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GFPR
GLOBAL FOREIGN
POLICIES REVIEW

p-ISSN: 2788-502X
e-ISSN: 2788-5038

GFPR

GLOBAL FOREIGN POLICIES REVIEW

HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

DOI (Journal): 10.31703/gfpr

DOI (Volume): 10.31703/gfpr/.2025(VIII)

DOI (Volume): 10.31703/gfpr/.2025(VIII.IV)



VOL. VIII, ISSUE IV, FALL (DECEMBER-2025)

Article Title

International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?

Abstract

The report focuses on the extent to which the Arctic systems of governance have enabled the Nordic small states, that is, Iceland, Finland, and Norway, to balance their merger material power by strategically exploiting the international law. The analysis has been done on the basis of the Small State Theory and is supplemented by Institutional Liberalism and legal institutionalism based on a qualitative comparative case study. The results demonstrate that the international law and the institutional frames connected with it are indeed considered as a relevant strategic resource that enables these states to augment their influence by means of legal expertise, agenda-setting, and norm entrepreneurship. It is concluded in the report that although Arctic governance offers a singularly predisposed surrounding to the impact of the small states, law is a facilitative mechanism instead of an equalizing one, with its effectiveness determined by the matter area and the political geography.

Keywords: International Law, Arctic Governance, Small State Theory, Institutional Liberalism, legal institutionalism, Small States.

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Pages: 28-37

DOI: 10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2025\(VIII-IV\).04](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04)

Article link: <https://gfprjournal.com/article/international-law-as-a-strategic-resource-for-nordic-small-states-do-arctic-governance-frameworks-compensate-for-limited-power>

Full-text Link: <https://gfprjournal.com/article/international-law-as-a-strategic-resource-for-nordic-small-states-do-arctic-governance-frameworks-compensate-for-limited-power>

Pdf link: <https://www.gfprjournal.com/jadmin/Auther/31rv1olA2.pdf>

Global Foreign Policies Review

p-ISSN: [2788-502X](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr) e-ISSN: [2788-5038](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr)

DOI(journal):10.31703/gfpr

Volume: VIII (2025)

DOI (volume):10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII)

Issue: IV Fall (December-2025)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV)

Home Page

www.gfprjournal.com

Volume: VIII (2025)

<https://www.gfprjournal.com/issue>

Issue: IV-Fall (December-2025)

<https://www.gfprjournal.com/issue/8/4/2025>

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Citing this Article

04	International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?		
Authors	Ahmad Nawaz	DOI	10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04
		Pages	28-37
		Year	2025
		Volume	VIII
		Issue	IV
Referencing & Citing Styles			
APA	Nawaz, A. (2025). International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power? <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> , VIII(IV), 28-37. https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04		
CHICAGO	Nawaz, Ahmad. 2025. "International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?" <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> VIII (IV):28-37. doi: 10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04.		
HARVARD	NAWAZ, A. 2025. International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power? <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> , VIII, 28-37.		
MHRA	Nawaz, Ahmad. 2025. 'International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?', <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> , VIII: 28-37.		
MLA	Nawaz, Ahmad. "International Law as a Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?" <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> VIII.IV (2025): 28-37. Print.		
OXFORD	Nawaz, Ahmad (2025), 'International Law as A Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?', <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> , VIII (IV), 28-37.		
TURABIAN	Nawaz, Ahmad. "International Law as a Strategic Resource for Nordic Small States: Do Arctic Governance Frameworks Compensate for Limited Power?" <i>Global Foreign Policies Review</i> VIII, no. IV (2025): 28-37. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04 .		





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www.gfpjournal.com

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gfpr>



Pages: 28-37

URL: [https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2025\(VIII-IV\).04](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2025(VIII-IV).04)

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Abstract

The report focuses on the extent to which the Arctic systems of governance have enabled the Nordic small states, that is, Iceland, Finland, and Norway, to balance their merger material power by strategically exploiting the international law. The analysis has been done on the basis of the Small State Theory and is supplemented by Institutional Liberalism and legal institutionalism based on a qualitative comparative case study. The results demonstrate that the international law and the institutional frames connected with it are indeed considered as a relevant strategic resource that enables these states to augment their influence by means of legal expertise, agenda-setting, and norm entrepreneurship. It is concluded in the report that although Arctic governance offers a singularly predisposed surrounding to the impact of the small states, law is a facilitative mechanism instead of an equalizing one, with its effectiveness determined by the matter area and the political geography.

