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The Select Committee on the Arctic
Inquiry on
THE ARCTIC

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TUESDAY 22 JULY 2014

10.40 am

Witnesses: Christian Le Mièrè and Dr Jeffrey Mazo
Members present
Lord Teverson (Chairman)
Lord Addington
Baroness Browning
Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Viscount Hanworth
Lord Hunt of Chesterton
Lord Moynihan
Lord Soley
Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Lord Tugendhat

Examination of Witnesses

Christian Le Mière, International Institute for Strategic Studies, and Dr Jeffrey Mazo, International Institute for Strategic Studies

Q37 The Chairman: Gentlemen, I welcome you to this Select Committee on the Arctic area. This is still towards the beginning of the process. Today we are looking at defence security, and in our second session today the international law around UNCLOS. As you know, this session is being broadcast. I will ask members of the Committee to ask you a number of questions, and I think you have some idea of the areas that we will be going over. I remind you that if you could keep your answers fairly direct, that would be useful, but do ensure that we have all the information that we need. You do not both need to answer every question, but if you have something important to contribute, please do. If there is anything that you feel you have left out or that has not been gone through by the end of the session, you are very welcome to offer that extra information as written evidence. I shall ask you briefly to introduce yourselves, and then I will ask Lord Addington to ask the first question.

Christian Le Mière: My name is Christian Le Mière. I am the senior fellow for naval forces and maritime security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. I am based here in
London and my remit is very much everything that happens at sea. The Arctic is a key area of that, but I also focus on other areas of the world such as the South China Sea, the Persian Gulf and anywhere there may be conflict or contention over the resources of the sea or the use of it.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo**: I am Jeff Mazo. I am consulting senior fellow for environmental security and science policy at the IISS. I have been working with Christian on our Arctic project for about three years. My main focus is on the security and strategic implications of climate change writ large, and the Arctic is a big part of that.

**The Chairman**: Thank you. We are very pleased that you are able to be here.

**Q38 Lord Addington**: Hello. What in your view will be the main changes that we will see in the Arctic over the next 20 years, bearing in mind that we are not absolutely sure exactly what changes are going to take place in the sea ice there? Once again in your view, are such changes contributing to tension between the Arctic states, and, if so, how exactly?

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo**: The main trend that we see is an increase in the human presence and concomitant economic activity in the sub-Arctic and north of the Arctic Circle, driven by increased maritime access due to a decline in the sea ice, as well as changing demand in global consumption patterns for hydrocarbon resources and competition for the market share of new sources. As you say, the timing of these trends is uncertain; the evidence that you heard last week shows that there is no scientific consensus about how quickly some of these physical changes will happen. We focus in our work on what we see as a mid-point view among scientists of about 2030 for seasonal ice-free conditions in the Arctic and mid-century for sustained and reliable access, but it could happen sooner or later than that. This uncertainty is actually an important driver of the economic and geopolitical developments that we foresee. We see hydrocarbon extraction as likely to increase over this time period.
but the relative share of global energy coming from the Arctic is not likely to change significantly and might even decrease. We see an increase in shipping in the summer between Arctic ports and from the Arctic to non-Arctic destination, particularly with regard to hydrocarbons, but not so much of an increase in trans-Arctic container shipping. The latter is likely to play out only later in the century when and if the transpolar route becomes reliable. As a rough idea, we see an increase in shipping activity in the Arctic of an order of magnitude of about 10—a multiple of 10 over the next 20 or 25 years. That is based on the current levels, which I should point out are actually lower than at the peak of maritime activity in the Arctic in the 1980s during the Soviet period. We are still at only about half that level at the moment.

There are also likely to be increases in tourism, which we already see happening; in fishing, or at least geographical changes in the pattern of fisheries; non-hydrocarbon mineral extraction; and some niche high-value economic activities, as the Arctic becomes more accessible. All these trends will require significant infrastructure expansion and replacement as well as supporting service industries, and all this increased human activity and expanding population will require an expanding security and constabulary presence, which we also already see happening. However, we do not see these trends as necessarily contributing to tensions. The Arctic is currently a region of co-operation and low tension, although security co-operation and the security architecture lag perhaps two decades behind the political, environmental and economic co-operation that we see in the Arctic. As long as development can keep pace with the physical changes that we expect, we do not see necessarily any increase in tensions.

We do not see any evidence of a race for resources in the Arctic. The known or expected resources in the Arctic, particularly oil and gas, are for the most part—90% to 95%—to be
found in undisputed national territories or exclusive economic zones, and very little of the remainder is likely to be in areas that are likely to be contested after the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf makes its rulings on various claims. The high-profile disputes that we see about Arctic territory have little substance behind them; they are more a question of national pride and internal politics. There is ample time for them to be damped down and solved before the issues really need to be resolved.

