



The Arctic: A New Model for Global Cooperation

**Speech by
the President of Iceland
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We have had a very interesting conference, starting yesterday with a brilliant opening speech by John Kerry. He analyzed the issues in a profound way and I hope, during his chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate, he will follow through.

During the discussion last night and this morning we have primarily concentrated on the challenges, the crisis, to some extent the failures and the urgent tasks within the Arctic. That was the nature of the discussion. Of course there are many such challenges; improvements and reforms that can and must be undertaken.

But I beg this afternoon to take a different line. I aim to give you a more positive picture of what has happened in the Arctic in the last ten or fifteen years; why I believe that what we have reached in the Arctic, despite the failures and the shortcomings, is in many ways a quite remarkable model of how cooperation can replace conflict, how enemies can come together in a positive way, how we can open international institutions up to a democratic dialog and scientifically based policy-making.

When most countries were preoccupied by growing terror, fear, confrontation and wars in other parts of the world, the Arctic has emerged as a new fascinating model of international cooperation.

In order to realize how extraordinary this achievement really is, let's go back twenty years. Let's go back to 1990 when the Cold War still dominated every international encounter, when NATO and the Warsaw Pact still marshaled against each other the most formidable arsenal ever collected in mankind's history. The destructive power of the weaponry was beyond imagination.

A few years before this, hundreds of thousands and even millions of people had demonstrated in Europe and the United States against the cruise missiles and other military installations in the Western World.

It was a period when the Arctic had become one of the most, if not *the* most, militarized area in the world; with destructive capability of nuclear submarines, intercontinental missiles, military aircrafts, navies, armies, air forces; military bases ranging from Alaska across Canada into Greenland, to my own country, Iceland, and onwards into the Murmansk area and the Soviet Union.

For my generation, the Arctic was the military center of the Cold War, where there was for decades a buildup of military strength, where the intellectual capability, the financial strength, the military strategies of the superpowers and their allies concentrated on doing more and more. Twenty years ago, that was the situation in the Arctic.

What I am going to describe to you here today is almost a polar opposite of this picture. An area which has become one of the most cooperative models we can find anywhere in the world; where the former superpowers that drove the Cold War with all their military strength have become pillars of cooperation. It is a remarkable demonstration, showing that in a relatively short time you can transform the worst of enemies into the best of partners.

What does the Arctic look like today? Instead of being like I described before, it has now moved center-stage in constructive cooperation of how to use the extraordinary natural resources in the Arctic, how to plan for the opening of new sea routes, linking Asia to Europe and America in a revolutionary way, transforming global trade and shipping as the Suez Canal did 100 years ago; measuring climate change in a way that should alarm the rest of the world to what is happening.

In addition, it has become what I have sometimes called 'a new intellectual frontier' of research, science, discoveries and scholarly

cooperation. Twenty years ago, there was hardly any scholarly cooperation except for a few individuals on the American side and the Russian side and the few Norwegians who cooperated with a few Russians. This area was almost completely empty with respect to constructive scientific cooperation. Now, it has become one of the most fascinating, vibrant areas of new knowledge and science.

The previous confrontation has been replaced by a new political system which I decided a few years ago – when I was in St. Petersburg, with Mead Treadwell and the late Governor Hickel, one of those great visionaries of the Arctic and the North – to call ‘the New North’ in order to distinguish it from the previous times.

Within this New North we now have a series of regional organizations that have been created in the last ten to twenty years providing an interlocked system of co-operation embracing the entire area from Russia across the Baltic regions into the Nordic countries, across the Atlantic to Iceland and Greenland into Canada and to Alaska.

In addition this new form of cooperation has utilized the federal structures of Russia, Canada and the United States to bring regional, provincial and state governments in those three federal countries into direct cooperation with the smaller nation states in the Arctic regions: my own country and Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark. New forms of diplomatic cooperation have been created.