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Introduction

Among the different paradigms of understanding the concept of power in international relations, the material perspective is dominant, and it quantifies the strength of a state in terms of its military potential, economics, and physical size (Łoś, 2022). On such measures, small states are bound to be disadvantaged structurally. The Nordic countries of Iceland, Finland, and Norway, with developed economies and high standards of living, best typify this state of restricted material power owing to

their sparse populations and limited military presence. According to this conventional model, their role on the international level should be marginal by default (McWhinney, 2023). Against this expectation is the reality of Arctic governance that is seen. It is an area that lies deep in transition, with the effects of climate change and the formation of strategic competition being experienced at a profound level; it is not dominated but rather entangled in a densely woven web of rules, institutions, and collaborative systems. The main heart of such



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architecture is the Arctic Council, a meeting that is specifically geared towards reaching decisions based on consensus and acting in concert in regard to environmental protection and sustainable development (Koivurova, 2009). Most notably, such an institutional setting has led to legally binding agreements over such significant matters as a search and rescue, oil spill response, and scientific cooperation. The marginal players in this particular governance space are the Nordic small states that are expected to be marginal players; however, they tend to be frequently described as agenda setters, powerful bargainers, and norm entrepreneurs. This is a very interesting paradox that refutes the principle of material power analysis. It means that the institutionalized, rules-based nature of the Arctic order may abandon the other sources of influence, where the diplomatic skill, legal acumen, and institutional interplay are available, potent sources of strategic resources (Bai & Zhu, 2023). This perceived paradox between traditional power theory and field effect forms the very basis to investigate the functional usefulness of international law to the states that possess small material capabilities. The paper look into; how effectively do the Arctic governance systems allow Nordic small states to offset material power shortages by leveraging the strategic employment of international law?

It aims to;

- Examine the particular processes in the Arctic governance systems and the Arctic Council, in particular, and its related legal agreements, which condition opportunities for small states' participation and power.
- Have a comparative evaluation of how Iceland, Finland, and Norway have been strategically involved and used these legal-institutional frameworks to serve national interests.
- Assess the circumstances and constraints within which international law can be a valuable compensatory tool to small states, it is important to determine areas of concern in which the law has been effective and material power imbalance has still existed.

Although current literature emphasizes the collaborative and institutionalized character of the Arctic governance, relatively little analytical effort is done to directly assess the international law as an alternative to material power. Many in the scholarship view the legal frameworks as a background condition and not as a strategic value of small states. Further, little focus on the functioning of international law in certain regimes of governance has been given by small state theory. This study fills these gaps by conducting a systematic investigation on the subject of law as a strategic asset in the framework of Arctic governance.

Theoretical Framework:

A single theoretical dimension would not be enough to question how Nordic small states maneuver through the tricky landscape of Arctic governance (Steinveg, 2024). The theoretical synthesis required by the core research question (a combination of limited material power, international law, and institutional structures) requires a multi-layered approach to theory. This discussion is developed on a composite model that incorporates the Small State Theory, Institutional Liberalism, and Legal Institutionalism. These schools of thought offer a strong framework of how states such as Iceland, Finland, and Norway transfer their diplomatic and legal capital into power and of how to assess the limits of such power in a geopolitically sensitive area that is rule-based.

Small State Theory

Small State Theory gives the diagnosis of the Nordic condition of the international system (Long, 2022). An absolute definition of small states, as a state by itself cannot, as a result of pure capabilities, ensure its own security or be materially predetermined to produce systemic results. It has been working in a structurally vulnerable position, and external happenings and the actions of bigger powers have disproportionately influenced its destiny. This natural state of affairs forms a unique logic of strategy, which is defined by a strong dependence on three pillars, including diplomacy, multilateralism, and the establishment of a strong rules-based international order. In the case of small states, conventional power politics based on military threats or economic pressure does not work in most cases. Rather, power has to be established in other ways. The process of coalition-building assumes the primary role, with small states striving to gain protection and greater representation in terms of number and unions, like the Nordic cooperation system or the NATO and EU memberships (Etzold, 2024). Another currency of great importance is niche expertise; through the creation of world-leading expertise in a particular field (e.g., maritime management, peace mediation, or clean technology), a small state can position itself as inseparable in group problem solving, thus establishing a sphere of control. Lastly, normative persuasion, which is the capacity to influence the ideational space through advocacy of values such as environmental stewardship, human rights, or scientific cooperation, enables the small states to punch above their weight, therefore determining the terms of discussion.