A lot of the claims that are being made now over the Arctic are not representative of a race for resources at present but are simply the consequence of the terms of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which states that you have to make your claim to extend the continental shelves within 10 years of ratification of the convention, which for Canada was last December and for Denmark is this year. The Russians made their claim quite early on, while Norway’s claim has already been submitted and resolved. The Canadian claim, which is the one most likely to overlap and conflict with Russia’s, is driven as much by this 10-year deadline as by any urgency to get the situation resolved. The conditions in the Arctic are changing slowly enough, and the deliberations of the UN commission are slow enough, that these issues are not likely to be resolved for 10 or 15 years anyway.

**Christian Le Mièvre**: I want to add one thing. I concur with everything that Jeff has just said—obviously, because it is primarily what is in our book—but equally the major political change over the next 20 years will be driven by this greater economic activity, so there will be a greater geopolitical engagement with and focus on the Arctic, though not necessarily competition. However, there are individual factors that may complicate the Arctic situation, and I would point out the potential for the independence of Greenland as one of them. Twenty years may be an ambitious timeline to foresee Greenlandic independence, but if it were to come about and Greenland were to become economically sustainable and
independent, we would suddenly have a relatively small in population and politically juvenile nation state as one of the Arctic five. Denmark might remain as an Arctic state because of the Faroe Islands but would no longer be littoral on the Arctic Ocean. Greenland would not necessarily be within NATO or indeed the EU but might perhaps still have a US base on it, and would be subject to greater pressures from the larger and wealthier states within the Arctic. Greenlandic independence would be an interesting event, with consequences that are largely unforeseeable and could complicate the Arctic picture.

Q39 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: To follow up that very welcome point about Greenland, you put a question mark over it because 20 years seems quite a long time to be certain that Greenland will not be independent. Presumably one of the consequences that you foresee, if Greenland were not to join NATO as an independent state, would be that it would no longer, as it currently is, be covered by the Article 5 guarantee—that is, for the first time there would be a littoral state in the Arctic that was not so covered or, alternatively, was not Russia or the Soviet Union. Could you comment on that and its likely destabilising effect, if any?

Christian Le Mièere: That is a quite possible outcome. I am not sure that it would be destabilising. There are already two Arctic states that are not NATO members, Sweden and Finland, that border on or are very close to Russia—the Soviet Union, as was—and while they were very aware of the potential threats to their borders and sovereignty, they nonetheless did not necessarily see the need for NATO membership to guarantee their political survival.

The situation with Greenland is further complicated by the US base at Thule and the potential for continued interaction with the US through that base. If you have US troops on your territory as an independent nation state, even though you may not be subject to Article
5 guarantees you can feel relatively confident that that is a hair trigger for greater international involvement in questions of your sovereignty. It is a complicating factor within the picture but not necessarily destabilising. However, it certainly makes the region a little more interesting.

**Q40 Lord Tugendhat:** I was very impressed when I read the IISS’s recent paper on the Arctic. I thought it was very interesting. However, it dealt with the Arctic, as it were, as a self-contained entity. Surely one of the big unknown unknowns, and something that we need to take into account, is that now that we are seeing the beginning of commercial shipping on a substantial scale, the use of natural resources and so forth, what happens in the Arctic will be very much influenced by what happens in the rest of the world. If, for example, the Suez Canal were closed as a result of troubles in the Middle East, or if there were a much more serious piracy problem in going around Africa, issues of that kind would certainly have an impact on the speed at which commercial shipping was developed over the northern sea. Likewise, oil and gas have had a profound impact; had it not been for the reserves in place and the production in the Arctic regions, what is happening in the Middle East, with all its dangers, might have had a greater impact on the oil crisis. To the extent that energy resources in other parts of the world are put at risk, that is likely to lead to a much more rapid development of resources in the Arctic. One of the difficulties I am having in coping with this very interesting question is the power of optionality, if I can put it that way. In terms of both shipping and natural resources, the Arctic is a very important new option, and the extent to which that optionality moves ahead will depend on what happens outside the Arctic, not on what happens within the Arctic.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** I think that is true. One of the reasons why we do not see hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic as likely to have a greater relative share of the global energy market
is that it is one of the most expensive options. It is certainly the most expensive oil and gas at
the moment, more expensive than conventional oil and gas and in some cases more so than
some of the unconventional sources. As you say, that could change in response to economic
developments elsewhere in the world, but the proportion of available resources expected to
be found in the Arctic over the next 20 years or so as exploration proceeds is equivalent to
the proportion of current contribution of energy extraction in the Arctic. So we see the
Arctic being, as you say, an important alternative source in these cases but we do not see
that as a change. That is certainly the case at the moment, and we do not see that
happening over the next 10 or 20 years.

