit, particular focus on the Arctic. For China it is business and politics. The focus is the whole world: Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, Australia, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and in the end Antarctic and Arctic. The two latest mostly on a long-term basis.

China has explicit strategies for Africa, Latin America and is heavily engaged in organisations like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Conference on Confidence Building Measures in Asia, (CICA) and the BRICS-countries group. China is engaged in areas and regions where it does pay, and how to prioritize between the many possibilities depends on the economic output.

Choosing between the two extremes, the political and economical evidence point mostly in the direction of the latest extreme. Its modest edition sounds like this:

Yes, there is a considerable interest in the Arctic as concerns resources, sea-lanes, SLOGS, scientific research, not least in conjunction with climate change. Yes China has displayed activism and growing interest in the Arctic. China has worked effectively to become a permanent observer at the Arctic Council, China has established an marked increased presence in the region, economically as well a politically. It goes for Svalbard and for Iceland. The largest embassy in Iceland is the Chinese. (Lundestad /Tunsjø: 4). And yes: China has launched what could be referred to an embryonic Arctic Strategy. In 2009 an assistant minister for Foreign Affairs delivered a speech at a study tour to Svalbard: "China's Arctic Policy". (Lundestad /Tunsjø: 4). Here it was claimed, "that Arctic Countries should ensure a balance of coastal countries interests and the common interest of the international community". (Shiloh Rainwater, "Race to the North", Naval War College Review, Spring 2013, vol.66, No.2). This indicates that the Arctic is not just a matter for the Arctic states. But the declaration is far from the more assertive Chinese statements from less authoritative voices that contains claims for "China's legitimate rights", that the area is "the common wealth of

the world's people, and does not belong to any one country" and- as mentioned- the claim that "China is a near Arctic state."

But again: compared to China's general political and economical pro-activism around the world the Chinese Arctic strategy as it is revealed in deeds and statements must be characterized as modest and selective.

## THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

### THE UNITED STATES

The SCS plays a non insignificant role in the US strategies, in the general ones- as e.g. the National Security Strategy 2015- as well as in the more specific strategies.

The US is, as we have emphasized, "An Asian Power". The superior power is ensuring stability, security and progress to Asia, and not least to the South China Sea. This is the main message from the US- strategy towards Asia: to remain being the most important Asian –Pacific power. This is emphasized in the President's 2012 Defence Strategic Guidance. Here it is stated that China plays a central role for the US. " Building a positive and constructive relationship with China is an essential part of America's rebalance in Asia". US supports a "prosperous and successful China" (Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel's statement on the IISS- Summit, June 2014, Singapore). But still the Defence Strategic Guidance speaks about China and Iran as states, "that will continue to pursue asymmetrical means to counter our power projection capabilities". As concerns the SCS the US "calls on all claimants to exercise restraint" and supports agreements to establish crisis hotlines. Basically the" United States has been clear that we do not take a position on the question of sovereignty" in the contested areas. "That does not mean, however, that we do not have an interest in how these disputes are addressed and settled. " (Ib.).

In July 2015 the US through the Joint Chiefs of Staff released its "National Military Strategy". Here the US aims at strengthening its position in the SCS region. The US is still "supporting China's rise" and is encouraging it to be a partner for greater international security. It is, however, stated, that" China's action are adding to the tension of the Asia-Pacific region. For example its claims to nearly the entire SCS are inconsistent with international law". As concerns the attempts to settle the different claims it is stated in the strategy that, "China has responded with aggressive land reclamation efforts that will allow it to position military forces astride vital international sea lines". This part is the crux of the matter. This is right inside the centre of the vital American interests. The US responsibility is stability and security. The main US interest is the freedom of navigation at sea and the protection of its allies. The main problem with the US-SCS –strategy is that although the US-rebalance strategy explicitly is announced as having nothing to do with China as a rising power, it raises suspicion in China that the aim is to contain and encircle the country and reduce its role in Asia.

Also there are at least two schools among scholars and politicians in the US on how to deal with the SCS. One based on confrontation and one on cooperation.