To some extent, we could argue that in the last 10-15 years, the Arctic has turned into a fascinating laboratory of new politics, of new methods of dealing with conflicts and tasks, inviting provincial and sub-state bodies into an equal partnership with the established nation-states. This would previously have been unthinkable, when diplomatic rules determined that you could only interact with each other through the capitals. Now, I can go to Alaska and have all kinds of cooperation with Mead Treadwell and the Governor and anybody else without even informing Washington. Twenty years ago that would have been a major diplomatic blunder! I can even go to regions within Russia and have direct cooperation and dialog with Governors of respective regions with very little encounter with Moscow. I can go to Greenland, which is still a part of the Danish Kingdom, and engage in constructive cooperation with the new government. So can the Government of Alaska. So can the different regions in Russia. This is a new type of diplomatic and political encounter which I think the oldest school in America studying diplomacy, the Fletcher School, should definitely make a core of its curriculum: a new type of diplomacy in the 21st century!

In addition, this new political system has become more democratic than any other international network. I know that is a strong statement. But what it involves is that organizations of citizens, of indigenous people, non-governmental organizations, have been formally invited to present their views and have a role in the policy-making formulations at the highest table where the diplomats and the foreign ministers come together. I don't know of any other international organization apart from the Arctic Council that invites indigenous people to have a formal role in the decision-making process. On the contrary, almost all other international organizations are based on the principle that only ministers and diplomats have the right to say anything. A lot of them would function differently if they would follow the democratic way of the Arctic Council.

This political innovation, which somehow was not planned but has gradually come about, in one way or another, has created a system where the ground rule is that anybody can work with anybody else. People at any level, whether they are in local government or regional government, whether they are in universities or non-governmental organizations, can claim a role and start operating with respect to any institution in the Arctic. We can do it across national boundaries and across institutional boundaries. The formal role of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, of the Sámi Council, of the Association of the Indigenous Minorities in the Far North Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation and their direct interaction with the representatives of the States are a concrete proof of how this functions.

This new system, which is still in evolution – I have only given a description of how it functions at this moment – is now the framework for a decision-making process which will be tested on some of the most crucial issues of our times. For example: How will the rich energy resources be managed, how will they be utilized, how will they be organized, in order to make sure that their utilization does not have a destructive effect on the environment, either locally or globally? How will the development of the new sea routes, linking America and Europe to Asia in a new way, be planned? The regulations, the harbor facilities, the hubs, all the infrastructure that has to be in place in order to make these sea routes effective. How will the Arctic Council and the Arctic countries fulfill their role as barometers of climate change, as Senator Kerry mentioned yesterday? It is probably the biggest role that the Arctic can play in the climate change debate in the United States. How will sustainable human development, especially of the indigenous people in the Arctic regions, be guaranteed? How will we treat the legal challenges when we have to resolve the conflict created by the positions, property and culture that the indigenous people have celebrated long before the states that now sit in the Arctic Council were established? How will they be dealt with in respect to the issues and the tasks that the various Arctic governments want to fulfill?

All of this has in an extraordinarily short time, made the Arctic a fascinating new political system; intellectually fascinating for universities, research institutions and scholars; a very fertile field. It is vibrant with a dynamic discussions and dialog.

Last year I found myself attending conferences on the Arctic in Alaska, in Russia, in Finland, in my own country Iceland, in Greenland, and also in Brussels, close to the EU headquarters. In addition to that, we had hundreds of people, young and old, from all over the Arctic, coming together for a dialog of this type. It is a concrete proof that not only are the diplomats and the ministers coming together in the Arctic Council to determine the future of the Arctic and exchange information. We have an extraordinary network of players in this area that didn't exist ten or fifteen years ago.

As somebody said at the conference this morning, probably the Arctic is the area with the most extensive networks that we now see in operation. Despite all the difficulties, shortcomings and challenges which I can also talk about – and we have talked about since 8.30 this morning – the Arctic and the North has succeeded in creating a new model.

What are the key elements in explaining how this model came into being; its characteristics? What is this Arctic model? How can it be used in other global areas, global conflicts and global cooperation? Let me mention six elements in this model.