With regard to the changes in maritime routes, that again is very much dependent on the
speed of climate change in the Arctic and the accessibility. Until the northern sea route
becomes reliable, particularly north of some of the offshore islands and the straits, it is not
going to be a viable alternative to Suez.

**Lord Tugendhat:** It might not be a viable alternative to Suez, but if Suez were closed or Saudi
Arabia went down, the world would look very different. That is my only point.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** That is true. However, in the timeframe that we are looking at, whether the
Arctic is a better alternative than the Cape, for example, even though that would be much
further, depends on huge range of economic variables, the most important of which is the
cost of fuel. In a scenario where the Middle East goes down and the cost of fuel rises
significantly, that saving in the Arctic will be significant.

**Christian Le Mièrè:** I agree with the concept that the rest of the world affects the Arctic, but
I would add that it can go either way; if the oil price drops, oil and gas exploitation in the
Arctic is likely to slow rather than become more rapid. The difficulty in writing this book, and
in dealing with the Arctic generally, is that there are so many variables that are unknown in
the future and we are dealing with such long timelines that it is impossible to predict accurately. We can talk broadly about the retreat of sea ice and be quite confident about that direction but not necessarily about the pace. Equally, we can talk about greater economic exploitation but, again, only about the direction, not the pace. I concur, but it is difficult to say that it will necessarily be made more rapid by external events rather than less rapid.

Q41 Lord Soley: The areas that I am looking at are the two of concern around both the United States and Denmark/Greenland. It is not a dispute but there is some uncertainty about the 200 nautical mile extension of the continental shelf. In the case of Denmark/Greenland, that would include the North Pole. I think again of Russia a few years back planting its flag at the North Pole and, perhaps more importantly, the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf asking Russia to review its submission. I wonder whether there is a potential conflict coming up over those areas. I am talking about the type of conflict that will need legal resolution.

Christian Le Miére: The witnesses in your second session today will probably be better placed to talk about the various issues regarding the law of the sea, but I would say that there are certain disagreements, and currently this is probably the primary one, over maritime jurisdiction in the Arctic. The word “conflict” is obviously loaded with a lot of different baggage. We consider the possibility of conflict in the Arctic to be relatively minimal, not least because it is being handled largely through co-operation. In fact, that dispute is being handled through the legal channels outlined by the law of the sea. The Arctic Council and the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008 have reaffirmed the primacy of UNCLOS as the legal instrument under which such disagreements will be resolved if negotiations do not work. Also, it is very hard to fight a conflict in the Arctic, as the UK and most Arctic countries
know. The area that you are talking about in which the overlap exists for potential continental shelves is still under sea ice year round, so the idea of a conflict is difficult to entertain, even though there will continue to be disagreements until we reach the most probable outcome of a legal conclusion.

Q42 Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: You said a moment or two ago that there was no evidence of a race for resources, but there is surely evidence of a race to invest. There is China obviously, and Iceland has been the first European country to sign a free trade agreement, but in your book—obviously we are going to refer to your book quite a bit—you seem to suggest that Beijing is attempting to develop greater soft power and economic influence over what might be described as some of the weaker members of the Arctic club: Iceland and Greenland, for example, which is obviously pretty desperate for investment. This is not just China, obviously, but Singapore, Japan and others.

I just wonder how the extension of the Arctic Council observer status is likely to develop, it having taken place and now watching it develop over the next few years. Do you think it will have an impact on the relationship between the Arctic states themselves? Coming closer to home, do you think it will have an impact on our relationship with those states? Saying that there is no race for resources is a nice line to draw, but actually there is quite a race for investment. The possible control of resources might be another matter, and there might be impacts for us.

Christian Le Mièrè: I will speak briefly on a couple of topics and Jeff will talk about the Arctic Council observers. We discuss the possibility of a national race for resources backed up by military power, which we consider to have a very low probability. But you are right: there is a lot of commercial competition in the Arctic, and we see that weekly, with various companies engaging in competitive bids for contracts or attempting to exploit the various
economic potential of the Arctic. That could be seen as healthy and a positive development for the region and for the countries that are involved.

