

Joanna Grzela

Jan Kochanowski University
in Kielce

THE UK POLICY TOWARDS THE HIGH NORTH AT THE BACKGROUND OF TRANSFORMATIONS AND GROWING INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN THE REGION

Introduction. Climate changes in the North Pole region are growing twice as fast as in other regions.¹ The process poses a threat for the local population, plants and animals, destabilises the weather, but on the other hand opens new areas for economic development (with its possibilities of resource extraction, enlarged area for fishery, new routes for cargo shipping and increased tourism). The obvious question can be posed whether it is possible to reach a balance between benefiting from the possibilities and the protection of Arctic natural environment. Another problem is who will benefit from the opening of the High North and whether it will be possible to avoid a conflict. Russia, Canada, the USA, but also Norway, with its significant oil and gas resources, and Denmark, because of Greenland, all emphasise their rights and compete for their influence in the region. On the other hand, the above mentioned countries have been obliged to maintain peace, to settle the disputes according to the existing international law and to act accordingly against the challenges connected with unstable climate conditions and navigation security. The so called “Arctic three”, i.e. Finland, Iceland and Sweden share the views and cooperate with other states in the Arctic Council. Not only European countries are interested in the High North, but also the countries of Northeast Asia though they are situated thousands kilometres away from the Arctic. Those non-Arctic stakeholders (or “near-Arctic” as China defines itself²) significantly extend the boundaries of the Arctic interest.

There are several factors which determine the increase of the interest in the Arctic.

Approximately 90% of international trade is shipped by sea. Melting icecap may not only intensify the navigation between Europe and Asia but also may significantly shorten the time of travel. For the global economy it means considerable savings. Secondly, global warming enables exploitation of natural resources.³ Access to oil,

¹ *2014 Arctic Sea Ice Extent – 6th Lowest in Millennia*, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2014/oct/20/2014-arctic-sea-ice-extent-6th-lowest-in-millennia> [February 17, 2015].

² *10 May 2012: China Defines itself as a “Near-Arctic State”*, Says SIPRI, <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2012/arcticchinapr> [February 17, 2015].

³ *Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle*, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/fs2008-3049.pdf> [February 16, 2015].

gas, minerals and fish, which was previously limited by thick ice, now becomes a possible and profitable source of income. The constant demand for oil, gas and minerals, even in the period of global recession, means that high prices for resources can be maintained. The prices will grow in the period of economic prosperity in Europe and Asia, which means that the potential mineral resources of the Arctic will become even more attractive. Thirdly, increased activity and the number of vessels will probably pose a new threat for the natural environment and internal security of the Arctic states. Fourthly, climate changes may, on the one hand, contribute to the navigation growth, but on the other hand thawing of permafrost may endanger the existing road and railway infrastructure on land.

Analysis of the latest research and reference works. Transformations in the Arctic are of great interest for scientists of various specializations, journalists and politicians. Among reference works there are studies and dissertations dedicated to the Arctic issues and its growing political importance written by the following authors: R.M. Czarny, J. Symonides, L. Heininen, N. Einarsson, J. Nyman Larsen, A. Nilsson, O.R. Young, K. Kubiak, M. Łuszczuk, O. Osica, R. Huebert, L. Jakobson, P. Graczyk. Each of them studies a separate issue of the Arctic reality. The author of the following article, in the part concerning the character of changes and the reasons of the increased interest of many states in the Arctic, has interpreted the results of the studies carried out by the above mentioned scientists. In the part concerning the matter of the article i.e. the policy of the UK towards the Arctic, the author has analysed expert reports as well as documents of British institutions (statements, opinions, comments).

The aim of the article is the analysis of the Arctic guidelines and the reasons of the UK's engagement in the High North in the context of the ongoing transformations in the region.