The confrontation approach is clearly demonstrated in the Heritage Foundation report "A National Strategy for the South China Sea", (NSSCS) (April 24, 2014.). The main claim in this report is that China is pursuing a mare clausum- policy, which is not in accordance with the world order of the 21.st century. Therefore the US has to develop and promulgate a NSSCS to counter Chinese aggression and to secure US navigational rights and interests in the region. The main aims of this strategy should – contrary to the current policy- take an official position

regarding the disputed SCS land features. Further a) underscore US policy on military activities in the SCS, b) publish a "Limits in the seas report" regarding the nine-dash line, c) assist SCS nations in complying with the law of the sea, d) support arbitration cases against China, and e) prevent potentially harmful provisions of an SCS "code of conduct", for example restrictions on military activities in the SCS or in any EEZ, which is unacceptable to the US.

The cooperative edition is a Brookings Institution "Foreign Policy Brief", "Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective", August 2014, by Jeffrey Bader, Kenneth Liebertal, and Michael McDevitt. The recommended strategy for the US is certainly different from the Heritage Foundation approach. The Brookings experts emphasize that the US policy should be based on principles- not on choosing sides. It should not favour one country's territorial claim over others. The US should lower the temperature of comments from officials and spokesmen speaking of Chinese activities as "provocative" or aggressive (Ib.:8), while remaining silent on actions by others. Further to adhere to UNCLOS and in the end reaffirm the convention, and support any kind of a binding code of conduct. Also the US should encourage the entire range of possible negotiation forums.

As indicated we see an approach which differs pronounced from the above, and certainly more directed towards keeping a close partnership with China. There are, however, limitations. If China is taking over an aggressive strategy that threatens the regional stability "the US will have to look for additional options to dissuade such behaviour". (Ib.: 10) But, again, the US should try to avoid a situation like this. The US should secure its core interests, but "also tone down its rhetoric, work with others not just some, and keep the South China Sea in the right perspective". (Ib: 10)

But what then is the core of the official US-strategy towards SCS? The basics are to be found in the statement made by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi, July 2010. Here she laid out the principles guiding the US-government. (Ibid: 6). The main points are: Freedom of navigation, including freedom of military navigation; freedom of over flight; unimpeded commerce; peaceful resolutions of disputes and abstaining from coercion; conforming claims to UNCLOS; a collaborative diplomatic process to resolve territorial disputes and negotiation of a code of conduct. All in all strategic guidelines, which evidently are closest to the Brookings recommendations.

## CHINA

China's strategy in the SCS is reflecting the general strategy of peaceful existence. The aim is to secure China's development economically, politically, and socially. But also to take care of its security. This is done by securing China's rise, not just absolutely but primarily relatively. The SCS issue becomes a natural part of this strategy. China's rise and its "going global" is also about developing an expanding maritime presence and turning China from its former land power position into a land-as-well-as-sea power. The vision is a change from the traditional "sea after land" towards "sea equals land" notion. (Xin Qiang, "Assertive reactivity", 2014, forthcoming).

According to the newest defence white Paper, China is officially announcing its military strategy, the first time ever. ("China's Military Strategy", May 2015, Beijing: The Information Office of the State Council). The main conclusion is rather positive: "With a generally favourable external environment, China will remain in an important period of strategic opportunities for its development". (p.2). But there are important problems. The US



rebalancing strategy implies that the US is enhancing its military presence and its military alliances. And on the issues concerning China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests," some of its offshore neighbours take provocative actions and reinforce their military presence on China's reefs and islands that they have illegally occupied." And also the US is blamed, yet without being mentioned by name. "Some external countries are also busy meddling in the SCS affairs. A tiny few maintain constant close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance against China".

As in the American case one can identify two more or less extreme concepts on how to shape a Chinese SCS-strategy. On the one hand we have suggestions for an assertive policy as concerns the maritime disputes, a policy which is based on the emergence of growing advanced maritime equipment, of "ever developing industrial-scientific-technological infrastructure" and on the modernization of the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy). Intense protection of the Chinese Seas and securing of the waterways, SLOGS, a blue water navy, a new "ocean consciousness" are among the elements of the recommendations for China's visions as a global sea power. We are here referring to ideas expressed on recent conferences by recognized well-known scholars.