On China’s involvement, it is very easy to see nefarious motivations behind China’s activities, not just in the Arctic but elsewhere in the world, but in reality China has been a relatively positive engager with the Arctic generally. Its investment in Greenland has been positive for that province as well, albeit with some concerns over the potential for Chinese immigration. Its investment in Iceland has broadly positive, although a particular bid to gain access to land within Iceland was subject to widespread public disapproval and eventual blocking, and it has developed fairly positive relations with most of the Nordic countries, Norway notwithstanding, given the Nobel Peace Prize issue. So while there is some concern, particularly among Nordic states, about China’s involvement and potential for greater soft power, there is also very much a welcoming atmosphere for Chinese investment, as there must be if you wish to develop some of the resources of the high north, which are difficult to get to. China is likely to be one of the largest clients for some of those resources. That is a roundabout way of saying that there is commercial competition, some of which is nationally based because China has state-owned companies, but it is not necessarily an unhealthy competition to have.

How that affects intra-Arctic relations is a bit too early to say, but there is broad acceptance among the Arctic states that Arctic issues should be dealt with by Arctic states. That includes issues to do with the law of the sea and fishing. There is, for instance, discussion about having an Arctic coastguard forum and about having rules and regulations for fishing on the high seas in the Arctic Ocean that will be drawn up by the Arctic states themselves. They often jealously guard their stewardship of the Arctic Ocean and the resources in the Arctic. That excludes countries such as China that might wish to have a more engaged presence
within the Arctic Ocean, so I am not sure that it will necessarily affect intra-Arctic relations that significantly until and unless China gains some undue influence over some of what you call the weaker states of the Arctic, such as Greenland, which we do not currently foresee.

I think the UK’s relations with the Arctic states are relatively secure, particularly with the Nordic states with which we have long historical cultural links. They are obviously quite tricky with Russia, as they have been on and off for a long time, but it is the issues beyond the Arctic, such as Crimea and Ukraine, that are going to affect UK/Russia relations and Sino-Russian relations more than the Arctic currently. So again, while obviously the UK will have to compete for influence and for commercial involvement in the Arctic with other states such as China, that competition is not necessarily unhealthy and not necessarily to the detriment of the UK.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** I would like to add a couple of things. One is that the new observer states, particularly the ones from Asia, have varying interests in the Arctic and a varying desire to be involved in the Arctic Council. China obviously has the commercial interests that you mentioned. Japan’s interest is driven as much by China’s interest and keeping a wary eye on its neighbour than by any other particular interest, although all the states in north-east Asia have real scientific reasons for wanting to be involved in Arctic research. The changes in weather patterns that will affect them will be driven by climate change in the Arctic, so China’s increased scientific research in the Arctic is legitimate in that respect, even if the volume and the prominence of that have some sort of geopolitical symbolism attached to them.

On their acceptance as observers in the Arctic Council, one of the reasons driving the Arctic Council members to bring them on board is that by doing that they are in effect agreeing to the status of the Arctic Council as the primary forum for Arctic issues, as well as the primacy
of UNCLOS as the governing law for the Arctic. It is about locking them in and making them less of a wild card. However, some of the concerns about expanding the number of observers to the Arctic Council might affect the role of the council. One of the unique benefits of the Arctic Council was that it was a very small, intimate group working by consensus among the Foreign Ministers and the Arctic ambassadors of the Arctic states, and the bigger and more unwieldy the council and observers gets the less efficient it will be in that respect. At the meeting in Yellowknife earlier this year, China sent a huge delegation of experts, most of whom did not need to be there. Also, most of these Arctic Council meetings are in the Arctic, for obvious reasons, and these areas have a lack of infrastructure, and a lack of hotel rooms, and by doubling the number of observers and drastically increasing the number of people being sent to the meetings you put a strain on the operations of the council. This was a concern.

I have one more point to make. The expansion of the number of observers risks diluting the role of the indigenous peoples, who have a unique position on the Arctic Council—a position that they do not have in similar forums for other parts of the world.

Q43  Lord Hunt of Chesterton: If your presentation was being given by Russians, would it be very different? If I may say so, it seems to have a terribly western flavour, and the Arctic is largely Russian. Could you comment?

