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“An Arctic Great Power”?

Recent Developments in Danish Arctic Policy

Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen

Denmark has been a firm advocate for Arctic cooperation in the recent decade, most importantly as the initiator of the 2008 Ilulissat meeting. Two new strategic publications – a foreign policy report (Danish Diplomacy and Defence in a Time of Change) and a defense report (The Ministry of Defence’s Future Activities in the Arctic), which were published in May and June 2016 – highlight the Kingdom of Denmark’s status as “an Arctic great power” and the importance of pursuing Danish interests, which could indicate a shift away from a cooperation-oriented policy. This article investigates whether the documents represent a break in Danish Arctic policy. It argues that the two documents represent continuation, rather than change. They show that the High North continues to become steadily more important on the Danish foreign policy agenda, although the region remains just one of several regional priorities for Denmark. They also continue the cooperation-oriented Danish Arctic policy and move this policy forward by adding more analysis of specific policy programs and initiatives that have long been on the agenda. These initiatives are meant to strengthen the Kingdom of Denmark’s High North profile, further Greenlandic development, add more capabilities to the Danish Armed Forces, and build ties to other Arctic nations. However, the real challenges in Danish Arctic policy are not found in bureaucratic reports, but in how these reports become part of an ongoing discussion about identity within the Kingdom of Denmark. Greenlandic policymakers have criticized the documents for being too Denmark-centric, which indicates a nascent Greenlandic resistance to Danish centralization of authority over foreign policy within the Kingdom of Denmark.

In January 2016, Peter Taksøe-Jensen, the diplomat who had been tasked by the Danish Prime Minister to write a strategic assessment of Danish foreign policy, gave a remarkable interview to the newspaper *Politiken*, in which he revealed some of the conclusions contained in his upcoming report (*Danish Diplomacy and Defence in a Time of Change* – DDDTC for short). One particular passage caught the attention of politicians and commentators alike:

“Denmark is, together with Greenland..., an Arctic great power. We must use our strength to ensure that the development in the Arctic corresponds with Danish interests. That is why I will suggest that it becomes an area that we should upgrade more” (Beim, 2016).

It seemed that the Arctic would become a new focus area for Danish foreign policy, but Taksøe-Jensen’s emphasis on Danish interests in the Arctic could also indicate a shift away from its current cooperation-focused Arctic policy (a regional policy that emphasizes inter-state cooperation through formal and informal institutions). Like the other Arctic states, Denmark had thus far supported regional cooperation, but perhaps the new report entails a slight change of tack. Speculation that a shift was underway gained more traction when it became evident that Taksøe-Jensen’s report would be followed by the publication of the Ministry of Defense’s long-

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awaited strategic analysis of its activities in the Arctic (*The Ministry of Defence's Future Activities in the Arctic* – MDFAA for short). The defense report, which was meant to map Danish defense and coast guard activities in the High North and outline potential priorities for future investments and reforms, had been planned since at least 2009 and began in 2013, but its publication had been postponed several times (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 8; Defense Commission of 2008, 2009: 274 & 298).

The two reports should be seen as political interventions in the Danish foreign and security policy debate, which were meant to prepare the ground for a shift in policy that puts further emphasis on the Arctic. Putting forward these comprehensive analyses of the Danish foreign policy (DDDTTC) and defense policy in the Arctic (MDFAA) helps to stream-line initiatives within the different bureaucracies and counter opposing arguments in the public debate. More importantly for a wider Arctic studies audience, they serve as weather-vanes that point to current trends in Danish Arctic policy, thus allowing analysts to take stock of the importance of the region within Danish foreign and security policy and the specific initiatives that are likely to come out in the years to come.

This article situates DDDTC and MDFAA and the public reactions to them in the larger context of Danish foreign policy and Arctic policy and examines to what extent these new initiatives represent a change of course. It argues that the documents signal continuity rather than change. The region's importance on the Danish foreign policy agenda seems to be increasing slightly, but this change should not be exaggerated, as the Arctic remains but one of several foreign policy priorities for Denmark. The key test remains whether more funds will be allocated for Arctic initiatives in the upcoming budget or in the defense agreement, which is due in 2017. Danish Arctic policy generally continues on a cooperation-oriented track, as the reports highlight concrete initiatives that may slightly strengthen Denmark's ability to operate in the Arctic and which opens doors for further cooperation with regional partners. The main challenge remains the viability of the Kingdom of Denmark¹ as a constitutional entity that contains Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland and the new reports do little to address these issues. In that sense, the Kingdom's Arctic policy hobbles along awkwardly with Denmark in the driver's seat and the Faroe Islands and Greenland complaining about the direction but too poor to get out.