These scholars are emphasizing China as peaceful, non-expansionist, and non-aggressive, non-assertive, non-provocative. But countered with Vietnamese or Japanese provocative, threatening actions in the SCS, China has to react. So Chinese motives are very far from being aggressive. They are simply reactive. And in order for the reactive measures to be effective they have to be assertive. In cases dealing with sovereignty and territorial integrity no significant compromises are possible. But basically: peaceful development should have the upper hand. An example is president Wu Shicun from the National Institute for South China Sea Studies. He emphasizes: "The South China Sea is a natural line of defence for Chinese national security, an important strategic waterway, and a strategic must-have for it to become a maritime power. The US controlling the South China Sea and maintaining its presence there is indispensable for its dominance in the Asia-Pacific based on its bilateral alliances formulated in the post-war era. In this sense, China-US competition and rivalry in the South China Sea is structural, strategic and irreconcilable." (US-Ambivalence in the South China Sea, NISCSS-website, 2015-07-09.) But again: no expansion, no aggression, and no provocations.

The other more radical suggestion for a SCS-strategy is an open offensive strategy, demonstrating what is referred to as the will of the Chinese people. The people is asking for a policy where China should act with urgent resolution using its enhanced military capabilities directly against aggression, provocations and armed interferences in matters dealing with the indisputable sovereign rights and geographical integrity based on historical facts and natural rights and determination. This policy should not only be directed at the critical maritime relations with what China is considering is middle size or minor neighbour countries but not least against the US interfering in Chinese affairs and in regional Asian affairs, areas, where the US does not belong.

To sum up: The US perceives the world in a twofold way: first: how to secure the survival the United States and how to secure the US-leadership of the world. In the Arctic region the US is secured by in a modest way maintaining sovereignty-not least as concerns resources. And the leadership is secured through the nuclear strategic presence. In the SCS region the survival is

secured through heavy forward deployed military forces and the leadership is secured by maintaining the position of the superior power in Asia.

China's position vis a vis the world order is one dimensional: to secure the survival of China as a one party state and as a rising power still enlarging its capabilities in order to facilitate the transformation from a developing to a developed country. In the Arctic this is done going global looking for shipping routes and resources, referring to an increasing "near Arctic status" for China. In the SCS it is about secure the precious and vital sovereignty and geographical integrity in an area, which underscores the increasing importance of Chinese maritime power.

#### 4.EXPLAINING THE POLITICAL OUTCOME: STRUCTURE AND POLICY CONCERNING TWO DIFFERENT REGIONS AND TWO POWERFUL COUNTRIES.

How to explain the political role, position and development of the two different regions? How is it possible to maintain the different international position as concerns stability and security for two regions- both of them considered in focus of world politics and as such subject to the fundamental forces of the current world order? Will the Arctic region remain the zone of peace, stability and accommodation and will the South China Sea region remain the zone of conflict, instability and contrasting interests? And how to explain the US and the Chinese policy towards these two regions?

The analysis tells us that both regions are more different as concerns physical, geographical, economical, demographical, military, political and resource characteristics than any other regions globally. It further tells us that the two most powerful countries in the world, the US and China both unavoidably involved in the two regions, are having contrasting but also accommodating interests in the two regions. It further tell us that there are quite convincing reasons for the different international position of the two regions to remain as they are i.e. the Arctic region as a zone of peace and transformation by negotiations and the SCS-region as a zone of conflicts and transformation by coercion and threats.

A third part in the equation is, however, to be taken in consideration: Russia. Russia, by far the biggest and most influential Arctic country and an important and emerging global energy and resource supplier is increasingly playing a changed role in world politics: protecting its fragile zone of influence regionally by attempting to regain part of its former position as a world power. This could threaten its former stand in its Arctic policy: that the Arctic region is a region of stability where differing interests, e.g. the sovereignty of territories at land or at sea, could be solved according to international agreements, international law, finalized by bilateral negotiations based on peaceful relations.