Christian Le Mière: Yes. The Arctic has a very emotional and cultural relevance to Russia and Russians in general, so I have no doubt of the possibility of a bit more table thumping and strenuous rhetoric if there is to be a Russian presentation, but there is a real mismatch between Russian rhetoric and the reality of Russian policy. We saw last year, for instance, President Putin proclaiming the importance of the Arctic while sending a flotilla to the new Siberian islands and declaring that there will be a new permanent base, but in reality there is
very little knowledge of what that base will be, how permanent it will be, what will actually
be built there and what will be kept there permanently. There is talk of increasing Russia’s
military presence in the Arctic, but actually most of its attention is currently focused on the
south and the West, given the issues in Ukraine and the Caucasus, and most investment is
actually going to the navy—or at least most new forms of ships are going to the navy,
specifically to the Pacific Fleet, the Black Sea Fleet and Baltic Fleet, rather than, as
traditionally, to the Northern Fleet.
So there are the occasional outbursts of nationalist rhetoric, and not just by the Russians but
by the Canadians, for instance, but what Russia is doing in the Arctic is pursuing legal
channels for its disagreements over continental shelves and maritime jurisdiction, and
investing in renewing its military presence in the Arctic but to a far lesser extent than it did
during the Cold War, often because other areas of the country require greater military
investment. It does not necessarily match the sometimes nationalistic, sometimes alarming
rhetoric that comes out of Russian politicians, Russian military, retired military personnel or
grandstanding private citizens.

The Chairman: Can I just have clarification on something that you can perhaps help me
with? We had circulated to us the Arctic Journal of Thursday 17 July, which states—I do not
know how accurate it is—“‘EU raw materials diplomacy’ with hundreds of millions of euro
available in exchange for guarantees that Greenland wouldn’t give China exclusive access to
its rare earth minerals, as said by Antonio Tajani, vice-president of the European
Commission, when he visited Greenland in June 2012”. Does that have any accuracy to it?

Christian Le Mière: I genuinely do not know whether that occurred, because it was a private
discussion, but there is concern in the EU and the US that Greenland’s rare-earth minerals
could be exploited by a Chinese state-owned company, given China’s current lock on the
rare-earth market. That could be seen as a negative strategic issue. But, again, Greenland is concerned by the possibility of Chinese immigration in particular and by greater Chinese influence. There is awareness in Greenland, the EU and the US that these minerals should be exploited for broad benefit and commercial gain rather than for one state’s particular gain.

**The Chairman:** I think we will pursue that elsewhere.

**Q44 Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Could you say a bit more about the role that the Arctic Council plays in good governance of the region? Will the council need to evolve, presumably to take on greater powers by agreement among its members, and how will it evolve? Perhaps in answering that question you could distinguish a little between the Arctic Council as a governing instrument, and on the idea that there could be sectoral agreements among the members of the Arctic Council dealing with a particular issue such as transport, safety, mineral exploitation or biodiversity. I think they are two rather different things, and perhaps you could cover both of them.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** The Arctic Council bills itself as an intergovernmental forum rather than an international organisation. It is a policy-shaping organisation, as they say, rather than a policy-making organisation. Nevertheless, it is currently the most prominent and the most effective body involved in issues of Arctic governance. The main gap in Arctic governance is the need to develop various agreements in different areas to operationalise UNCLOS in the region, but these can be subregional, or bilateral between states, or can deal with parts of the Arctic including non-Arctic states. Current instruments that meet this pattern and involve part of the Arctic are the OSPAR environmental agreement and the north-east Atlantic fisheries agreement. There are some agreements and negotiations involving the A5—the five coastal states—and others that are taking place at the Arctic Council level. Various agreements and treaties have been passed in the last couple of years on search and rescue
co-operation and oil spill response, and although they are often referred to as Arctic Council agreements they are in fact multilateral agreements among the Arctic states. They were agreed under the auspices of the Arctic Council but are not formally Arctic Council instruments. Then there are various other instruments affecting the Arctic at a more general international level, such as the development of the mandatory Pole Code under the IMO.

There are various gaps in Arctic governance, and the Arctic Council is positioned to deal with some of them but not all of them: it depends on the geographical scope of them and the interests of non-Arctic states.

The other main gap in Arctic governance is security and developing a security architecture. The Arctic Council is explicitly excluded by its original remit from dealing with security issues.

The Arctic Council is evolving and has been evolving constantly since it was established in 1996. With the new observer states, now over 50% of the world population is represented by either members or observers. In 2013, for the first time it got a secretariat in Norway, which is already starting to improve its efficiency and operations. It is still very small, but it has a communications strategy, which it did not have before, so it is beginning to gel and come of age. Some people have referred to the Kiruna meeting as the end of the adolescence of the Arctic Council, and the Kiruna 'Vision For The Arctic', which the UK in its Arctic framework has supported, calls for an aspiration for a transition from a policy-shaping into a policy-making body. To make that formal requires some sort of Arctic convention, whether among the Arctic eight or more broadly, but for political reasons in the various Arctic states I do not think that is likely to happen. What is more likely is that the Arctic Council will evolve over the next 16-year cycle of the chairmanships of the eight states into the central pillar of a multilayered, multi-instrument governance regime similar to what we see in the Mediterranean for example, with various different environmental and search and
rescue agreements, and other agreements of that nature, and the Arctic Council at the centre of it.