Research results. The history of the UK's relationship with the Arctic has been long, mainly because of the English whalers going to Svalbard in order to hunt cetaceans⁴ but primarily thanks to a large group of English researchers with Martin Frobisher, the 16th century sailor and explorer, renowned for his search of the shortest route to Asia i.e. the Northeast Passage. The existence of the route was proved by English geographers at the turn of the 16th century.⁵ Great Britain is one of a few European observer countries in the Arctic Council and because of its engagement wants to strengthen its position in the High North. Obviously, Great Britain is not an Arctic country and does not have any claims there. Geographically, however, the British might be called a "near-Arctic nation", because of its northernmost point Muckle Flugga, a small rocky island in the Shetland Islands, which lies 75 kilometres south of the Faroes and north of the 60th parallel that defines the boundary of the Arctic near those islands.⁶ Thus, the Arctic remains a part of British territorial waters.

⁴*British Arctic Whaling: an Overview*, <http://www.hull.ac.uk/baw/overview/overview.htm> [February 23, 2015].

⁵*Encyklopedia powszechna PWN*, Warsaw 1993.

⁶J. Mazo, *Britain as an Arctic Nation*, <http://www.iiss.org/en/politics%20and%20strategy/blog/sections/2014-d2de/november-52fa/britain-as-an-arctic-nation-7118> [February 17, 2015].

Geographical proximity means that the UK must pay particular attention to the Arctic matters, especially in the period of unprecedented changes in the region. Currently, the Arctic is important for Britain for several reasons:

- **political** – (the Queen is still the head of state in Canada, which makes it legitimate to bear political responsibility for the Canadian Arctic);
- **economic and security** – (the UK’s government notices potential economic opportunities. Oil, gas, fishery and mineral resources are the basis of economic development and the companies such as British Petroleum or Mittal are the entities most interested in the exploration of the newly accessed area. However, considering the fact that London does not control the Arctic territory, they can only operate through public-private partnerships with foreign capital. The example could be the agreement between BP and Rosneft concerning establishing a joint enterprise TNK-BP, concluded with the intention of the Arctic resources exploration⁷). The UK National Strategy for Maritime Security, concluded in May 2014, states as follows: “The United Kingdom is an island nation with a strong maritime heritage and maritime interests throughout the world. Almost every aspect of our national life depends on our connections to the wider world, and most of these connections are provided by the sea. We depend on the sea for our prosperity and security and are reliant on a stable global market for the raw materials, energy and manufactured goods critical to sustaining our way of life. Recent trends such as globalisation, resource competition, population growth and climate change have changed the maritime domain to one that is simultaneously more connected – providing substantial growth opportunities for UK business [...] in which developments in distant maritime regions can have an immediate and direct impact on our prosperity and security”.⁸ Therefore, the prospects for opening new navigation routes in the High North cannot be anticipated more. The seas are the driving force for the British economy, with 93% of its trade being transported by sea. For that reason, the Arctic is of great importance for the further economic development of the country (approximately 40% of food consumed by the British is imported, of which 91% is transported by sea). Maritime industry of Great Britain directly contributes up to £13.8 billion to the UK economy, and indirectly a further £17.9 billion. It accounts for £8.5 billion revenue for the UK Exchequer each year (the UK’s fishing industry employs over 12,000 people and British fishing vessels transport over 600 000 tonnes of fish with a value of £770 million each year).⁹ For the above mentioned reasons and considering national security, the UK’s government aims to establish a strong global partnership (joint efforts of diplomacy,

⁷ *Rosneft Finalizes TNK-BP Deal, Becomes World’s Largest Oil Producer*, <http://rt.com/business/rosneft-finalize-tnk-bp-deal-largest-oil-producer-583/> [February 17, 2015].

⁸ *The UK National Strategy for Maritime Security* Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty May 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310323/National_Strategy_for_Maritime_Security_2014.pdf [February 23, 2015].