Russia is, however, convincingly enhancing its military presence in the Arctic, and its new military doctrine is not least emphasizing the role of Arctic in the Russian national rejuvenation and international re-emergence as a Great Power. The present development in the Western-Russian crisis on Ukraine is not promising for a positive development of the current world order. In an Arctic context an American-Russian confrontation is not unthinkable. A war, however, is. Canada plays a specific role: with its specific national interests it is very active in opposing what is seen as Russian hyper-aggressive behaviour in the Ukraine crisis.

Three factors are to be considered: First: Russia's amount of natural resources are immense. The accessibility and usability are, however, critical. Western investment, Western technology and infrastructure are necessary to secure exploitation of the physical resources. Second: A spill over effect of the Ukraine standoff involving sanctions and military threats and challenges to the Arctic stability position cannot totally be avoided. The Russia versus the West -conflict is, however, overarching; it is a great power play. The Arctic situation could remain as a bubble of innocence or even a possibility for having positive impact on the overarching Western-Russian conflict. Third: There are no signs of Russian appetite for land or sea grab in the Arctic. Russia seems primarily occupied with preserving, securing and protecting the sea communication routes of the West passage. Fourth: the Russian military presence has intensified- but from a very low post cold-war position. Also the Russian military strategic direction does not point to the North. The broad security challenges are on the southern frontiers.

The Western countries, the US-NATO- conglomerate is the target as part of shaping a strong Russian great power identity emphasizing the "near abroad" concept. The southern direction seems however, to be the most critical and having the highest priority for Russia. Russian military presence at the Southern borders indicates an aim to demonstrate a will to counter the strong Chinese influence from the South. So, there is no regional threat from the North, in the Arctic; the Southern borders are areas where Russian security is challenged.

The problem with Russia in connection with the puzzle in this paper- two different regions between the globally two most powerful countries- is that it – as a relatively weaker country measured according to combined capabilities- counts less in the general word order which still is- and the a foreseeable future will continue to be constructed around the US as the sole superpower.

#### A THEORY OF UNIPOLARITY

We will try to explain the political situation around the two different regions using insights from unipolarity theory based on neorealism. The theoretical point of departure is Birthe Hansen's unipolarity theory, which probably is the most powerful and fruitful theoretical contribution as concerns how to understand a unipolar structure. (Hansen, 2011). The theory is based on systems structure approach.

In a unipolar world the symmetrical balancing, which is taking place during bipolarity conditions, has disappeared. The dynamics in the system are demonstrated in three ways: 1. Countries that have a flocking behaviour around the unipole, 2. Countries that are free riding and 3. Countries that are conducting asymmetric balancing, i.e. opposing the unipolar world order.

Flocking is the preferred behaviour for most countries. In the current world order this is demonstrated in the US multilateral and bilateral alliance system or tacit security agreements with individual countries. In our case all the countries having to do with our two regions – except China and Russia- more or less belong to this group.

Some countries prefer free riding, as they can build up resources to strengthen their own capabilities. We have China as an example. The Chinese government admits that the world order after the cold war has provided stability and security, which has given China an unprecedented strategic opportunity to build up a strong a prosperous country. In certain aspects Russia also is enjoying the same opportunity.

Opposing the world order through asymmetric balancing is problematic, with few possibilities for success, and even having dangerous effects. US has stigmatized these countries as rogue states. Russian behaviour does in some ways belong to this category.

In the unipolar system the sole superpower has to take care of the international system as such by creating stability and security. And, as it has been formulated in several US-official security strategies: one important American global goal is “Shaping the strategic choices for key states”.

The superpower has to carry out international management and to meet the challenges to international stability, e.g. terrorism and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Unipolarity is robust and lasting, but will probably in due time be overtaken by a new structure in the international system.

One way to manage the international system is through regionalism. The US operates strategically through main regions, which covers the whole world. The point of departure is the military command system. There are six geographically oriented commands: The North Command, the Europe Command, the Central Command, the South Command, the Pacific Command and the Africa Command. The US is present all over the world, politically, militarily, economically and culturally.