Whether it will expand its role to cover security issues is a huge question. The exclusion of security issues originally in 1996 was driven mainly by the United States. The United States’ view on this has shifted a great deal; and with an eye towards the US chairmanship in 2015, last week and for the first time America appointed an ambassador-level senior Arctic official, who is a retired coastguard admiral with considerable experience of Arctic issues. That suggests to me that the United States is going to make security, in the form of constabulary co-operation, a key feature of its chairmanship in 2015-17. Whether this is the right venue to do this—Christian can talk about some of the other elements of an Arctic security architecture—is an open question, especially with regard to the blowback from the Crimea. The main impact on Arctic governance from that has been to do with security issues, and if they had been central to the Arctic Council they would have had a negative impact on other co-operation in non-security areas as well.

The Chairman: We will come on to that a little later.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could I follow up on that very briefly and ask you whether you are really saying that the Arctic Council is metamorphosing very slowly into an international organisation, while saying that it is not doing so? Is that roughly what you are saying?

Dr Jeffrey Mazo: Yes.

Lord Soley: You used the analogy of the Mediterranean. Do you mean that it is like that, or do you mean that it is different from what is happening in the Mediterranean between the regional states?

Dr Jeffrey Mazo: It will be different to some extent. There is no equivalent to the Arctic Council for the Mediterranean, but most of the world seas have some sort of regime, such as
multiple overlapping sets of instruments. I just use the Mediterranean as one of the most developed examples. The Arctic Council has a fairly unique position, at least at the moment, in maritime governance.

**Q45 Baroness Browning:** Could I ask you about the interface with NATO? I will split this question into two sections. The first is on the five member states of the Arctic Council, which are members of NATO. We have been given the impression that there is no settled view among these five states on NATO. In particular, there is a difference of opinion between Norway and Canada. Could you explain Canada’s reservations a bit more and why you think there is a lack of consistency at that level? The other issue is to do with the United Kingdom and our observer status. You have already mentioned that in the UK policy framework the UK Government committed to the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable. Could you flesh out a bit for us what it actually discusses? It is UN-sponsored. Is this part of the incremental move towards more militarisation of the Arctic, is it a precautionary measure, or is it frustration that you have a mix of countries, some of which are NATO members and some of which are not?

**Christian Le Mièvre:** On the first topic, there is certainly disagreement among the Arctic NATO members on how closely NATO should be involved in the Arctic and what its role should be. Norway has traditionally been perhaps the most forthright in advocating a stronger NATO presence and involvement in the Arctic. An interesting factor here will be the fact that the new Secretary-General of NATO is Norwegian, and just last month he wrote an article extolling the global importance of the Arctic, but if he wishes to increase NATO’s role in the Arctic he will have to overcome significant internal resistance, particularly from Canada. It was Canada that has prevented the Arctic from becoming a more significant issue in NATO previously, particularly in official statements. The reason for that is a little difficult to work
out, but the best guess is that Canada fears a wider internationalisation of the Arctic issue. It
does not wish to see the North-West Passage designated as an international strait as the US
would like, because it considers them to be territorial waters. It does not necessarily wish to
have extensive external involvement in the Arctic, because the Arctic can be resolved by the
Arctic states. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has previously opined that the Arctic Council
has expanded too quickly and involved too many observers from outside the Arctic, which is
diluting and complicating the interactions of the Arctic states themselves.
There seems to be a very visceral discontent in Canada about the possible
internationalisation of the Arctic among a wider audience, part of which would be the
greater involvement of NATO in the Arctic. Equally, Russia would almost certainly react very
negatively to a greater NATO role, so Canada may simply be cautiously and sensibly trying to
prevent that negative reaction from Russia by keeping NATO out. How that develops under
the new Secretary-General will be interesting to watch. Even though the last Secretary-
General was Danish, this one seems to have an even stronger view that NATO could be
involved in the Arctic. That has been publicly espoused previously.
The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable is very much the operational level of discussions
among the Arctic states and near-Arctic states on how to interact, rather than the high-level
chief of defence meeting of the previous two years, although it might not happen this year.
ASFR looks at things like maritime domain awareness and sharing information, such as AIS
data and any other maritime information, which would allow for interaction and greater
awareness of traffic in the Arctic and better jurisdiction and constabulary activities there.
The difficulty with ASFR is that the Russians have traditionally been very circumspect about
attending high-level meetings in particular, so it has been difficult, from what I understand,
to entice significant Russian involvement in the ASFR that would allow for any substantial agreements on information sharing or intelligence sharing, for instance.