⁹ *Ibidem*.

police, army, as well as strong and efficient representation in crucial organisations dealing with the issues), as well as international law regulations (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – UNCLOS). Also because of those reasons Great Britain began to cooperate closely with Nordic and Baltic countries (NB8) within the Northern Future Forum. The aim of the Forum is to discuss future challenges and exchange opinions on business innovations, long-term economic growth, enterprise and job creation while preventing social exclusion. The first meeting of that kind was initiated by the UK’s Prime Minister and took place in London from the 19th to 20th January 2011. During the meeting, the possibilities of increasing economic potential of the region especially by developing technology were considered. Also the idea of including Great Britain in NB8 cooperation was discussed. At the press conference after the meeting, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron said: “I want to see action on economic reform by Europe as a whole on trade, regulation, single market, on innovation but I believe that UK, Nordic and Baltic countries can be the avant-garde and be the guardsmen in delivering jobs and growth”.¹⁰ Scandinavian and Baltic countries are important trade partners for Great Britain’s economy (generating revenue of £54 billion per year, equivalent to the UK trade with China). The purpose of the London meeting was not only the improvement of commercial relations, but also a closer cooperation. David Cameron perceives Scandinavian countries as an example for the UK. According to him, “this meeting brought together people and ideas from nine countries that face common challenges. We came together in London to listen and to learn and to capture ideas, the kind of ideas that can make our societies better places for our citizens to live in”.¹¹ Some observers saw the summit as a “British power-play”, an attempt to create the “Northern League” out of Euro-sceptical, pro-Atlantic states, which want to restrain Brussels’s authority and the EU’s growing expenses.¹² The participants of the Northern Future Forum share similar views on several matters, which may influence the sustainability and frequency of the initiative: they are cautious towards Russia, demand free trade and common energy network, they want to be more competitive and become leaders in technological innovations. There are however some diversities. Some countries support budgetary discipline in the EU, others favour a strong relationship with the USA in the NATO. The meetings in NB8+1 Format are held on regular basis. Another Northern Future Forum summit took place in February 2012 in the Swedish capital,¹³ and for

¹⁰ UK, *Nordic and Baltic Countries Can Be European Avant-Garde – British PM*, <http://www.lithuaniatribune.com/5145/uk-nordic-and-baltic-countries-can-be-european-avant-garde-british-pm-20115145/> [February 5, 2015].

¹¹ Quoted in: V. Kreilinger, *Why Nordic Countries Are a Cornerstone of British Foreign Policy*, <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/node/1019> [February 5, 2015].

¹² W. Bagehot, *Nice Up North. Why David Cameron Is Fascinated by Sweden and Its Neighbours*, “The Economist”, January 27, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18010449> [February 11, 2015].

¹³ See: <http://www.government.se/nff> [March 1, 2015].

the third time the nine Prime Ministers met in Riga on the 28th February 2013.¹⁴ Further meetings have been planned to take place in Helsinki and Reykjavik.

- **environment protection and scientific research** – these issues are strongly supported in the UK policy as the policy-makers are aware of all the threats for the Arctic environment connected with the melting ice-cap. For over fifty years Great Britain has been a leader in exploration and scientific research in both polar regions with the purpose of biodiversity protection and understanding the ongoing changes. Currently, there are 77 institutions involved in the research of Arctic climate and natural environment, including 46 universities and 20 institutes employing over 500 scientists specialising in the Arctic problems. The entity that coordinates all the research in the Arctic Office (established in May 2009¹⁵) of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) hosted at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). The BAS manages the UK research station at Ny-Alesund on Svalbard. The NERC's role is to promote British research and collaboration in the Arctic.¹⁶ The NERC operates four polar research vessels: James Clack Ross, Ernest Shackleton, RRS Discovery and RRS James Cook. Another institution is Scott Polar Research Institute, a centre for research into both polar regions at Cambridge University.¹⁷ Considering the growing international interest in the High North and the pressure of many British political and scientific organizations,¹⁸ on the 17th October 2013 the UK government published its priorities in the Arctic policy entitled *Adapting to Change: UK Policy Towards the Arctic*.¹⁹ Mark Simmonds, then the Minister for Polar Regions at the Foreign Office stated that “the Arctic is one of the most dynamic and influential regions of the world, despite its remoteness from large population centres and its often challenging geographical and climatic conditions.” And further on: “We are the Arctic's nearest neighbour and we have long-standing environmental and commercial interest there. Our climate, migrating birds, fishing and shipping industry, and energy needs are all reasons why what happens in the Arctic is of vital interest to us”.²⁰ Likewise Science and Universities Minister

¹⁴ See: <http://www.futureforum2013.gov.lv/en/> [March 1, 2015].