The article presents its argument in three steps. The first section locates the Arctic within Danish foreign policy and shows how the new reports may signal a slight increase in the High North's importance within Danish foreign policy. The second section examines how the new policy initiatives fit within Danish Arctic policy, while the final section looks at how the Greenlandic reactions to the new policies indicate fundamental tensions between Denmark and Greenland within the Kingdom of Denmark.

The Arctic Climbs the Agenda

The two reports largely continue long-term trends in Danish foreign policy, where the Arctic has become steadily more important over the past decade. Danish policymakers began to take an interest in Arctic issues after the 2007 Russian flag-planting. Before 2007, Danish Arctic policy focused almost entirely on the bilateral relationship with Greenland, but the Russian flag-planting led Danish policymakers to realize the importance of forging stronger regional relations. Danish thinking matured over the following years, but it was only after the publication of the

2011 Arctic Strategy that the region truly became a key issue for Danish foreign policy (Rahbek-Clemmensen, forthcoming). All Arctic states are interested in enhancing region-wide cooperation and they mainly focus on creating bi- and multilateral ties that are most relevant for their own part of the High North. Denmark is no different. Greenland remains the center-piece in its Arctic policy even as Copenhagen has become more attentive to wider regional concerns. Denmark was a late-bloomer compared to Norway, where the government had declared the High North (“*Nordområdene*”) to be “Norway’s most important strategic [foreign policy] priority” as early as 2005 (L. C. Jensen, 2016; Norwegian Prime Minister’s Office, 2005).

Denmark and the other Arctic states have pursued policies that aim to strengthen regional cooperation. Copenhagen initiated the 2008 Ilulissat meeting, where the Arctic coastal states agreed to adhere to international law and further regional cooperation in institutions like the Arctic Council (“*The Ilulissat Declaration*,” 2008). Though opposed by states and NGOs that felt that the coastal states excluded relevant actors to maximize their own influence and undermined other regional institutions, the Ilulissat Declaration has defined the current regional order, which places the Arctic states, especially the littoral states, at the apex of the decision-making structure. Danish policymakers strive to preserve this order (Government of Denmark, Government of Greenland, & Government of the Faroe Islands, 2011: 10 & 13–15), which strengthens Copenhagen’s regional influence and arguably provides clear and effective decision-making structures. Denmark is not exceptional in its dedication to High North cooperation – a similar, if not greater, commitment can be found in the other Arctic states.

DDDTTC solidifies this enhanced focus on the Arctic by explicitly making it one of Denmark’s four foreign policy priorities, the others being the stabilization of the global south, deterrence and the defense of Eastern Europe, and engagement with the new Asian economies. The report represents a move away from a narrow focus on out of area operations in the global south (Afghanistan, North Africa, and the Middle East), which has dominated Danish foreign policy since the 1990s, by adding a new focus on areas within Russia’s sphere of interests (Eastern Europe and the Arctic).

Danish security policy during the Cold War was based on the security guarantee provided by NATO, where Danish territorial defense was seen as the main way of showing its dedication to the common cause (Defense Commission of 1988, 1989; Ringsmose, 2008). Greenland’s geostrategically important location made it an important part of the defense of North America and the island functioned as a crucial bargaining chip vis-à-vis the United States, which Copenhagen used to improve its relationship to Washington and solidify its position within NATO (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2014: 400–1). Territorial defense faded as a policy priority during the 1990s and 2000s as the Russian threat to Europe, and thus Denmark’s geostrategic importance, vanished (Defense Commission of 1997, 1998; Defense Commission of 2008, 2009; Government of Denmark, 2003; Rasmussen, 2005). A foreign policy white-book from 2003 went as far as arguing that “the conventional military threat against Danish territory has disappeared and there is consequently no need for territorial defense” (Government of Denmark, 2003: 37) and territorial defense was replaced by an expeditionary agenda that focused on out of area operations, mainly in Afghanistan, North Africa, and the Middle East (Defense Commission of 2008, 2009; Ringsmose & Rynning, 2008). Danish operations abroad were meant to strengthen the Western alliance as well as Denmark’s position within NATO and give it

influence in Washington DC (Henriksen & Ringsmose, 2011). Greenland remained important for Denmark's position within the Western alliance, as the American Thule Air Base and the adjacent radar installations in Northwest Greenland continued to be a vital part of the United States' early warning system for intercontinental ballistic missiles (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2014: 400–1).