In the Arctic case, the theory is used to define the need of the Nordic states: they should reduce their material constraints by making use of their agency in the systems of collaborations in the region to the maximum

(Zamyatina & Pilyasov, 2018). Their initiative is not so selfless but a self-preservation and power-proactive move. Small State Theory therefore preconditions the main question: in the face of their predisposing vulnerabilities, how do they go about pursuing their goals? The solution, it implies, is in the institutional and legal environment, and it brings it to the next theoretical level.

Institutional Liberalism

Small State Theory describes why Nordic states want rule-based arenas, and Institutional Liberalism describes how such arenas operate with the potential to even the playing field. According to this school of thought of liberal international relations, international institutions are independent variables, rather than epiphenomena of state power, that determine how states behave and perform (Schweller & Priess, 1997). They operate by alleviating the crude, anarchic nature of the international system in a number of ways, which are especially helpful in the context of smaller actors.

First, the institutions reduce the costs of cooperation through transaction costs (Gilligan, 2009). They offer a consistent and regular arena through procedures (such as the two annual meetings of the Arctic Council and six standing working groups) such that the resources and effort required to negotiate agreements are less, and it is more possible to involve less-resourced states and have them be consistent and active contributors. Second, they produce and spread information, which brings clarity that eliminates doubt and chances of making wrong calculations.

Third, and most importantly, institutions create certain stable expectations and lock-in patterns of behavior (BEDNAR & PAGE, 2018). They inculcate the culture of cooperation by building routines of interaction between scientific cooperation and emergency response drills into a self-enforcing culture. This socializes the members into a community where the norms are shared and reputation regarding good citizenship is important. In this environment, it is possible that persuasion, argumentation, and quality of ideas take the same or even greater importance than coercive power to influence decision-making. A case study of an institution that has been established to ensure that functional cooperation would not become geopolitical competition against each other is the Arctic Council with its clear charter that prohibits any discussion of military security, as well as the emphasis that it has on environmental and science matters.

In the case of Nordic small states, institutional liberalism would propose that the Arctic Council is not merely a speaking club but an important mechanism of empowerment (Specia, 2023). It gives them the organized, predictable, and norm-saturated space in which their

positive qualities, such as diplomatic ability, technical expertise, and adherence to rules, can be best applied. It adapts the game to be not about pure power politics but the one in which process management and consensus-building are the most important.

Legal Institutionalism

Institutional Liberalism reveals the importance of the forum as such, but this book by Legal Institutionalism offers the much-needed micro-level perspective on the particular tool of interest in this study is international law (Capoccia, 2016). This method of analysis goes beyond the idea of law as a fixed body of prohibitions or aspirations (a normative ideal). Rather, it is more dynamic, like law, as a working system, as a practical resource inherent in and produced by institutions.

In this perspective, legally binding agreements that are cultivated by the Arctic Council (the 2011 Search and Rescue Agreement, the 2013 Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response Agreement, and the 2017 Scientific Cooperation Agreement) are not just final products (Rottem, 2015). They are dynamic players of governance, which serve the following main roles:

Creating Authority and Legitimacy: These conventions make the soft norms in the Council hard. This legalization gives the rules a special kind of power, which is based upon state consent and the relative legitimacy of the process of cooperation (Franck, 1988). To a small state, being a contributor to the drafting of a treaty gives it an interest in a system the regulation of which it may subsequently claim to enforce against the larger sides.

Developing Procedural Pathways: Law has the ability to give specific procedures to decision-making, resolution of disputes, and implementation (Carvajal, 2023). Small states are able to take advantage of this proceduralism. It ensures that they have a formal seat at the table to examine the implementation of a treaty (e.g., by meeting the parties) and provides them with predictable avenues through which to express contrary opinions or suggest initiatives to protect against arbitrary marginalization.

