

Cover Story

Cover Story



The New Arctic

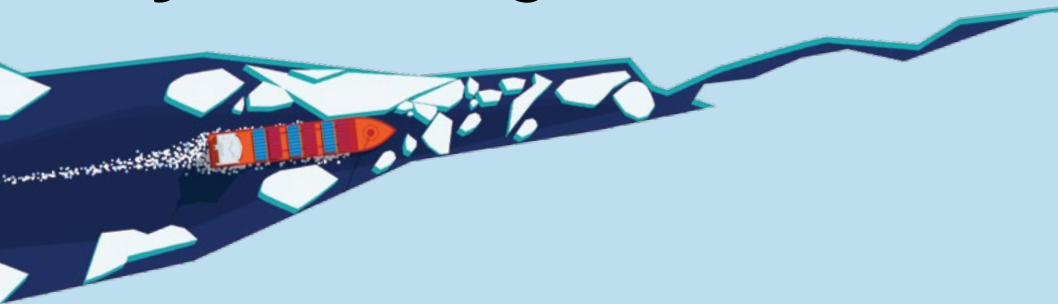
Climate Change and the Latest Arena for Great-Power Competition

The Arctic is fast emerging as a region of the world that is attracting greater attention on issues as varied as international shipping, resource extraction and even geopolitical ambitions. It remains, of course, at the center of discussion about the threat of climate change.

ESSAYS BY	
<u>Oran R. Young</u>	8
<u>Marc Lanteigne</u>	16
<u>Robert W. Corell</u>	22
<u>Tatiana Mitrova</u>	28
<u>David Balton</u>	34
<u>Jong Deog Kim, Sungwoo Lee, Minsu Kim & Jeehye Kim</u>	40
<u>Yang Jian</u>	44
<u>Bernard Funston</u>	50
<u>Sara Olsvig</u>	56

We Live in the Arctic: Inside Greenland Looking Out

By Sara Olsvig



The issues surrounding the Arctic are enormous in scope and involve topics as diverse as climate change, geopolitics, shipping, fisheries, extractive industries such as natural gas and the region's economic future.

What these discussions often ignore is the fact that the Arctic is also home to approximately four million people, many of them Indigenous peoples, and their views are an essential part of this tableau. A native of Greenland, Sara Olsvig provides a portrait of the struggles facing its people.

THERE IS NOW considerable literature on the Arctic — its societies, its ecology, the impacts of climate change and political-security issues. But most is presented by outsiders whose thinking reflects an “outside in” perspective. In contrast to Antarctica, the Arctic is home to more than four million people, many of whom are Indigenous peoples who have flourished there for millennia. The residents of Arctic communities face a range of environmental and socio-economic challenges in a rapidly changing world. Peoples of the Arctic have built up an extensive body of knowledge in the course of finding ways to live successfully under Arctic conditions, and today many Indigenous peoples are having to deal with the massive impact of outsiders on life in the Arctic. But the outside world cannot be ignored.

In this essay, I want to describe some of the efforts on the inside, drawing on my experience as a Greenlandic Inuk and an active participant in public affairs, with emphasis on my own country. I will focus on three distinct themes: the major concerns of Greenlandic citizens in their individual and community life; Greenland's future as a distinct society establishing its own social contract, values, aspirations and economic future; and relations between Greenland now and in the future with the outside world, including not only Denmark but other countries of Europe, North America and Asia.

Challenges Facing Arctic Communities

For the average Greenlander, and for many people in other Arctic communities, the highest priorities are local in nature: jobs and opportunity, access



Characteristic colorful wooden houses in a suburb of Greenland's capital city, Nuuk, near the southern tip of the country.

to health, education and other public service infrastructure, and protecting our environment, culture and traditions in a rapidly changing world.

Greenland has inherited and chosen a Nordic welfare model. The government is expected to deliver a high level of public services equitably in education, healthcare, housing and basic human needs and seeks to do so in very challenging circumstances. The population of about 56,000 is spread out over more than 70 settlements scattered along hundreds of miles of coastline, not connected to one another by road. Nuuk, the capital, is home to a third of the citizens, 18,000 inhabitants, but some settlements have as few as 50 residents or less.

Despite the Nordic welfare model, the inequities are highly visible. Access to healthcare, for example, is obviously very different for those in small settlements as compared to Nuuk or other larger towns. From the age of 12 or 13, children in a small settlement must leave to pursue their education in a bigger town. Senior citizens may not have acceptable housing. Water, sanitation and even daily necessities may be lacking.

How Greenland handles this inequality will be an urgent concern in the years to come. Today, the government seeks to provide services to the

places where people choose to live. But consider the example of food and modern necessities. Greenland has very good infrastructure to ensure that daily necessities are provided to all towns and settlements, but not necessarily year around, especially for remote places where ice may block access for supply ships for months. Air freight is extremely expensive.

Traditionally, hunting and fishing helped supplement food supplies and these practices are integrated into the everyday lives of many families as part of the culture and traditions. Yet climate change affects the behavior of sea mammals and has made it perilous to travel on sea ice during parts of the year. As a result, some families and small communities face extremely high food prices and food security issues.