In our case two commands counts: The North Command and the Pacific command. No other country in the world has these capabilities and tools for global management at its disposal. So, the US-regionalization policy also covers the Arctic and the SCS regions.

Following this simple theoretical framework, referred to as the neorealist-unipolarity approach, we have to admit that it cannot explain all aspects of outcomes in international politics. It can explain the important ones, not the specific and detailed. And using a structural approach, the main idea is, that “short of predominating, a systems structure acts as a constraint on the systems units (the states). It disposes them to behave in certain ways and not in others.” (Waltz: 58).

So, what kind of disposals for the states is unipolarity offering in this specific case involving two regions and the two most powerful states? And what restraining factors can be identified? What can unipolarity/neorealism tell us, what can it explain as concerns important trends?

*First* the theory can explain some important structurally determined outcomes of the US and China policies. Needless to state there is a huge difference between the structural position of the US and China.

## CHINA

China is subordinated the American world order and is exploiting its security -and -stability -umbrella by free riding. Therefore China can play a marked role in the Arctic region and thereby emphasize that it is not just a regional power, but also a global power, hungry for resources and for fast transport. But it is generally free riding – also in the Arctic - and is for the time being not willing to take over vital global responsibilities. Unipolarity and the US-regionalism also dispose China to a certain restraint in the SCS- region. China could easily pursue a much more aggressive policy, but the fact that the US is the overwhelming military

power in Asia with its own regional military command, and the fact that China is welcoming the US as an Asian power spreading security and stability stops China from using its still stronger maritime military power.

China tries to overcome its position as the traditional land power. How to get rid of the fact of being surrounded by narrow straits hindering a free passage to the open oceans? The response is widening the possibilities to be a blue navy power by economic-trade-related initiatives like the "One belt one road-strategy."

But structural restraints have to be overcome. One way to reduce the restraints is to strengthen the military capabilities of China - including not least the maritime capabilities- and then slowly begin with the SCS - taking in and dominate the first, the second and the third island chain.

## THE US

The US is -at the lonely superpower- also the superior sea power.

The US looks at the Arctic region as an area with possibilities and challenges among others- but not as any prioritized cornerstone. The resource role is modest. The Arctic, however, is an asset that together with the direct access to the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans gives the US an extremely favourable strategic position globally. As the superior sea power the US reins the world. The Arctic plays- strategically seen-an important role for the US as the superior super-nuclear power. The Unipolarity theory points to the policy of non-proliferation. Structure will dispose the US to use big efforts to avoid being a nuclear power on par with others nuclear powers. It is aiming at maintaining its superiority in this field. Therefore the US is steadily enhancing the nuclear force- and in this connection the anti-nuclear force, AMB-systems play a critical role. As the lonely superpower the US will never give up the military and the military technological superiority. In this understanding the Arctic has been and still is highly valuable for the US as a superpower.

As concerns the SCS -region the US as the superpower master manager of the international system and as the overarching master of war and peace has a natural interest in the SCS which is surrounded by major Asian powers all more or less attached to the US. Especially China enjoys a kind of strategic partnership with the superpower, and the two countries are having a most intensive communication lines and a hyper multifaceted set of relations on different levels. So, in many ways the US is considering the SCS-region as its own inland sea. The US has two goals: To exploit its position as the World Master Intelligence Collector. This collection is done - not least from the SCS. The other goal has to do with the Global management function. In order fulfil this task an undisputed free access to all international waters is necessary. Here is no compromise possible.

Contrary to China the US is the born sea power. And the superpower exploits this geopolitical asset as only a superpower can do. It considers itself in many instances as a part of international law as well as being above international norms and conventions. The US adheres to the UNCLOS, The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, but is not legally bound. The US is second to none in terms of maritime policy, economically, militarily and politically. US rule the waves. But China is catching up. This is exactly the reason for the US to do everything to demonstrate its superiority.

*Second*, theory can tell us something about the two regions – and their specific role in world politics. Why are these regions important, and why are they so different as regards international security and stability?