**Q46 Baroness Browning:** You said that there are many variables looking into the future. I guess this question, which I have been prompted to ask you, is about one of them, so I will not ask it. It was, “Will NATO play a more active role in the future?”. I do not know that anybody can answer that, but I just wonder what is available publicly on contingency situations. Presumably NATO itself, regardless of who is Secretary-General, must in its contingency planning look at all the member countries in the Arctic Circle and a “what if?” situation. Is that well advanced, or has it, because of the nature of the Arctic, been on the back burner?

**Christian Le Mière:** NATO is an organisation with decades of experience behind it of dealing with the Soviet Russia in the era of the Cold War and afterwards. Part of that thinking about Russia and the Soviet Union involved contingency planning for areas of the Arctic or high north. In particular, the member states of NATO believed the Arctic to be, and used the Arctic as, a strategic area for ballistic missile submarine deployments, so they also tracked and attempted to disrupt Soviet submarine deployments underneath the Arctic and through the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap. They were also aware of the possibility of Soviet encroachment into the Arctic through Finland and Norway. I am obviously not party to contingency planning within SHAPE, but I am aware that a variety of contingencies have been thought about, particularly vis-à-vis Norway and Russia, and it is likely that these could simply be dusted off and brought back to the table again.

As for NATO’s future role, the internal resistance from Canada is probably sufficient for the foreseeable future to prevent any significant role, and certainly any permanent presence, within the Arctic. There will continue to be a rotational presence through exercises such as
Gold response, but I think that NATO’s role is likely to be limited. NATO/Russia relations are obviously in a very poor state at the moment. There has been an attempt to improve NATO/Russia relations for the last 20 years, and any permanent presence in the Arctic would set that process back even further, so strategically it does not seem to be a sensible move for NATO to make.

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** What, if any, relevance does the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe have in the Arctic, given that, strangely enough if I have it right, all members of the Arctic Council are members of the OSCE? I always get a complete blank when I ask this question. Could you perhaps fill in the blank a little and explain whether it is relevant, and if it is not relevant, why is it not relevant?

**Christian Le Mière:** It is theoretically relevant. The OSCE, as an organisation that is dedicated to early-warning conflict prevention—and, as we say, contains within it all the members of the Arctic Council—has a mandate that is very relevant to the Arctic in preventing any potential conflict from developing and perhaps allowing for greater information sharing and awareness to encourage co-operation. But practically I am not sure how relevant it is, given that the Arctic states are relatively jealous of Arctic issues and wary of wider internationalisation or the involvement of extra-regional international organisations when they think that the Arctic Council at the moment is perfectly sufficient to do the job of jurisdictional or constabulary issues within the Arctic itself.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** One reason why you get a blank reaction when you ask this question is that it does not come up in discussions that we have had with diplomats from various Arctic and non-Arctic states and with analysts, observers and the military. No one ever brings up the OSCE; it is just not on anybody’s radar. Having said that, it can be one small contribution to this multilevel and multi-instrument governance structure for the Arctic.
Q47 Lord Tugendhat: I think we have already had the answer to this question in reply to others, but I will put it just the same: to what extent do you think the Arctic Council and wider Arctic co-operation is insulated from global frictions? In your view, have the recent events in Crimea and so forth, for instance, impacted on relations between members of the Arctic Council?

The Chairman: I would like to add to that. We understand that Canada is being a bit more direct in terms of where it has meetings or who it allows to meet it when it comes to the Russians as a result of the recent crisis, and is potentially boycotting working group meetings in Russia. I do not know whether that is true and whether you have any feedback on it as an answer to the additional part of that question.

Christian Le Mièrè: I will let Jeff talk about the Canadians and the working group. Events in Ukraine have definitely affected the Arctic. We have seen, for instance, Sweden increasing its defence budget last year for the first time in quite a long period. That has been inspired by concern over Russia and galvanised by events in Ukraine and various events such as the flying of strategic and long-range bombers close to the Swedish border and the Swedes being unable to react. So a long period of decline in the defence budgets of Nordic countries, notwithstanding Norway, is likely going to see something of a change now that there is greater concern about Russian aggression or intervention in its near abroad. We have seen an effect on military diplomacy in the region, in that the chiefs of defence meeting is not likely to go ahead this year; it is simply impossible for American military personnel to sit down at a table with Russian military personnel in the current diplomatic climate in order to make any substantial negotiations possible. So the CHODs meeting seem to be suspended, the ASFR has had no significant Russian involvement in it, and the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum proceeded without Russian involvement as well. There have definitely been
effects on the military and security sides and those are likely to continue, given continued concern among Nordic states over Russian assertiveness in its near abroad.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** On the question of Canada and the working group, it is a fairly low-level meeting. It is actually a task force, which is a level lower in the Arctic Council than a working group meeting, on black carbon issues. It was the third one that they had held. Canada boycotted the meeting in Moscow specifically as a sanction against Russia over Crimea, but there was a follow-up meeting of the working group—the fourth scheduled one—in Helsinki two months later. Canada chaired that and Russia came, so I think it was just to do with the geographical location. The meeting happened to be held in Moscow, even though it was not a Russian-led meeting, and Canada found a useful symbolic way, without really affecting the work of the council or its working groups, to make its displeasure known. The senior Arctic officials meeting in Yellowknife went ahead after the invasion of Crimea, and all eight senior Arctic officials attended that. So far at least, although there is a bit of posturing it is not really affecting the work of the Arctic Council.