Compliance by Managerial Means: Legal institutionalism frequently focuses on a model of compliance that is managerial, with states adhering to rules not necessarily because of fear of punishment, but because it is good, to promote capacity building, and to make the institution accountable through the process of justification (Feldman, 2010). The position of a small state in this model may change to that of a helpless referee, and it may take up the managerial role in which it applies its own expertise to work out compliance principles, to head scientific evaluations, or to serve as a secretariat, and so influence the change of the regime.

It is through this lens that we can examine international law as an equalizer in the abstract sense but as the toolkit in the real world. The issue is how do Nordic small states employ this toolkit? Do they, in the negotiation of treaties, insinuate good clauses or operational zones? Do they exploit the secretariat functions, or do they chair working groups to spearhead implementation? Legal institutionalism focuses our attention on these particular strategic applications of law in the institutional machinery.

Theoretical Synthesis

These three theoretical strands find their synthesis to develop an integrated analytical framework that has been used in this study:

Small State Theory defines the actors and their fundamental strategic dilemma (vulnerability seeking mitigation). The arena (the Arctic Council) is specified by institutional liberalism and reflects how it may restructure interactions in a manner that is beneficial to those actors. The main tool (international law) is defined by legal institutionalism and enables a granular analysis of the usage of that tool as an active resource in the arena. The overall analytical hypothesis that this framework permits is as follows: Arctic governance can provide a distinctive conversion process: it is possible that Nordic small states can transform their non-material resources (diplomatic skill [S], niche expertise [S], normative commitment [S]) into institutional capital in a favorable forum [IL], which can in turn be solidified into legal authority and procedural influence via binding agreements [LI]. An effective process of this sort would be a major compensation for material power deficits.

Nonetheless, there are also some critical checks in this framework. It does not presuppose this automatic or total conversion. Institutional liberalism recognizes the possibility of the existence of power asymmetries in institutions. Legal institutionalism appreciates that the power of law is relative. The structure thus prepares us to also detect the cases of successful small-state influence with law and the conditions that limit it, including the encroachment of high politics issues, implementation discrepancies, unilateralism by great powers, etc., when material power reacts and we have a failure in the compensatory mechanism. This combined theoretical focus is in respect to which the role of Iceland, Finland, and Norway in governing the Arctic will be analyzed empirically.

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative research design based on a comparative case study design in order to conduct a systematic investigation of the strategic application of international law by Nordic small states in the Arctic

(Fox-Wolfgramm, 1997). This methodological decision is based on the essence of the research question, which aims at explanation of complex processes of influence, negotiation, and institutional engagement phenomena that cannot be easily measured and represented using statistics. The qualitative approaches are the only methods that can reveal the how and why of the state behavior and make it possible to explore in detail the mechanisms of transforming the legal and diplomatic capital into political results within a particular governance ecosystem.

The main idea of this design is the narrowed-down comparison of three cases that are chosen purposely: Iceland, Finland, and Norway. This choice is a strategic one, which follows the principle of the most similar systems design but provides the presence of the main aspect of the controlled variance. The three states are characterized by some basic traits that make them a Nordic small state: the range of their material power in comparison to the great powers is low, they are highly developed economically, they have strong diplomatic corps, and they are extremely devoted to multilateralism and the rules-based international system. This similarity provides the basis of meaningful comparison with a relatively constant small-state condition.

Most importantly, though, they are different in the quality's peculiar to the Arctic, as well as capital, which becomes the foundation of analyzing how the various strategic resources are mobilized within the legal contexts:

- Norway is a country of the Arctic Ocean, which has sovereign rights to large maritime areas, vast hydrocarbon and fisheries reserves, and a long-term reputation as a polar state. It has a material and institutional entrenchment strategic profile.
- Finland is an arctic country that does not have an ocean shore, but it has impressive technological and administrative experience in such areas as ice-breaking, clean technologies, and environmental monitoring. It has a functional and normative entrepreneurship profile.
- The geographic place of Iceland is almost solely determined by the fact that the island is strategically placed at the entrance to the Arctic. It has few local material resources in the area, and its applicability and influence are more geographic and diplomatic.