First of all, the Arctic Council was blessed up to now by being non-bureaucratic. There was no secretariat, there were no officials. It was under a rotating presidency held in turn by each country. When Iceland had the chair, we had to perform well in order to justify our chairmanship. When Canada took over, they had to do the same. Now, however, it has been decided to establish a permanent secretariat. I am still unsure whether this is a good thing, but I'm absolutely convinced that the non-bureaucratic nature, the political dynamic of letting each country carry the entire responsibility for two years and then another country, was one of the reasons why the model became successful.

The second element: It turned out to be democratic, inviting the indigenous people and other non-governmental organizations to be a part of the dialog, to some extent to have a seat at the table.

The third element is new diplomatic norms. Not only can ministers speak to ministers, or ambassadors to ambassadors, but anybody can speak to anybody else. The President of Iceland can work with the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska or anybody else within this region. This is a

completely new arsenal of diplomatic exchanges in order to create positive results.

The fourth element is the emphasis on science-based policies, the emphasis that before you take decisions which affect the Arctic, you let the scientific community do their work. This was brought out very clearly with the Arctic Climate Assessment Report that came out in 2004. This was in fact a historic document on climate change, created by about 80 scientists who came from all the Arctic countries, a remarkable form of scientific cooperation. The same year, the Human Development Report brought social scientists, economists, and others together to analyze the need for economic and social policies in the Arctic. And now, under the Arctic Council's auspices, these two reports are being redone in the same way to emphasize the science-based policies. In addition, the University of the Arctic was established; a network of over 100 universities and research institutions in the Arctic countries; a formalized way to bring science and knowledge into the policy-making process. I could mention other evidence of this, e.g. the Northern Research Forum, which was established more than ten years ago.

The fifth element is the equality of partners. Russia and the United States agreed to sit down with Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden, and Canada, on the basis of equality in the decision-making process, leaving outside the room their superpower status, their historic position during the first half of the 21st century; agreed to sit down on equal terms with any state and player in the Arctic region. No Arctic Security Council with a veto power, but an equality of partnership for everybody.

The sixth element is the future orientation of the tasks. Everybody who is dealing with the Arctic realizes that the cooperation must be about the future, how the Arctic would be transformed into a new area both in terms of its own natural characteristics as well as the human encounters. Very few international organizations have been as future-oriented: climate change, the opening up of new sea routes, organizing search and rescue, or now preparing protocols on oil spills.

The end result of this has been a model of cooperation in the Arctic. It is firmly established. I believe nothing can shake it now. It will continue to grow because every partner, every state, every organization, every region has seen the benefit of this constructive cooperation. It has replaced, as I said at the beginning, the monumental conflict that for decades characterized the Arctic as the most militarized zone in the world.

The result is also a galvanization of non-governmental organizations, of public movements, of indigenous people, of scientists and researchers, bringing them into the decision-making process in a way that you cannot

find in any other part of the world. It is beginning to result in formal agreements like the search and rescue agreement which was signed in Nuuk and the new protocol on oil spills that is being negotiated.

Look back twenty years and reflect on at the agreement that Russia, the United States and the rest of us signed last year on search and rescue. Nobody at the height of the Cold War would have believed such a development possible. It is an inspiring proof that the world can indeed change in a positive way.

The Arctic has become the area where Russia and the United States cooperate in a constructive way. I don't know of any other area of international relations where in the last 10-15 years Russia and the United States have cooperated so constructively, in such a harmony, and good spirit. That is a very important lesson for the rest of the world as well as the United States and Russia.

Although we have conflicts in the Middle East, or in Asia, or wherever, they are nowhere on the scale of the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, in the second half of the 20th century. So, to have this harmonious relationship, this constructive engagement between Russia and the United States, is also great, not just for the Arctic, but as a model for other areas.

If I may say so, I think universities and research institutions, as well as the political establishment, both in Washington and elsewhere in the US, have not really drawn conclusions from this very fundamental change or analyzed it sufficiently.

Let me conclude by coming to the final part of what I mentioned in my opening: How is this new model in the Arctic having an impact in other parts of the world? Or is it just an isolated, exclusive Arctic club where we can celebrate what we have done? Is this somehow a model for people in other parts of the world?