Having said that, I agree with Christian that it is not entirely isolated. As long as the Arctic Council does not have a major security co-operation role, it is likely to stay insulated to some extent—as much as any other international co-operation. Russia’s interest is very strongly in keeping the Arctic isolated, so it is really a question of whether the other Arctic states feel that it is an appropriate venue for sanction. To some extent, it is not about the Arctic Council; the US sanctions on the Russian-controlled oil company, which originally were on the chairman but have recently been extended to various financial arrangements, could in the long term affect Russia’s energy expansion in the Arctic. Whether that disinclines Russia from co-operating further in the Arctic is an open question.
**Lord Soley:** For clarification, Mr Le Mière, I thought I heard you say that the Russians had flown bombers close to the Swedish border and that the Swedes could not react. The Swedes have a pretty good air force. Did you say that, and what do you mean when you say that they cannot react?

**Christian Le Mière:** I did say that. It was a particular sortie last year, and the Swedes did not have enough planes on the ground or the pilots available to react in time. They had to rely on NATO’s air policing mission in the Baltic countries to shadow the Russian bombers along the border. This was a significant concern to the Swedes. It became public knowledge, probably because of a leak from the military, and it was a major issue that fed into the discussion around the defence budget for this year as well.

**Q48 Lord Hunt of Chesterton:** All these issues in the Arctic are also being considered by the United Nations specialised agencies such as meteorology—I used to work for the Met Office—UNEP for exploration and so on. The Arctic is a particular area for all these processes. The Antarctic is similar; the World Meteorological Organization has an Antarctic committee. I wondered whether the expertise, experience, and obviously interests of other UN agencies are somehow factored into the Arctic Council or vice versa.

**Christian Le Mière:** There are three UN agencies that are observers to the Arctic Council.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** The UNEP is certainly one of them. Besides that relationship, the Arctic Council working groups work closely with these various agencies.

**Lord Hunt of Chesterton:** With regard to food and agriculture, fishing is obviously hugely important for the whole world there. That is a UN agency question.

**Dr Jeffrey Mazo:** Anything that the Arctic Council or the Arctic five do regarding fisheries will be within the overall framework of UNCLOS and as an operationalisation of the UN convention.
Q49 The Chairman: I shall finish off the session by asking you to give me one response each to the following. Bringing us back to the UK, what one thing, within this context, should the UK do or definitely not do? Could you give me something on the way this works?

Christian Le Mièrè: The main message from the military and security side is that there is unlikely to be military conflict but that there will be geopolitical and commercial competition in the Arctic, because there is significant economic exploitation to be had there. So it is very much in the UK’s interest to continue to engage with its allies in the region militarily, but also to attempt to expand its economic involvement within the Arctic for commercial reasons. The one thing that has not come up in the session that may be of interest for members is the issue of Scotland and its potential independence. We may all have our different opinions on how likely or probable that is, but an independent Scotland would be likely to attempt to position itself more closely with Nordic countries that are Arctic states as well. Given further devolution towards the Scottish Government post-referendum, there may be an attempt or indeed a facilitation for Scotland to increase economic, commercial or even cultural links with those Arctic states.

Dr Jeffrey Mazo: There is one main thing that the UK could do that has not come up in this session. The UK punches well above its weight in scientific research in the Arctic; it is by far the greatest producer outside the Arctic states of scientific research that deals with the Arctic in both the actual output and the percentage of its research budget. More involvement by the UK in the detailed work of the working groups of the Arctic Council, which are not self-funded by the council but rely on national funding, would both increase the UK’s influence in the Arctic Council and have a beneficial effect on the work.

The Chairman: That is a good ending. Thank you both very much for your evidence. That has been an excellent session, and I think we are a lot more enlightened as to how it all works.
You are both very welcome to stay here in the room if you would like to learn more about UNCLOS, which I am sure you do.