DDDTTC is a slight shift in prioritization away from stabilization operations in the global south to securing areas in Eastern Europe and the Arctic. It maintains that a “conventional military threat to Danish territory remains unlikely, but Denmark's and Europe's neighborhoods have become less secure” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016a: 12, 2016b: 71) and “the foundation for the abolishment of the territorial defense is therefore still relevant” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 74). Russia does not pose a direct military threat to Denmark, but Russian adventurism in these areas could diminish Denmark's territorial security down the line. DDDTC therefore suggests that the Arctic and Eastern Europe should receive increased priority. DDDTC also highlights the continued importance of the global south and, as such, the document entails an expansion of the list of policy priorities.

The size of the strategic reorientation can be gauged by looking at the suggested shift in defense spending. Both reports suggest allocating an additional DKK 120 million (USD 18 million) from the defense budget to Arctic Command to finance new initiatives (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016; Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b). However, though a large increase in Arctic Command's budget, these funds are only little more than a half percent of total defense spending. The new documents thus represent a small step, rather than a comprehensive pivot, to the north (Ministry of Finance, 2015). These suggestions must be written into the next five-year defense agreement, which is due in 2017, before they come into effect.

It is in this context that one should understand the aforementioned references to Denmark as an “Arctic great power” and the calls for a more “interest-based foreign policy” in general and specifically in the High North. Of course, the term “great power” is not used in a strict IR sense, where a great power is commonly thought to be either a state “with substantial industrial and military potential” (Posen & Ross, 1996: 17, see also Waltz, 1979: 131) or a state that is “recognised by others to have... special rights and duties” (Bull, 1977: 196). Compared to the resources of other Arctic players, such as the United States, Russia, and, arguably, Canada, China, and the EU, Denmark's material capabilities are too feeble to make it a regional great power. Also, there is no evidence that the other Arctic players recognize Denmark as playing a special role in the Arctic that makes it one of the central regional states on par with Russia and the United States. The term “great power” is used to aggrandize Denmark's position in the High North to a domestic audience that will not scrutinize it further.

In sum, the Arctic is becoming moderately more important as one of three geographical priorities on par with deterring Russia in Eastern Europe and stabilization in the global south. It has thus yet to gain the status it has in Norway, where it is considered *the* main priority in Norwegian foreign policy. The references to interests and great power status are made for domestic consumption and they do not signal a significant shift in how Denmark approaches the Arctic.

Continued Cooperation

In spite of emphasizing “an effective pursuit of the Kingdom’s interests [in the High North]” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 35) and highlighting Denmark’s status as “an Arctic great power” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 86) – phrases that could indicate a shift towards more unilateral and bellicose regional policies – the new policy document advocates for a continuation of Denmark’s current cooperation-oriented Arctic policy. Denmark’s Arctic policy has thus far focused on four implicit priorities:

1. Use the Arctic to strengthen Western institutions and gain international influence
2. Preserve the current constitutional arrangement
3. Maintain an operational defense of Greenland
4. Support regional interstate cooperation

First, as outlined above, Denmark strives to use its Arctic presence to strengthen Western institutions, most notably NATO, and to gain international influence. Copenhagen facilitates an American presence on the geo-strategically important island, which in turn improves Denmark’s clout in Washington. Similarly, Denmark has been trying to become a gate-keeper to the Arctic for European and Asian governments interested in the region (Jakobson & Lee, 2013; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2014: 400–1 & 404–5).

The documents follow previous strategies in barely addressing *how* Denmark can gain influence via its Arctic engagement (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2014: 402–3). DDDTC highlights that Denmark has a strategic interest in “strengthening the Kingdom’s Arctic profile in order to maximize its influence on the regional development for the benefit of the region, the Kingdom, and the local population” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 37). It suggests that the Kingdom should improve its public diplomacy in the Arctic by hosting international conferences, including a conference about the Ilulissat initiative in 2018, and by striving to make Greenland a new hub for Arctic research (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 35), but it does not offer a wider strategy for gaining international influence. One can only speculate that such matters are considered taboo, as they would entail “giving away the diplomatic game plan” to international partners and addressing the fact that the three nations – Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland – do not necessarily share the same interests (the latter is discussed in detail below).