¹⁵ See: <http://www.arctic.ac.uk/about/> [March 1, 2015].

¹⁶ *Protecting the Arctic*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmenvaud/171/17107.htm#note539> [March 1, 2015].

¹⁷ See: <http://www.arcticinfo.eu/en/united-kingdom> [February 25, 2015].

¹⁸ See: *Protecting the Arctic – Environmental Audit Committee*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmenvaud/171/17107.htm#note539> [March 1, 2015]; cf: D. Depledge, *The United Kingdom and the Arctic in the 21st Century*, <http://arcticyearbook.com/index.php/articles/18-the-united-kingdom-and-the-arctic-in-the-21st-century> [March 1, 2015].

¹⁹ *Adapting To Change – UK Policy towards the Arctic*, Polar Regions Department Foreign and Commonwealth Office, King Charles Street, London, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adapting-to-change-uk-policy-towards-the-arctic> [February 12, 2015].

²⁰ Quoted in: *UK Sets Out Its Arctic Policy with “Legitimate Interests in the Region” and Priorities*, <http://en.mercopress.com/2013/10/17/uk-sets-out-its-arctic-policy-with-legitimate-interests-in-the-region-and-priorities> [February 17, 2015]; cf: *UK Aims to Become Hub for Arctic Oil Exploration*, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/oct/17/uk-hub-arctic-oil-exploration-greenpeace> [February 17, 2015].

David Willetts admitted that “as set out in this new framework, the UK will promote greater understanding of the Arctic through international scientific collaboration and will promote policy development on the basis of sound evidence. Co-operation, respect and appropriate leadership will be central to the UK’s approach when working with the Arctic states”.²¹

Adapting to Change: UK Policy Towards the Arctic is the first document defining the UK’s interests in the High North in a detailed way. It presents the vision of the Arctic based on three principles:

- respect for the sovereign rights of the Arctic states and the interests of people who live and work there;
- leadership in matters of climate change (recognising the priority of the eight Arctic states) trans-boundary issues, science and industry in the region;
- cooperation with the Arctic states, indigenous peoples and other entities in the region. The UK government sets out three dimensions to its policy in the Arctic:
- **human** – the country is committed to work towards the region that is safe and secure, well-governed in conjunction with indigenous peoples and in line with the international law. The UK declines the necessity to create an Arctic Treaty and intends to fulfil its objectives through the Arctic Council in cooperation with other existing international organizations;
- **ecological** – the UK aims to develop international research in order to understand the Arctic problems thoroughly; it emphasises the importance of reducing the emission of greenhouse gases and global temperature rise; it is committed to act as a leader in diplomatic efforts leading to a legally binding global climate change agreement;
- **commercial** – the reduction of Arctic ice means growing interest in potential natural resources deposits which, as the UK government points out, must be held with a special care of the natural environment of the Arctic and its ecosystems. The UK supports “legal and responsible commercial activity in the Arctic”, held in a sustainable way. This dimension of the Arctic policy is of special importance for the British as it is connected with the energy security of the country and can be associated with the reduction of carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy sources. The UK energy relies on natural gas, with Norway being its fundamental supplier. To help satisfy projected demand for import gas and the transition to low-carbon economy, the government intends to support new infrastructure investments that would connect Norway’s new Arctic gas finds with the existing North Sea pipeline network.

The UK is committed to be the place of developing specialistic knowledge, which is of great importance for the oil and gas companies operating in the Arctic.²² It might mean the construction of oil and gas rigs, in which the UK has a long-standing

²¹ Quoted in: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/respecting-the-arctic-promoting-uk-interests> [February 17, 2015].