This variance allows the analysis to inquire into the extent to which and how various forms of small state capital, such as resource-based (Norway), expertise-based (Finland), and location-based (Iceland), are effectively leveraged into power by using the medium of Arctic law and institutions.

Data Collection and Sources

Considering the documentary and procedural approach to the international governance, the study is based solely on the triangulated collection of secondary sources, which guarantees a rich evidence base that can be verified:

Key Legal Documents

- The empirical background of the analysis is the three basic legally binding documents negotiated within the framework of the Arctic Council:
- Sweden Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR). 2011.
- The 2013 Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (MOSPA).
- 2017 Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation.

The documents are interpreted as artifacts of a negotiation process, which show what is negotiated, what is compromised, and which institutional design choices are made.

- Institutional Documents, to put into context the legal agreements that are going on in the continuous activity of the regime, the study reviews:
- Ministerial declarations of the Arctic Council (1996-2014), mapping the change of the political priorities and consensus.
- Reports, evaluations, and meeting resolutions of the six Permanent Working Groups of the Council (e.g., the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, AMAP, the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment, PAME).

The formal and informal channels of agenda-setting and decision-making are procedural and terms of reference.

- National Policy Documents, In order to define state intent and strategy, official government publications are critically evaluated:
- Icelandic, Finnish, and Norwegian national strategies and policies on the Arctic.
- Relevant white papers on foreign policy and national security, which place the Arctic policy in the broader national goals.
- Scholarly Literature: The presence of a strong review of scholarly literature in the areas of Arctic studies, small state theory, international law, and institutionalism offers the background of the required theoretical and empirical context, which may be used to interpret findings and address research gaps.

Analytical Procedure

A systematic qualitative analysis of documents is carried out on the corpus of collected documents. It entails a close reading, coding, and thematic synthesis process, which is guided by the integrated theoretical framework. The analysis is conducted on three interrelated dimensions:

Process-Tracing: Recreating the history of the negotiation process and drafting of the main legal agreements to determine the precise contributions, efforts, or line breaking of the case study states.

Institutional Design Analysis: The formal and informal rules of the Arctic governance are examined in order to determine the extent to which they enable or restrict the involvement of small states in the agenda-setting, leadership of working groups, and review of implementation.

Discursive and Strategic Analysis: The analysis of the national policy documents and diplomatic statements that contribute to determining how each of the states constitutes its Arctic interests, rationalizes its presence, and uses the legal and institutional rhetoric maximally.

In this approach, the paper follows tangible lines of influence or non-influence in coming out of claims of influence to show the operation of legal frameworks as resources in use. It is also sensitive to the indicators of ongoing power asymmetries, including the exclusion of some problems or the limitation of the capacity of implementation, thus presenting an equitable position of international law in compensating small Nordic nations in the Arctic.

Analysis: The Arctic Governance Ecosystem

The institutional character of Arctic governance, of which the Arctic Council is the institutional core, does not merely provide a neutral space of discourse; it literally produces a strategic space that disproportionately empowers small state agency (Rottem, 2019). This structure highly negatively stresses the strength of raw materials and actively enhances the currencies where the small states are usually well off: diplomacy, technical expertise, and a sense of procedural legitimacy. This ecosystem possesses three intersecting attributes that define the compensatory potential, such as the formal principle of equality by consensus, the principle of the fundamental role of knowledge production, and the typical thickening of the law.

The Formal Equality and the Power of Consensus

In one of the simplest procedural models, the institutionalization of the principle of sovereign equality

of the eight member states is the Arctic Council, in which the majority of the international arenas are rhetoric (Schermers and Blokker, 2018). The great power diktat, or weighted voting, is not followed, and instead, decision-making is based on the consensus. This is a technicality, but it is a rule of the constitution, which transforms radically the nature of the process of negotiation. It provides a good procedural guarantee to Nordic small states. It subjects all to de jure veto such that no legal statement of any kind or project of substance may be conducted without their express authorization. This transforms their participation into a vital one. This rule of consensus is, as a matter of fact, a strong discouragement to open coercion and the cultivation of a culture of concessive and persuasive activity. A superpower cannot simply outvote a group of small states; it must be involved in argumentation and negotiations in order to create some consensus. This makes the art of diplomacy, coalitions, and technical competence in making proposals that were sound and politically acceptable highly important, which were exactly the attributes that states such as Norway, Finland, and Iceland had developed.