Housing is another serious problem. In larger towns, housing prices have skyrocketed and there are no controls on the price of houses and apartment rents. In 2017, the most recent year on record, there were 878 persons with no permanent housing in Greenland.¹ Since this is the Arctic, the availability of housing and its costs are serious issues. All the socio-economic areas — housing, health, education, and jobs — are interconnected. The authorities aspire to provide opportunities to be employed so that people



Iceberg spotting near Illulissat on Greenland's western coast. Tourism is an increasingly important economic driver for the country.

can afford to rent or own their own homes. There are debates about the best way to address these issues; one thing is certain — housing is a fundamental human right of particular importance in the Arctic, and that right is challenged.

As in other parts of the Arctic, Greenlandic communities experience serious stress. In a relatively short period, people experienced colonial administration, then decolonization and now the struggle to build sustainable communities in an era of self-governance. The suicide rate stands at about 80 per 100,000, one of the highest in the world.² Local communities struggle with other social ailments including alcoholism, substance abuse and abuse of children or family members. These issues have proved difficult for the authorities and politicians to handle. How do you talk to people about potential suicide or sexual abuse of children? How do you create programs that work? Greenland's social services have developed methods and programs that result in tremendous change and it helps that a general survey of Greenland's population is done every four years. The latest survey showed correlations between suicide and peoples' answers to questions about alcohol abuse or the abuse they experienced as children that may help us fashion

preventive measures. But more programs that reach every settlement and child on the ground are needed. There is no silver bullet, and all Arctic communities must address such problems in a variety of ways.

The Future of the Greenlandic Nation

In Greenland and in some other Arctic nations including the self-governing territories in Canada such as Nunavut, a high degree of self-determination compared to many Indigenous peoples around the world has been achieved. As a self-governing society, Greenland itself bears the responsibility for grappling with the big challenges outlined above. This brings us to my second theme regarding the nature and future of Greenland as an autonomous society.

Greenland has long been part of the Kingdom of Denmark in legal and political terms. But it is also a distinct society with its own history, and the people of Greenland are recognized as a distinct people according to international law. When I am asked whether or when Greenland should be independent, I cannot give a clear answer, but I strongly believe this is a struggle that must be continued in order to define the society we want. Greenland has come a long way since the 1950s, when Denmark sought assimilation and designated Greenland as a county

¹ According to information from Greenland municipalities in connection with a ministerial answer to the Greenland parliament in 2017: ina.gl/documents/para3637/2017/svar/2017_230_hjemloese_angerlasimaffeqangitsut_aacl_svar.pdf

² According to statistics from the Police of Greenland, 2017.

³ See more on the Constitutional Commission's website, tunngavik.gl

⁴ See more on the Greenland government's website, naalakkersuisut.gl/en/About-government-of-greenland/About-Greenland

of Denmark, giving Greenland no voice in critical issues affecting the country's future, including the security relationship with the United States. Under the Home Rule Act of 1979 and the Self-Government Act of 2009, Greenland achieved a high degree of self-determination, and now has the right to freely initiate and pursue this process, including the preparation of a constitution for an independent Greenland. A Constitutional Commission is working on a draft for public discussion.³

This necessitates a clear thinking about the values on which the people of Greenland want to build the Greenlandic society. What kind of society will Greenland be in the future, and what fundamental rights and freedoms should its citizens enjoy? Does Greenland want to retain any link to Denmark? Does it make sense to become a nation-state given the small population and economic circumstances? Are other options available as the world moves beyond being organized exclusively around states? There are at this point no clear answers to these questions and the process of discussing these issues is necessary.

When the process of drafting a constitution started, politicians debated whether to produce one draft for a future independent Greenland or two, with the second draft applicable within the Danish realm. I always advocated a single draft, because the Danish constitution has not been updated since 1953 and does not envision two self-governing nations (Greenland and the Faroes) with their own parliaments as part of a single legal system. It has now been agreed that the commission will work on a single draft and the current schedule calls for it to be presented within the next couple of years.

Whatever course is chosen, it will be critical to develop Greenland's economy. It is essential to build on the strong fisheries. But since they account for 90 percent of our exports, there is an urgent need to diversify the economy.⁴ Are there other sectors to encourage? Yes, tourism, but not mass tourism. Yes, minerals, but which minerals and how? It is important to choose carefully.

In such debates, innovative thinking is essential. At this critical time, fostering creativity and entrepreneurship is vital. Creative people are often deterred by those who are committed to traditional ways of doing things, and to diversify the Greenland

economy, new paths must be found. This requires expanding horizons as a basis for finding economic opportunities that are profitable but also compatible with Greenland's distinctive culture and demography. Only in this way can Greenland move away from dependence on the block grant from Denmark or on other outsiders who might exercise excessive influence over Greenland's development.

It is going to be fascinating to see what happens in the future. Will Greenland choose the nation-state model or some other model? At this point, I cannot say, but I believe it will be progressive and exciting. The Constitutional Commission's work will provide a foundation for an open public debate regarding these matters.