Second, Denmark can only pursue these interests as long as Greenland remains a member of the Kingdom of Denmark. Independence remains an ambition of all parties in the Greenlandic parliament, though the likelihood of it happening has declined in recent years as the island’s economy has stalled due to problems in the mining and energy industries. The Danish Arctic policy still aims to minimize tensions between Nuuk and Copenhagen by attracting foreign investments and providing government services to Greenland in order to show the Greenlanders that they benefit from the current constitutional arrangement.

The new reports include several minor initiatives that are meant to enhance Greenlandic development. The aforementioned initiative to make Greenland an Arctic science hub would also benefit Greenland economically as “experiences from ... Svalbard and New Zealand show that an increased influx of scientists and science funding has an economic effect, including in tourism and other industries” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 35). The report also suggests “examining

possible financial mechanisms” from various Danish sources and to “explore [international] Arctic investment opportunities, for instance through the establishment of an Arctic Investment Bank” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 35). Furthermore, the reports also suggest enhancing defense activities that also benefit Greenlandic society, including exploring the possibilities of strengthening the island’s communications infrastructure through satellite-based solutions and building an organizational structure for involving Greenlandic volunteers in Arctic Command’s activities (search-and-rescue and environmental protection) (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016; Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 35 & 83). The latter idea, which has been floated at least since 2008 and is based on previous attempts to involve the Greenlandic population in the Danish Armed Forces in the 1950s, is of minor operational value for the Danish Armed Forces and should instead be seen as an attempt to forge stronger bonds between the Danish authorities and Greenlandic society (P. H. Jensen, 2001: 142; Kristensen, Hoffmann, & Pedersen, 2013; Rahbek-Clemmensen, forthcoming).

Third, maintaining the Kingdom of Denmark entails having a credible defense force in place in order to survey the island and enforce Danish sovereignty over it. While operating in Greenland, the Danish Armed Forces also functions as Greenland’s coast guard by performing tasks such as search-and-rescue, fisheries inspection, and maritime pollution prevention. These coast guard operations are among the services provided for Greenland by the Danish government. The opening of the Arctic, due to globalization and climate change, increases the need for additional defense capabilities to handle increased traffic in the Greenlandic waters and adding capabilities, such as additional Knud Rasmussen Patrol Vessels or a permanent Challenger aircraft in Kangerlussuaq (Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009; Rahbek-Clemmensen, forthcoming).

Both reports recognize the need for an enhanced military presence in the High North and MDFAA makes three concrete suggestions for Arctic Command in addition to the aforementioned voluntary schemes for Greenlanders (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016; Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 35, 72 & 83). First, MDFAA suggests giving Arctic Command access to satellite surveillance capabilities from commercial sources, the European Space Agency, and in cooperation with other nations, such as the US, Canada, the UK, France, and Germany (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 11–12 & 222–27). Second, it also proposes enhancing the presence of existing capabilities, including a Challenger aircraft and C-130 transport aircraft (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 11–12). Finally, it recommends stationing one of the existing Iver Huitfeldt class frigates in the North Atlantic for two months in the summer period (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 12 & 198). Fighter aircraft (currently F-16 and most likely F-35 in the future) may occasionally operate in the Arctic, but the report is careful not to specify how often, if at all, this would occur (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 192–93). These suggestions signal a wish to enhance operational presence on the cheap. MDFAA does not specify new presence levels, which gives defense planners room to scale down presence later to facilitate operational as well as fiscal concerns. Furthermore, alternative, and more expensive, capabilities, such as a fourth Knud Rasmussen patrol vessel, anti-submarine capabilities, icebreakers, and large drones (such as Global Hawk) are either rejected or bracketed for now (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 188–99).

Finally, preserving the status quo also entails avoiding political and military tensions in the High North and the Danish Arctic strategy is consequently focused on maintaining the current cooperative order.