Epistemic Authority: The Centrality of Knowledge

The second enabler of this enabling environment is the express mandate of the Arctic Council that delimits its interests and coverage to environmental protection and sustainable development, specifically excluding military security as its scope. This is a vital functional limitation. It diverts state interaction out of the old high-politics, zero-sum competition, and into what is commonly seen as mutually beneficial cooperation (Holden, 2023). It is not a security committee but rather a collection of six ongoing working groups (e.g., AMAP, PAME, CAFF), which are communities of knowledge, the epistemic communities.

The groups are committed to the scientific evaluation and gathering of data as well as policy recommendations on certain themes such as pollution, biodiversity, and marine ecosystems (Watson-Wright et al., 2024). Here, power is not gained by the quantity of the military but rather based on the excellence of the science, the strength of the data, and the innovativeness of the technical solutions. This is an epistemic space that Nordic small states instinctively occupy, and they always spend a lot on research and specialized technology. The Nordic countries' engineering and clean technologies in cold climates are already in the lead as marine biology and oil spill response research in Finland and Norway and geothermal energy and fisheries science in Iceland become firsthand sources of institutional power. Through the chairing of working groups, the fronting of assessment reports, and the delivery of expert delegates, these states influence the very evidence base upon which

all the decisions of the Council and other legal agreements are developed.

Comparative Case Studies: Strategic Archetypes in the Implementation of Legal Resources

The structurally enabling Arctic governance does not secure influence; it gives a platform where states have to act strategically (Steinveg, 2020). The comparative study of Iceland, Finland, and Norway indicates that there are three different, but complementary, archetypes of how small states use international law as a resource. Their strategies are informed by their distinctive capitals, in which non-material assets are converted into legal, institutional power in an impeccable way.

Norway: The Institutional Insider and Architecture of Regulations

The approach of Norway is entrenched institutional and regulatory entrepreneurship (Kolvereid & Åmo, 2019). Being a coastal state located on the Arctic Ocean, having a huge hydrocarbon potential, a large fishery, and a centuries-long polar identity, Norway has considerable material and historical interests in the region. It does not only seek to be a player but rather to influence the very rulebook according to which Arctic activity is conducted in such a manner that it predetermines a predictable, collaborative order, which ensures that its sovereignty and economic interests are not violated and the actions of bigger powers are restricted.

Norway puts this into practice through its constant search and acquisition of institutional strategic positions. The fact that it was the chairman of the Arctic Council (2006-2009) was decisively constructive, as it led negotiations that would result in the first agreements to be binding by the Arctic Council. This placed Norway in a position to establish the first agenda and procedural norms of this new process of law. Outside the chairmanships, Norway is the permanent host of the secretariat of the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (MOSPA) (Arctic Council, 2013). This is not just an administrative position; this offers Norway a permanent agenda-forming capability, custodianship of the agreement in force, and a focal point of information and best practice, making it essentially the permanent custodian of this legal order.

Norway has an influence in the legal negotiating process, which is borne out in the fact that the agreements are extremely detailed, operational, and prescriptive. It proposes certain, technically demanding standards, based on its global leadership in the area of maritime safety, oil spill mitigation, and ecosystem control (Daisy et al., 2022). Incorporating its high standards of operation into the binding law, Norway increases the criteria of all players in the Arctic, where

legal codification serves as an exportation of its home standards to the region. This strategy makes its technical skills a kind of regulatory authority, as the legal framework will be in line with its preference of strict, practical rules rather than abstract principles.

Iceland: The Geographic Leverager and Niche Entrepreneur

Iceland describes a masterpiece in how to use acute vulnerability to diplomatic centrality, using legal and institutional means (Heffernan, 2020). The only tool that Iceland can boast of, with regard to the lack of indigenous military or economic power generation projection in the Arctic, is the undebatable geographical position on major trans-Arctic shipping and air routes. Its policy is entrepreneurial: to inexorably transform this geographical lot into essential institutional capital.