The interesting thing is: This Arctic model has already become a signpost for others. Let me give you a few examples.

I mentioned the rights of the indigenous people, their formal role in the decision-making process and the opening up of the Arctic Council to a democratic input from the indigenous people. There are indigenous people all over the world. They are in Asia, in Africa, in Central America, in Latin America. Many of them are already looking at the Arctic Council, the relationship between the Arctic Council and the indigenous people in the North, and asking themselves the question: 'Why can't we have a similar

empowerment, a similar role for the indigenous people in our part of the world?

This was brought home to me some years ago in Bangladesh, when we were moving on a small boat observing the potential effect of rising sea levels on Bangladesh. The Minister for the Environment, who happened also to be a king of a tribe of 400,000 people – that's more than my own nation – was well informed about the Arctic Council and the legal framework of the indigenous people and their detailed role in the policy making. It was an experience I will never forget: to sit with him in Bangladesh, sailing in the rising sea water, and having a detailed discussion on the democratic framework and the indigenous people in the Arctic Council. He was asking himself the question: 'Why does not my tribe of 400,000 people have the same right to a policy-making process in my country as the Inuit and the Sámi people have with respect to the Arctic Council?'

The second evidence is the so-called 'Third Pole' cooperation in the Himalaya region. Although we have not mentioned it once, yesterday or today, the ice-dependent world is not just in the Arctic or in Antarctica; there are thousands and thousands of glaciers in the Himalaya region. Almost all of the big rivers in China and India depend on the water resources in the Himalayas.

In the last three years, for the first time, glacial scientists and other natural scientists from India, China, Nepal, Pakistan and Bhutan have come together to gradually, hesitantly try to examine what is happening to the glaciers in the Himalayas. In Iceland last September, we organized the meeting of the Third Pole Himalayan research community and the Open Assembly of the Northern Research Forum. This brought together, for the first time in history, representatives of the Arctic, both scientists and policy-makers, and the scientific and the policy-making community of the Himalayas. It was fascinating to see the effects of the stories that the representatives of the indigenous people from the Arctic and the social scientists and the economists from Arctic were telling glaciologists and other representatives from China and India; that they must bring the indigenous people of the Himalayan region into the dialog.

The model of the Arctic cooperation is already having impact on how people think in China, India, Nepal, and other Himalayan countries; now they deal with the threat of the retreating glaciers, the fundamental changes in their water systems, how this is affecting the life and the prosperity and the future of the people in the villages and up in the hills and the mountains of the Himalayas.

I have proposed in dialog with people from the Himalayan region that it might be a good for India and China and the smaller countries in the Himalayas to take the entire model of the Arctic Council and plant it in the Himalayan region. Where we had Russia and the United States, they have China and India; where we had smaller countries like Iceland and Greenland, they have Nepal and Bhutan.

It will be fascinating to see how far, in the next five years or so, this dialog between the Arctic and the Himalayas will have an impact on cooperation between India and China and the other countries in the Himalayan region, a region which now in our times is probably, like the Arctic was twenty years ago, an area where the threat of military confrontation still exists. If that was to be the only contribution that the Arctic Council could make to the global community: to bring the military confrontation in the Himalayas into a constructive cooperation on the retreating of the glaciers and how the changing water systems are impacting the life of the local people and the tribes and indigenous people of the Himalayas, it would be the justification for everything we have done.

I know I have been overly optimistic. I could also give a critical lecture on the Arctic Council if you invite me to come here again. But I think it is important that here in the United States there is a growing realization of how this new model is already in existence, that there should be analysis, both in the political community and in the academic community, of this process; how the role of the United States will be one of the key factors of the development of this model in the next 5-10 years.

If we have moved our cooperation from military confrontation twenty years ago – and that’s a very short time – into what we have today, imagine what we can do in the next 5-10 years if we follow the six principles that I listed as the fundamental basis of this new model and use it as an inspiration for people in other parts of the world. We will then do a great service, not just to the people in the Arctic, but also to the global community.