Greenland and the Outside World

If Greenland chooses to adopt a nation-state model, the questions arise of how it will fit within the community of nations and with whom and how it should partner? What relations should Greenland have to the EU, of which Greenland is currently not a member, and how about NATO? Should Greenland be demilitarized? Can it even afford to be? So far, this international aspect is largely missing from public debate. Most people in Greenland pay little attention to foreign relations and security issues. But going forward, a debate on these issues cannot be avoided. Although the public of Greenland may not seem to be so interested in others, others are interested in Greenland. As they come knocking, Greenland will need to build a consensus on its place in the larger picture of the Arctic and even global affairs.

Looking historically, some attention has in fact been given to these issues at the elite level. In the early 2000's, even before self-government, when the US expressed a wish to upgrade its radar on the US Air Force's Thule Air Base, Greenland took the initiative to insist on being a negotiating partner and joined the 2004 Igaliku Agreement, a three-party agreement between Greenland, Denmark and the US.⁵ But the thinking at that time was directed less toward the relationship with the US and more toward the struggle with Denmark. Later, in 2011, Greenland published a foreign policy strategy looking ahead to 2050. After 2014, it seemed to disappear from government documents and active memory.

5 See more on the defense agreements and the Igaliku Agreement and other agreements Greenland holds with foreign states at naalakkersuisut.gl/en/Naalakkersuisut/Departments/Udenrigsanliggende/Om-Udenrigsanliggende/Ansvarsomraader

6 According to recent data from NASA's Operation Icebridge, at

climate.nasa.gov/news/2883/study-predicts-more-long-term-sea-level-rise-from-greenland-ice/

7 See more about Greenland's position here: climategreenland.gl/en/citizen/international-cooperation/the-international-climate-negotiations/

There is a lack of continuity in Greenland's policymaking, partly because there have been so many changes in government and government personnel in recent years, but also because security and defense issues are still under Danish jurisdiction. Today, Greenland has a foreign ministry with a small, but well-educated, capable staff, and they are becoming a respected diplomatic corp. Still, in a democratic society, foreign policy cannot be the product of just the foreign ministry staff, and to date a broader debate of an interested public is lacking.

As I see it, Greenland wants to maintain the excellent co-operation we have developed in the Arctic. Greenland is geographically part of the North American continent. What does that mean for Greenland's relationship with Canada and the US? In the 1940s and 1950s, Denmark made agreements with the US to accept military installations in Greenland. Should Greenland reconsider these arrangements as a matter of future policy? It is difficult to imagine that further militarization of the Arctic is going to benefit the people of the Arctic. That is why many were worried by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 2019 Arctic Council speech portraying Russia and China as aggressors in the Arctic and calling for an assertive American response. US presidential leadership is now changing with the election of Joe Biden, and the question is whether the rhetorical approach the US takes to Arctic security issues will change with it.

Greenland wants peaceful relations with others. For example, there is a big Asian dimension to Greenland's trade; the fishing industry exports more than \$350 million in fish products and shrimp to East Asian countries, currently the second largest market. This is a clear result of Greenland's long-lasting and strong foreign-policy relations, done from the government in Nuuk. It also seems important to maintain good relations with Russia and the EU and engage with others who can play a role in developing the economy in sustainable ways.

Climate Change and Greenland's Voice

Greenland obviously plays a huge role in climate change debates, but almost all debates are led by outsiders. Greenland holds the principal remaining ice sheet in the Northern Hemisphere. It is estimated

that if fully melted, it would raise sea levels by 6-7 meters.⁶ Of course, local citizens notice the receding glaciers, and the changes in fish migration and animal movements that have a big impact on many lives, though varying from place to place. But while climate change puts Greenland on the map of international climate research and policy discussions, it has been mostly off our map in terms of national debate. The government of Greenland and even the parliament have produced no consistent messaging on this even though authorities are maximizing renewable resources, mostly hydropower. Loose talk of the pros and cons of climate change introduce ambiguity in the message. In fact, there are no pros, just consequences, and we simply have not studied and addressed these at the national level or made our voices heard internationally. Greenland, for example, has not signed the Paris climate agreement.⁷

Which raises a final point: with its small population and emerging nation status, Greenland faces an enormous deficit in human resources. We lose some of our most talented young people each year to emigration. But as the most advanced self-governing nation among Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, we have a responsibility and an opportunity for a leadership role in expressing our views from the inside and engaging constructively with our friends outside. Thus, in addressing Greenland's national challenges, particular emphasis must be given to educating young people to be informed national and global citizens. In fact, the negotiation of the Paris agreement showed that small countries can play outsized, influential roles when they choose to make their voices heard. My hope is that Greenland will be heard on this and other issues critical to the future of Arctic societies as we continue to address the socio-economic challenges we face and define our nation, its values and its relationships on our own terms.

Sara Olsvig is a Ph.D. fellow at Ilisimatusarfik, the University of Greenland and an assigned member of Greenland's Constitutional Commission.