The greatest success of Iceland in this respect was the acquisition of permanent headquarters of the Arctic Council Secretariat in Iceland in 2013 (Jóhannesson, 2022). This was a direct consequence of a long-term diplomatic initiative that put Iceland not in the role of a peripheral actor but as the rational, impartial geographical and logistical core of the Arctic cooperation. Having the Secretariat is a sustained, low-profile source of power: it creates dense networks of contacts with Council officials, provides minor manipulation capacity of administrative operations, and gives Iceland a symbolic stake in the identity of an Arctic capital.

In certain legal systems, Iceland follows the policy of niche specialization. The voices of the parties had a strong technical weight in the negotiation of the Search and Rescue (SAR) Agreement because of the decades of experience that Iceland had had in performing intricate operations in the hazardous North Atlantic, known as search and rescue (SAR) (Rottem, 2013). It was able to bring a critical input in defining the geographic search and rescue areas in the agreement in a manner that represented realities of operation and its own areas of responsibility. By specializing in areas where it had unrivaled practical experience, Iceland exported operational skills in niche areas into meaningful impact in law so as to make the treaty viable and representative of its strengths.

Finland: Normative and Technical Facilitator

The power of Finland is based on its ambivalent character between a normative entrepreneur and a technical problem-solver (Kantola & Kuusela, 2018). Without the resources of Norway in the littoral and Iceland in its central geography, the capital of Finland is its image of pragmatic neutrality, advanced technological development, and the firm resolve to adhere to the multilateral process. It is the greasers of the wheels of

cooperation who operate law to further collective environmental norms and to overcome practical obstacles to cooperation.

This was demonstrated by the chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2017-2019) by Finland, which bears the theme of Exploring Common Solutions (High North News, 2019). It focused on tangible results that are easily realizable, such as leading the way in supporting the Implementation Plan of the Paris Agreement in the Arctic and the promotion of the Arctic Meteorological Cooperation. With this emphasis, Finland was able to redirect the work of the Council to its own strength: the consensus-making on climate action and the creation of technical frameworks of cooperation.

The best way to demarcate this facilitating task is the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (Showstack, 2018). Finland, as a nation with extensive experience in the administrative system and cross-border logistics, made great contributions in making the most viable provisions of the treaty. It promoted provisions that streamline the visa processes, ease the movement of science equipment across boundaries, and access research facilities. Finland made the step to eliminate these small yet significant bureaucratic hurdles and therefore, with the assistance of the legal text, could be able to establish a more efficient and attractive system for all Arctic scientists. It is more powerful than its great guise in its actual and effective legal plumbing of the accord, which gives it credibility and silent authority as the state that makes cooperation practically possible. In so doing, it can be ensured that the normative goal of scientific cooperation has a legal basis that serves to consolidate its status as an instrumental technical structure of the Arctic regime.

Conclusion

This paper establishes the presence of the unique architectural design of Arctic governance as the powerful enabler of the Nordic small states, who can employ the international law strategically to offset their deficits in material power. The consensus-grounded procedures of the Arctic Council, the privileging of the epistemic power, and the iterative law-thickening process of the council itself all create a space where diplomatic dexterity, technological competency, and the persuasive normativism all come into play with a great deal of effectiveness. The geographic location, technical expertise, and institutional entrepreneurship have been adeptly converted into visible power and influence by Iceland, Finland, and Norway, which have determined the binding agreements and shaped the agenda of the region, as shown by the comparative cases. Nevertheless, this reimbursement capability is not extensive in its nature. The international law at work is a conditional and facilitative multiplier and not a transformative equalizer in

this regard. It is most evidently powerful in the relatively low-politics-like areas like environmental monitoring, scientific collaboration, and practical emergency response, where there is mutual concern on the matter and the exercise of coercive power is relegated to the margins. Conversely, the weaknesses of the framework are unveiled whereby a fundamental strategic or sovereign interest, such as military security, the right of access to undersea resources, or a deep geopolitical rift, occurs. There is an implicit power imbalance in these high-stakes arenas, and they will surely cut across the institutionalized norms. In this respect, thus, in the case of Nordic small

states, the Arctic governance is not a replacement of material power but a fundamental supplement to the efficiency of other forms of capital they possess. The question that has been nagging is whether this mature model of cooperation on the basis of rules can live through the growing tensions of strategy competition. The future of the Arctic will be an unambiguous experiment on the healthiness of the international law and the international institutions in a period when the liberal order, which they are established on, is put to the test like never before.

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