#### THE ARCTIC REGION

The US is the power having the prerogative – as superpower- to regionalize the world. From the beginning of the US-superpower position the Arctic was a strategic asset, but certainly not considered a region or a sub region. Already during the Second World War the Arctic area became a strategic core area. From 1951 -1953 the US established a gigantic base around Thule, Greenland. The Arctic was the most critical area for the East West conflict during all the years of the cold war: the first area to monitor a possible nuclear exchange, which would lead to a global Armageddon. The Arctic emerged as an institutionalized coherent area through a bottom up process. The establishment of the Arctic council was of less interest for the US; bilateralism was preferable and hard security was not included. The Arctic became a recognized region proper in connection with the Illulisat-declaration 2008 where the US as one of the Arctic Five agreed on resolving conflicting interests according to international law. The US has continued this regionalization process, by giving the Arctic Council a slightly higher profile in connection with taking over the chair of the Arctic Council in 2015 for a two years period So, the US is able to set the international agenda and can influence the direction of the region if it wants to do so.

But how in neorealist-unipolar terms to explain the “low tension”- position of the Arctic region? And how will the new Russia-West tension impact this position?

First of all the Arctic region involves five Arctic countries having important strategic territories and specific interests. Of the five three of them have close and long term special relationships with the US. They are all tightly security wise flocking around the superpower and are all-willing to support the US-World order. Number 5, Russia, was also almost up to the end of the 00’s more or less supporting the world order. Then the Russian government began questioning the blessings of the this current world order. The government began critical advances towards the implementation of the US project of market economy, democracy, individual freedom and human rights. But, as we have seen, the government did not want the international crises of Georgia and Ukraine and their related proliferation of tensions to occupy the Arctic region realm. The western powers-mostly- accepted the specific refuge. Why? The answer can be found in the fact that Russia needs this refuge in order not to cut a “flocking “ lifeline to the US in a region where in fact no regionally determined interests exists. Tight cooperation between the two countries in this distinctive narrow environment looks like a rational policy. Here no NATO, no overarching US-Russia security relations, no Russian European zone of influence are involved.

Will it last? There is a certain probability that it will. Russia will at some time in a not too distant future in order to avoid marginalizing itself too much globally, opt for a reset of the relations to the superpower.

#### THE SOUTH CHINA SEA REGION

What about the South China Sea? How can we explain the SCS as a hot spot waiting for a spark to set the region on fire? The SCS is a core interest for China, to be assessed in the same vein as the unequal treaties, signed while China was weakened and humiliated. China is now a strong country and is in the present situation not willing to compromise. China has historical

rights not to be ignored. And-as a determining factor- China will not accept any interference from the United States. What we see, however, is an increasing political interventionist US-policy, stating that there are limits to its neutrality position. Additionally the other countries in the SCS are pursuing a still more assertive policy towards the Chinese proactive SCS-political and practical measures. Why is it that the prolonged crisis will not flare up into a war proper?

The structural constraints give the answer. The superpower presence will not allow a real war. The superpower system has – according to the theory – the possibility globally to impose its world order project. The content of this project is primarily to support market economy, democracy, individual freedom and human rights. Most countries tend to imitate the content of this project. It is part of a socializing process, which ensures wellbeing and survival. This process is in line with the on going globalization process affecting economic, political, military, societal and cultural development. This socialization process is fostering and facilitating an economic interdependence, which will tend to make easy the choice for the countries to choose between costly and unpredictable war or further development and prosperity. The choice is not difficult when it comes to the final decision. Up to then, however, there seems to be rather tight boundaries between the two decisive realms- the economic realm and the security realm. This is an issue, which requires further research and theory building. The security- economy nexus has to be explored and examined intensively. The two regions being examined here are obvious cases.

The structurally supported interdependence is as we can see, a restraint for outbreak of war. Together with the superiority of the superpower's military might these two factors secure a certain stability in the SCS- region in the years to come.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper is to explain the strategic background for the American and the Chinese policy towards two specific regions differently positioned in world politics- the Arctic region and the South China region.