²² D. Depledge, K. Dodds, *The UK and The Arctic. The Strategic Gap*, “Rusi Journal”, June/July, 2011, vol. 156, no. 3, pp. 72-79.

experience (connected with extracting oil in the North Sea), but also additional services such as financial or legal advisory and shipping.²³

Additionally, the UK emphasises the necessity to support stability and security in the region, seeing the NATO as the main guarantor of trust and peaceful cooperation. It is also interested in developing fishery, tourism and scientific research in the Arctic.²⁴ The document implies the government to support science and finance climate research in order to develop knowledge on Arctic changes and their impact on global system- weather and biological diversity.

Conclusion. The UK's priorities are compatible with the Arctic States strategies and they focus mainly on the civilian aspect of international relations.²⁵ The Arctic is strategically important for the UK not only because of its geographical proximity, potential benefits for the British economy, impact on climate and weather, but also access to the northern part of the Atlantic. The UK's policy towards the Arctic is well thought and well balanced, but at the same time hesitant and cautious, thus being more reactive than proactive. The following aspects are of special significance for Britain:

- new navigation routes;
- new sources of oil, gas, minerals and fishery;
- impact on the international political scene;
- scientific research on climate changes and their impact on the flora and fauna (extending human activity in the Arctic will depend on technological advancement, which will in turn facilitate the development of British research centres, universities and enterprises).

The UK's government does not intend and cannot stand aside of the transformations taking place in the neighbourhood – it must become a part of cooperation and management in the region. The country aims to a peaceful management of the Arctic. It wants to increase its influence in the region by maintaining good bilateral and multi-lateral relations with the Arctic States. By its engagement in the High North the UK wants to remain politically and ecologically correct, but primarily intends to guarantee energy security. The ambivalence of the British attitude is connected with emphasising the economic aspect of the Arctic on the one hand, and on the other focusing on the environment protection of the region and reducing global sources of pollution. Such discrepancy in the government's principles was strongly criticised by ecologists, for whom economic interests and environment protection cannot be reconciled. Rod Downie, head of UK marine policy at World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly WWF), said: "The UK's new Arctic policy is a welcome step towards the conservation of one of our largest wilderness regions, and could in time serve as a model for other nations with emerging interests in the Arctic. But it also exposes the lack of coherence

²³ *UK Aims to Become Hub for Arctic Oil Exploration*, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/oct/17/uk-hub-arctic-oil-exploration-greenpeace> [February 17, 2015].

²⁴ R. Mills, *UK Government Arctic Policy*, Polar Regions Unit, FCO, http://www.oceanstewardship.com/IOSF%202009/Presentations_2009/RMills_2009.pdf [January 30, 2015].

²⁵ L. Heininen, *Arctic Strategies*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.nrf.is/arctic-strategies> [January 30, 2015].

in Whitehall over climate and energy policy. Instead of looking to high risk Arctic oil and gas for energy »security«, the UK government, and governments and industry across the world, must heed the warning signs from the rapidly changing Arctic by acting with urgency and ambition to tackle climate change [...]».²⁶

The scope of British interests in the Arctic and some parties' expectations²⁷ demonstrate that the UK's policy towards the region should be firm, coherent and coordinated, otherwise its position will be replaced by the states with smaller experience and dependencies, but more outright in their policy towards the High North.²⁸

Summary

THE UK POLICY TOWARDS THE HIGH NORTH AT THE BACKGROUND OF TRANSFORMATIONS AND GROWING INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN THE REGION

The United Kingdom does not have any territory in the Arctic, so it has no formal role to play in shaping international policy in the region. However, it still remains an interested party because of its northernmost part being close to the High North area. On the 17th October 2013 the British government issued its first document concerning the Arctic policy. It presents the vision of the Arctic, the region which is secure and managed in cooperation with the indigenous peoples, in accordance with the international law, with full respect for the fragile natural environment (reducing greenhouse gases emissions, biodiversity protection) and the balance between economic activity and environmental protection.