As a small power, Denmark's presence in the North Atlantic has historically been vulnerable to geopolitical shocks and the whims of greater powers. For instance, the Second World War enabled Iceland to become fully independent and challenged Danish sovereignty over Greenland (Bertelsen, 2014; Lidegaard, 1996). An Arctic conflict – say between Russia and the United States – would strain the Danish Armed Forces and could make Denmark more dependent on American protection. The complex political relationship within the Kingdom of Denmark makes it vulnerable to foreign political-military harassment, which could show that Denmark is unable to enforce its sovereignty over Greenland. Danish policymakers have long recognized that all Arctic states seem dedicated to regional cooperation and the Danish Arctic policy has subsequently focused on engaging Russia and strengthening regional institutions to maintain the status quo (Government of Denmark et al., 2011; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2014).

The new reports continue this benign view of the region by arguing that it remains “an area where it has been possible to continue the dialogue and cooperation with Russia” and where “it is in Europe and Denmark's interest to have Russia on board when establishing durable solutions” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 34). In general,

All Arctic coastal states have to strengthen their military presence in order to enforce their sovereignty and provide government services as a consequence of increased civilian activity. The heightened Russian military presence in the Arctic should not, in of itself, be seen as a militarization of the Arctic, but partly as a legitimate wish to enforce sovereignty, partly as a broader strategic buildup vis-à-vis the US and NATO (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 72).

The reports suggest that Denmark should continue to strengthen existing cooperation and institution through concrete initiatives, such as the aforementioned satellite cooperation scheme, the 2015 declaration concerning high seas fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean, and the Arctic Council's work in general (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 36).

MDFAA also supports a conciliatory Arctic approach. Danish defense planners have for long feared that misunderstandings or clumsy signaling can spark a security dilemma. This fear has influenced the writing of the new defense report, which explicitly notes that

“other Arctic nations ... pay significant attention to the Danish analysis [and they hope it] ... will not add to the militarization of the Arctic. ... The report will send signals to other nations about the Kingdom's dedication to and prioritization of Arctic questions and Arctic security” (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2016: 30).

Consequently, the Danish authorities have been in close dialogue with the other Arctic nations to ensure that these new reports are not seen as escalatory steps. Furthermore, the fact that MDFAA recommendations – satellite cooperation, intermittent stationing of surveillance aircraft and frigates – almost entirely focus on civilian coast guard operations underscore the importance assigned to signaling among Danish defense planners.

Two recommendations warrant special attention. First, DDDTC suggests that “the increased military presence and activity” necessitates “an international structure for handling security

questions in the Arctic”, which “could work as a room for security policy dialogue in case of tense periods” and create “a platform for additional trust-building measures in the region, such as advance advertisement of military movements or expansions of military infrastructure” (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 36). This idea has been floated elsewhere to no avail (Conley & Rohloff, 2015) and it seems to have very little support within the Danish civil service, which regards it as unrealistic to set up such a structure in the midst of a foreign policy crisis with Russia. Furthermore, one could argue that the current set-up lowers tensions as it allows Arctic diplomats to meet and have informal conversations about the bigger issues in the corridors without having to address the elephant in the room that is military security. These views are shared by many High North experts and can be found within the halls of government in most Arctic nations (Groenning, 2016; Keil, 2016). It seems unlikely that Denmark will push for such a structure in the coming years.

Second, DDDTC also recommends that Denmark and the other coastal states settle the ongoing continental shelf claims sooner rather than later. The report highlights that the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf will present its evaluation of Russia’s continental shelf claim long before it evaluates the Danish claim, implying that this could lead to political complications. The report argues that Denmark and the other Arctic coastal states should “explore the possibilities for identifying other possible – and faster models [sic] – for a solution”, which might be possible as it “is in the interest of both the Kingdom and the other Arctic coastal states to ensure that the drawing of boundaries in the Arctic is settled through negotiations based on the Law of the Sea“ (Taksøe-Jensen, 2016b: 37). Some Copenhagen experts and policymakers fear that the continental shelf question could become a hot button issue in domestic Russian politics, forcing Moscow to take a harsh stance. Domestic rumblings in Russia after the 2010 Barents Sea agreement and the 2014 Danish continental shelf claim can be seen as evidence of potential opposition arising from within Russia. Some commentators have criticized the Danish claim for being unnecessarily large, arguing that it might spark tensions in Russo-Danish relations (Breum, 2015), and DDDTC indicates that Denmark may be interested in compromising with Russia and Canada.