This is done the following way:

First to set the stage for a new reality in world politics: the return of the overarching relevance of maritime strategy worldwide and the prospect for a politicization of maritime policy. In the framework of this global dynamic the paper assesses the two regions, the Arctic and the SCS-region using a simple comparison model taken from the neorealist way of measuring combined capabilities across countries.

Second step is to compare the strategies of the US and China towards the Arctic and towards the SCS- region respectively. Third step is an attempt – in broad structural terms – to explain the general policy outcome, which is examined in the first two sections. The theoretical approach used is a neorealist- based theory on Unipolarity developed by Birthe Hansen.

Basically the general finding of the paper is that the relations between the US and China concerning the two regions generally is an asymmetric relation. The US is the lonely superpower and will remain so for a foreseeable future, a position that places China as a rising power, but certainly not a superpower. China's rising position is to a great deal dependant on China's extraordinary ability to utilize the World order managed by the

superpower, an order providing global stability and security to China. Without this world order the extraordinary Chinese economic expansion had not materialized.

The asymmetry characterizing the relationship is demonstrated in the Arctic case. The US is an Arctic country, but the Arctic region is one among many regions- nationally, regionally and globally - to be managed by the US. The US is present globally in terms of economy, trade, resources, political influence, security policy, and armed forces. The US is able to promote its global political project and to use its diplomatic policy as is required by the situation. The US is in a superior position.

China wants to go global and do have a lot of choices globally; in the Arctic the possibilities are however, restricted. China's position is subordinated.

That is e.g. the reason for China not to choose its normal procedure in international politics: to prefer bilateralism. China has to cope with the status quo and join the multilateral fora.

The asymmetry is also a fundamental condition in China's own backyard: the SCS-region. The US- as claimed above-is also superpower in relation to the SCS. It is capability wise – the strongest power in Asia. It is admitted by China, but this fact is to an increasing degree difficult fully to acknowledge for China due to its rising power position. Therefore we are witnessing from American as well as from Chinese side a constant kind of testing the basic conditions through many -often provocative- practical political actions. But the outcome of the testing is leaning to the US side.

Will the SCS situation lead to war? And will the specific state of affairs displaying the Arctic region as the peaceful, low tension, internationally regulated and accommodated region continue, despite the US-China competition and the US-Russia tension?

No; there will probably be no war. And yes; the Arctic region will probably stay as a low-tension area.

The unipolar structure will dispose the countries around the SCS not to wage war. No vital security issues are at stake. And the dissemination internationally of the US-world order project, based on sustainable globalization in broad terms has lifted the barrier for obtaining substantial gains from a war due to losses from breaking the economic interdependence. The Arctic region will remain a refuge in relation to the overarching tensions due to the fact that Russia will be disposed to keep an opening to the superpower in a region where a "flocking" behaviour is preferable for fundamental economy and development reasons.

We still – for a foreseeable future- will have a Pax Arctica and a restrained South China Sea cauldron –owing to the global Pax Americana.

*Literature:*



Carnegie Endowment (Taylor Frawel et-al.) 2015, "Conflict and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region", Washington, April 2015,

China Institute 2014, Summary Report: The Second Arctic Maritime Workshop: Sea lines of Communication Security in the Asia Pacific and the Arctic.

"China's Military Strategy," 2015, Beijing: The Information Office of the State Council, White Paper, May 26, 14.

Bader, Jeffrey, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael McDevitt, 2014, "Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective", Washington D.C: The Foreign Policy Brief, Brookings Institution, August 2014.

Blackwill, Robert and Ashley Tellis, 2015, "Revising US Grand Strategy Toward China", Report No.72, March 2015, Washington: Council on Foreign Relations.

Buzan, Barry and Ole Wæver, 2003, "Regions and Powers", Cambridge.

Dutton, Peter A., 2014, "China's Maritime Disputes in the East and the South China Seas", Naval War College Review, Summer 2014, 67:3, p.7-16.

Department of Defense 2015, "Annual Report to Congress. Military and Security

Developments involving the Peoples Republic of China 2015". Washington D.C.

Dutton, Peter A, 2014, "China's Maritime Disputes in the East and South China Sea", Naval War College Review, Summer 2014, vol.67, 3:7-18.

