

## Editorial

Dear Readers,

German cartographer August Petermann was one of the greats of his field in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; his distinctions included receiving the highest award of the Royal Geographical Society in London. It was his firm belief that, thanks to the Gulf Stream, there was ice-free access to the North Pole. Indeed, the theme of the first ever German Cartographers' Day in 1865, initiated by Petermann, was the organisation of a German expedition to the North. It was not until several failed expeditions and dozens of deaths later that Petermann's theory was finally abandoned.

A good 150 years later, climate change has moved the prospect of an ice-free North Pole from the realm of fantasy to the realm of possibility: this has far-reaching implications for the entire Arctic region, which has now become part of the debate on security policy as a potential source of conflict. The "battle for the North Pole" is on everyone's lips, writes Michael Däumer in this issue of *International Reports*.

But what does that mean exactly? Is there a looming threat of a race between the superpowers – possibly even to be battled out with weapons – to gain access to previously inaccessible resources that are now open for exploitation to whoever is quickest to plant their flag? Will there be conflicts over new sea routes that outrank existing international trade routes due to the shorter distances?

There can certainly be no doubt that the potential for conflict in the Far North has increased. Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look at the facts and causal connections and at the interests of the stakeholders involved. As quickly becomes apparent, the reality in the Arctic is much less black and white than some of the extreme scenarios being put out by the media might suggest.

For example, Arild Moe puts into perspective the idea that the region holds huge reserves of raw materials that are bound to result in conflicting claims. He makes two points here: firstly, the amount of resources that can be extracted in an economically viable way is likely to be much smaller than many people expect; secondly, most of the deposits that seem likely to be able to be exploited are located in areas that are already clearly allocated to a particular state.

This does not mean that conflict over these resources is impossible. In addition to the Arctic states, as David Merkle describes, China – a self-proclaimed "Near-Arctic State" – is also pushing to expand its influence in the region, investing in infrastructure and raw material projects. In doing so, it finds itself in competition with Western companies and the interests of the local population in some cases. Nonetheless, the continuation of such manageable conflicts of interest seems a more plausible scenario in the foreseeable future than any large-scale struggle over sovereignty claims between nations.

Likewise, it is advisable to take a sober view of the sea routes between the Atlantic and the Pacific that are likely to emerge in the future or be usable for longer periods of the year as a result of declining ice cover. The Transpolar Sea Route via the North Pole region: "not a

realistic option” either today or in the near future for safety reasons, according to Moe. The Northwest Passage through the Canadian Arctic archipelago: not yet developed as a trade route by the Canadian government. The Northeast Passage along Russia’s northern coast: in use, but not to the extent assumed in the past – and hoped for not least by Moscow – due to increasingly restrictive regulations and persisting logistical pitfalls.

More frequent use of all or some of the Arctic sea routes in the future cannot be ruled out, however, and this does hold potential for conflict in that the legal status of the Northwest and Northeast Passages in particular is disputed. The divisions here run along rather unusual lines: while Canada and Russia take the view that the routes along their respective land masses pass through waters inside their territory, the United States, the EU and also China regard the passages as international sea routes.

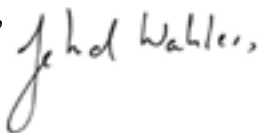
Generally speaking, the Arctic must be seen as both: a region that is influenced by external factors and which also exerts an influence itself. Take the example of climate change: Antje Boetius explains that the trend of global warming is particularly evident in the northern polar region – with temperatures rising three to four times faster than the global average. The resulting changes in Arctic wind currents can in turn cause extreme weather conditions even in much more southerly latitudes.

Then there is the example of security policy: on the one hand, as Thomas Kunze and Leonardo Salvador outline, the Arctic ice melt affects the threat perception of a state like Russia, which de facto stands to gain a new physical northern border as a result. On the other hand, the much-lamented remilitarisation of the northern polar region is also the consequence of a development whose origins have little to do with the Arctic: the confrontation between the Western states and Russia, and increasingly also China, is being transferred to the strategically important Arctic region too. It is against this background that Norbert Eschborn examines the Arctic policies of Canada and the United States, and Gabriele Baumann and Julian Tucker look at those of the Nordic countries. Meanwhile, Knut Abraham analyses German policy in the Far North, arguing that significantly more resources should be devoted to the security policy aspect.

Whether or not the Arctic is the most important geostrategic place on earth today, as Canadian businessman Frank Giustra claimed at the Arctic Circle Assembly a few years ago, is a moot point. It is certainly true that the region has gained in significance and that a differentiated approach to it is necessary. This issue seeks to contribute to such an approach.

I hope you will find this report a stimulating read.

Yours,



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