In sum, the new reports largely continue the overall goals of the cooperation-oriented Danish Arctic policy, but they do move it forward by specifying how these ends can be achieved through specific measures. They indicate that Denmark will try to develop a satellite and communications partnership with other Arctic states and that Copenhagen is willing to settle its overlapping continental shelf through a compromise with Russia and Canada.

New Tensions between Denmark and Greenland

Though the content of the new reports are crucial for understanding the development of Danish thinking about the Arctic, perhaps the most important development has occurred outside the halls of government, as Greenlandic policymakers reacted harshly to what they saw as a Danish centralization of power within the Kingdom of Denmark. The tensions between Denmark and Greenland (and, to a lesser extent, the Faroe Islands) essentially spring from the use of the term “the Kingdom of Denmark” in the new reports, which conceals the fundamental tension between the three nations. The Kingdom of Denmark is riven with tensions between a Danish political culture that emphasizes an overlap between the Danish state and the Danish nation and

the need to contain several polities (Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland) within one constitutional unit. Danish political discourse rarely distinguishes between citizenship and membership of the Danish nation. Denmark is seen as the home of a specific cultural group – the Danes – and although immigration and globalization challenge this view, being a citizen entails not just adopting a political identity, but also entails learning Danish and adopting certain cultural customs (Hansen, 2003). This identity constellation has always made it difficult to find room for Greenland and the Faroe Islands within the Danish state and most Danes think of them as separate polities that might as well be independent. The new papers implicitly try to articulate the Kingdom of Denmark as a multicultural state that contains several nations, but they struggle to get this vision accepted in the Danish public and in the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

Like the 2011 Danish Arctic Strategy before them, the new reports refer to the Kingdom of Denmark as a unitary actor, thus ignoring that Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland sometimes have different and conflicting interests and goals. Greenlandic politicians have consequently criticized DDDTC for being “a report that sees through Danish eyes” and ignoring “Greenlandic interests” (Nyvold, 2016; Sørensen, 2016).

The Greenlandic criticism represents a new development in Danish-Greenlandic relations, as politicians from Nuuk seem to have realized that Denmark retains for itself the right to speak on behalf of all three nations, thus potentially subsuming Nuuk and Thorshavn’s interests under those of Copenhagen. No such criticism has previously been voiced when foreign policy documents referred to the Kingdom as a unitary actor. For instance, when the Kingdom’s Arctic Strategy was released in 2011, the Greenlandic premier backed it publicly at several occasions and made it a cornerstone of his tenure (Anonymous, 2011b; Espersen, Kleist & Johannesen, 2011; Kleist, 2011; Schultz-Lorentzen, 2011). The only opposition criticism focused on the lack of resources dedicated to Greenland, not on the notion that a unitary Kingdom could represent all three nations (Anonymous, 2011a).

The criticism is a symptom of how the enhanced importance of the Arctic is altering the internal dynamics of the Kingdom of Denmark. As the Arctic became a foreign policy priority for Denmark, the importance of the bilateral relationship between Denmark and Greenland declined, with Denmark becoming more focused on forging bi- and multilateral ties with the other regional states to the detriment of Greenland. Denmark’s lack of interest for Arctic politics had previously given Greenland the opportunity to have an independent diplomatic role. For instance, the Greenlandic premier represented the Kingdom of Denmark several times in the Arctic Council before 2009, as the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs could not find the time to attend the meetings (Rahbek-Clemmensen, forthcoming). The foreign minister, of course, insisted on retaking his seat at the table when Denmark came to see the Arctic Council as a crucial foreign policy venue, thus removing one of Greenland’s few foreign policy arenas.

As Denmark began to focus on Arctic politics, it instead became commonplace to view the “Kingdom of Denmark” as a unitary actor. Before 2009, Danish policy documents readily referred to Denmark and Greenland as separate cooperating entities. For instance, the 2008 Arctic Strategy Draft, a failed attempt to write a Danish Arctic Strategy, which nevertheless defined Danish Arctic policy from 2008 to 2011, focused on “Danish-Greenlandic cooperation” and aimed to “support and strengthen Greenland’s development towards increased

independence” (Home Rule of Greenland & Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 5; Rahbek-Clemmensen, forthcoming). Such references to the different entities of the Kingdom and to the prospect of Greenlandic independence disappeared, when the Arctic Strategy was published a few years later (Rahbek-Clemmensen, forthcoming). Though the two documents are of roughly equal length, the 2008 Arctic Strategy Draft uses the term only 35 times, while it appeared 191 times in the 2011 Arctic Strategy (conversely, the 2008 Strategy Draft referred to “Greenland” more often than the 2011 Arctic Strategy).²