Giraud, Peter, 2014, "Forget the South China Sea. China's Great Game in the Arctic Draws Near", The National Interest, The Buzz, Aug. 4, 14.

Groves, Steven and Dean Cheng, 2014, "A National Strategy for the South China Sea", The Heritage Foundation, Background # 2908 on Asia and the Pacific.

Hansen, Birthe 2011, "Unipolarity and World Politics. A Theory and its Implications", New York: Routledge.

Houlden, Gordon and Hong Nong, 2012, "Maritime Security Issue in the South China Sea and the Arctic: Sharpened Competition or Collaboration?", Beijing: China Democracy and Legal System Publishing House.

Jacques, Martin, 2012, "When China Rules the World", 2.ed., New York: Penguin Books.

Jokela, Juha, 2014, "Arctic Security Matters", EU Institute for Security Studies

Kaplan, Robert D., 2014, "Asia's Cauldron. The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific", New York, Random House.

Kissinger, Henry, 2011, "On China." New York, Penguin Press

Kissinger, Henry, 2014, "World Order.", New York, Penguin Press.

Lanteigne, Marc, 2013, "Chinese Foreign Policy. An Introduction.", London: Routledge.

Lam, Willy Wo-Lap, 2014, "Era of Xi Jinping", New York, Routledge.

Lord, Carnes and Andrew S. Erickson, eds, 2014, "Rebalancing US Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific," Navel Institute Press.

Lundestad, Ingrid and Øystein Tunsjø , 2014, "The United States and China in the Arctic", Polar Record, Cambridge University Press: 1-12.

Mersheimer, John J, 2014, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics", updated ed. , New York: W.W.Norton & Company.

Nye, Joseph, 2015, "Is the American Century Over?", New York, Polity Press.

Olesen, Michael Runge, 2014, "Common and Competing Interests", In Jokela, Juha, "Arctic Security Matters", EU Institute for Security Studies.

Olesen, Michael Runge and Jon Rahbæk Clemmesen , 2014, "Arctic Security. Global Dynamics upset Stable Regional Order", Copenhagen, DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies, Report.

Pillsbury, Michael, 2015, "The 100 Year Marathon. China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower", Hudson Institute.

Ross, Robert and Zhu Feng, eds., 2015, forthcoming, "China, the United States, and the East Asian Order: Managing Instability", TBA.

Shambaugh, David, 2013, "China goes Global. The Partial Power." Oxford: Oxford Press.

Shi Xiaoqin, 2013, "Seapower and Sino-US Relations", Beijing: Academy of Military Science

Shi Xiaoqin, 2013, "Seapower and Sino-US Relations", Beijing: Military Science.

Sisci, Francesco, 2014, "A Brave New China-the Big Change", GoWare.

Staun, Jørgen, 2015, (in Danish), "Ruslands strategi i Arktis", Copenhagen: Royal Defence College, Rapport 2015.

Storey, Ian, 2013, "Arctic Lessons: What the South China Sea Claimants can learn from Cooperation in the High North, ISEAS perspective, #65, Singapore.

Taylor, Fravel, 2015, "The Myth of China's Counter-Intervention Strategy". Washington Quarterly, February 2015.

United States Coast Guard,"Arctic Strategy", May 2013, Washington D:C:

United States Strategies are the following: National Security Strategy, National Military and Maritime Strategies, National Strategy for the Arctic Region, Arctic Region Policy (NSPD-66/HSPD-25), National Strategy for Homeland Security and Maritime Awareness, National Ocean Policy, Quadrennial Defense, Diplomatic, and Homeland Security reviews.

Waltz, Kenneth N., 1979,"Theory of International Politics", Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Wu Yizu ,2014, "New Development of America's Asia-Pacific Rebalancing Strategy", International Strategic Studies, 4-2014, Serial No.114, Beijing: CIISS, p.51-54.

Zhang Baohui, 2014," Xi Jinping, "Pragmatic Offensive Realism and China's Rise". Global Asia, Vol.9,2, Summer 2014:71-79.