The following article attempts to analyse the UK's Arctic policy, its priorities and the reasons of interest in the remote region. The aim of the article is to demonstrate the British-Arctic relations in the context of the growing interest in the High North expressed by the countries of the region as well as by the non-Arctic stakeholders.

Keywords: the Arctic, Arctic policy, the UK, climate change

²⁶ Quoted in: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/oct/17/uk-hub-arctic-oil-exploration-greenpeace> [March 1, 2015].

²⁷ *Responding to a Changing Arctic. Select Committee on the Arctic – Report of Session 2014-15*, Ordered to be printed 11 February 2015 and published 27 February 2015, Published by the Authority of the House of Lords London: The Stationery Office Limited.

²⁸ On the 27th February 2015, Chair of the House of Lords Committee on the Arctic, Robin Teverson stated in the interview that the UK should follow the example of Japan, Singapore and France and appoint an Ambassador for the Arctic. See: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/arcticcom/news/report-published/> [March 3, 2015].

Резюме

БРИТАНСКАЯ ПОЛИТИКА В ОТНОШЕНИИ КРАЙНЕГО СЕВЕРА НА ФОНЕ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ И РАСТУЩЕГО МЕЖДУНАРОДОГО ИНТЕРЕСА К ЭТОМУ РЕГИОНУ

Великобритания не имеет никакой территории в Арктике, и поэтому не играет никакого формального роля в формировании международной политики в регионе, хотя ее трактуется в качестве заинтересованной стороны, потому что наиболее северная часть ее находится недалеко от площади Крайнего Севера. 17 октября 2013 г. британское правительство издало первый документ по арктической политике. Это видение Арктики, земли, которая является безопасной и управляемой в сотрудничестве с коренными народами, в соответствии с нормами международного права, при полном уважении к окружающей среде (сокращение выбросов парниковых газов, защита биоразнообразия), и балансом между экономической деятельностью и охраной окружающей среды.

Эта статья пытается проанализировать политику Великобритании в Арктике, свои приоритеты и причины интереса к этой далекой стране. Цель этой статьи заключается в иллюстрации отношений британо-арктических в контексте растущего интереса к Крайнему Северу, как в странах региона тако и у внеарктических заинтересованных сторон.

Ключевые слова: Арктика, Арктическая политика, Великобритания, изменение климата

Streszczenie

POLITYKA WIELKIEJ BRYTANII WOBEC DALEKIEJ PÓLNOCY NA TLE PRZEobrażeń I ROSNĄCEGO MIĘDZYNARODOWEGO ZAINTERESOWANIA TYM REGIONEM

Wielka Brytania nie posiada żadnego terytorium w Arktyce, a więc nie ma formalnej roli do odegrania w kształtowaniu polityki międzynarodowej w tym regionie, mimo to jest traktowana jako strona zainteresowana, ponieważ niektóre najdalej wysunięte na północ jej części są blisko obszaru Dalekiej Północy. Siedemnastego października 2013 r. brytyjski rząd wydał po raz pierwszy dokument na temat polityki arktycznej. Jest w nim przedstawiona wizja Arktyki, krainy, która jest bezpieczna oraz zarządzana we współpracy z rdzenną ludnością, zgodnie z prawem międzynarodowym, z pełnym poszanowaniem środowiska naturalnego (ograniczenie emisji gazów cieplarnianych, ochrona bioróżnorodności) oraz równowagą pomiędzy działalnością gospodarczą a ochroną środowiska.

W artykule podjęto próbę analizy polityki arktycznej Wielkiej Brytanii, jej priorytetów oraz powodów zainteresowania tą odległą krainą. Celem artykułu jest ilustracja relacji brytyjsko-arktycznych w kontekście wzrastającego zainteresowania Daleką Północą zarówno krajów tego regionu, jak i niearktycznych interesariuszy.

Słowa kluczowe: Arktyka, polityka arktyczna, Wielka Brytania, zmiany klimatu

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