Greenlandic resistance to the Danish take-over takes two forms that both utilize ambiguities within the constitutional arrangement to their advantage. The moderate IA party insists that DDDTC is a *Danish*, but not a Greenlandic, document and that Greenland should write its own foreign policy analysis to determine its own interests (Veirum & Jakobsen, 2016). In contrast, the nationalist Siumut party (which currently leads Greenland’s government) combines a critique of Danish brashness with an insistence on making its voice heard in Danish foreign, security, and defense policy. If Denmark speaks on behalf of all three nations, Siumut’s argument seems to go, the two minor nations should get a say in Danish foreign, security, and defense policy. For instance, Aleqa Hammond has interfered in the debate about the upcoming Danish fighter aircraft procurement, where she has been very critical of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, “a very expensive plane that is not useful in fulfilling the Danish Armed Forces’ obligations in the Arctic”. Procuring the F-35 would signal that Denmark is “turning away from the Arctic and prioritizing its effort and its resources in other parts of the world [, sending] ... a very clear signal to Greenland” (Hammond, 2015). This argument aims to make the Danes get a taste of their own medicine: if the Kingdom of Denmark is a unitary actor, then Danish foreign and defense policy should reflect Greenlandic interests. Both of these responses – rejection (IA) or cooption (Siumut) – will lead to tensions in the coming years and it seems likely that the foreign, security, and defense policy of the Kingdom will become a new arena for Danish-Greenlandic arm-wrestling.

To be sure, though these tensions will not lead to the demise of the current constitutional set-up – the Faroe Islands and Greenland remain economically dependent on Denmark – they show that the challenges facing Denmark go beyond the policies devised within the government. Copenhagen policymakers offer bureaucratic reports that slowly push new measures that make a marginal difference for Greenland without allocating the funds necessary to make a tangible difference. The tensions between the three nations can only be addressed by clarifying the division of labor within the Kingdom to outline how Greenland and the Faroe Islands can be heard when it comes to common policy questions that are within Copenhagen’s purview. This would entail challenging existing notions of citizenship and nationhood within Danish national identity that can only be done through a political intervention. Denmark’s current policy is to ignore the fact that there are ambiguities and then use these same ambiguities to monopolize control over common issues, while hoping that Greenland remains too penniless to leave the Kingdom. This policy may work in the long term, but perhaps there would be more to gain by thinking out of the box and rethinking the fundamental mechanics of the current set-up.

Conclusion

The two new policy initiatives – the foreign policy report and the defense report – largely represent a continuation of existing trends in Danish Arctic policy. The High North continues to become a more important part of the Danish foreign policy agenda and it is part of a general priority shift from stability operations in the global south to regions where a resurgent Russia can hurt Danish interests. The documents continue the cooperation-oriented Danish Arctic policy and focus on strengthening the Kingdom's High North profile, increasing Greenlandic development, adding capabilities to the Danish Armed Forces in the region, and building ties to other Arctic states. They move Danish Arctic policy forward by adding details and analysis to existing ideas that can then be taken up in coming political negotiations. The reports are thus just one more incremental step in the Danish policy process – the real test is the upcoming budget and defense negotiations, where the importance of the Arctic in Danish foreign policy and the shape of Danish Arctic policy can be solidified if funds are allocated for the High North.

Perhaps the most important development in Danish Arctic policy is occurring outside of the reports themselves, as a fault line seems to be opening between how Danish and Greenlandic policymakers understand the division of labor within the Kingdom of Denmark's foreign policy process. Greenlandic politicians have begun to use different strategies to resist Denmark's insistence that the Kingdom of Denmark is a unitary actor. The current set-up can continue to function as long as Greenland remains fiscally dependent on Denmark, though tensions are likely to cause awkward episodes and clashes as Nuuk and Copenhagen struggle over final say. Reducing these tensions would entail going beyond bureaucratic reports and rethinking how the Kingdom of Denmark works – a task that requires political will, which currently seems absent in Copenhagen.

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Notes

1. The Kingdom of Denmark is the constitutional unit that comprises of Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland.
2. The 2008 Strategy Draft is 18,200 words, while the 2011 Arctic Strategy is 25,660 words.

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