

The European Arctic in US foreign energy policy: the case of the Norwegian high north

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ABSTRACT. This article examines how US policy makers relate to the European Arctic as an oil and gas region, and more specifically to Norway's efforts to promote the region through its high north policy. The 'high north' is defined as the Norwegian and Russian sectors of the Barents Sea. The Norwegian assumption that northern oil and gas is of interest to the international community is tested by analysing and explaining the character of the US approach, with an assessment of whether Norway has succeeded in influencing how the USA views the high north as an energy region. Norway has managed to raise the awareness of the high north as an energy region in Washington, but the interest in the topic has been moderate. Moreover, Norwegian policy makers in the first phase of the high north initiative have misinterpreted US officials' definition of the situation in which Washington's foreign energy policy is developed. Ironically, Norway's 'exemplary' energy policy has led to less response than was initially expected, whereas Russia seems to be of significantly greater interest for the USA. With its relatively small resource potential, straightforward investment climate and unclear high north strategy, Norway and its high north do not stand out as very interesting to the USA, which tends to direct more attention to cases in which its oil and gas companies work under more uncertain investment framework conditions in regions with huge energy resources.

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Introduction

The world is heavily dependent on petroleum and seems set to remain so for the foreseeable future. In the USA, the demand for oil and gas is growing while domestic production is declining, so its oil and gas imports are expected to rise significantly in the coming decades. Demand from other consumers such as India and China is also rising. Political instability persists in major oil and gas producing regions, and what many see as a new resource nationalism is winning ground in important producing countries. As a result, the oil price has been rising steadily, leaving international oil companies with large coffers but constrained opportunities, lacking access to a significant share of the world's resource base. Also, as a result of climate change, the polar ice is melting. In combination with technological advances this might make the hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic more accessible and increase the transport opportunities through the region. Accordingly, economic activities in the region might increase dramatically in the future and intensify the political interest in the region from a security, environmental and/or economic perspective. Within this

context the Norwegian government has developed its high north energy policy toward the United States based on the assumption that the region is of interest as a new and politically stable energy region. The 'high north' is here understood as the Norwegian and Russian sectors of the Barents Sea. (For the Norwegian government's broader definition of the region, see Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007: 13.)

The Norwegian sector of the North Sea is a mature energy region, with declining rates of oil discovery and major fields nearing depletion. Therefore, oil and gas production has moved into the Norwegian Sea and even further north to the Barents Sea in the Arctic. Over the past four to five years a debate has emerged on whether and how Norway's oil and gas resources in the high north should be extracted and what implications this will have for Norway's international position. A basic assumption in this debate and in Norway's official high north policy is that the Barents Sea can contribute to global energy security and more specifically to the energy security of key allies by lessening their dependence on oil and gas from politically less stable regions. Northern oil and gas is thus believed to hold significant interest for the international community. The 2005 government platform (Norway, Government 2005a, 2005b) declared the high north as national and foreign policy priority number one. The Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre (2006) has noted:

The High north covers the areas of the Arctic adjacent to Norway . . . a vast region with rich resources that already provides a large portion of the fish eaten in Europe and that is about to meet a significant share of the globe's future energy needs — in particular those of the United States. Energy is key. Energy is in fact the new dimension that is reintroducing the High north to the political scene . . . In the years to come, the High

north will be one of the most important strategic areas in the world.

Energy security has risen to the top of the foreign and domestic policy agendas in the United States. The 2001 National Energy Policy Report (United States 2001: viii) indicated that the USA in 2001 faced the worst energy crisis since the oil embargoes of the 1970s. It was proposed the global production of energy be increased, and to 'make energy security a priority of [US] trade and foreign policy' (United States 2001: Chapter 8: 18). The George W. Bush administration has indeed demonstrated an active foreign energy policy aimed at meeting the energy security challenge (see for example Klare (2001) with reference to the Iraq war and Nanay (2005: 139–140) on the US engagement in the Caspian region). The high north might represent an important addition to more volatile energy supplies from politically unstable energy regions, so new initiatives toward the high north are a possibility.

The US Ambassador to Norway from 2002 to 2005, John Doyle Ong, has noted that the USA seeks to:

strengthen our own energy security and world economic prosperity by working cooperatively with key countries and institutions to expand the sources and types of global energy supplies (Ong 2005: 2).

The question is whether the US energy administration sees Norway as a 'key country' and more specifically the high north as a key energy region. It is the aim of the article to test the Norwegian assumption that its northern oil and gas is attracting the interest of the international community by analysing and explaining the character of the US approach to the high north as an energy region. Another aim is to learn more about the mechanisms that might create great power energy policy interest in the region.

Research design and definition of concepts

The approach of this study is explorative. It is assumed that 'what matters in policy making is how the milieu appears to the policy maker, not how it appears to some sideline analyst or how it might appear to a hypothetical omniscient observer' (Sprout and Sprout 1957: 319). Thus, actors act in relation to their environment (or milieu, or surroundings). This environment is not given. Consciously or unconsciously, actors will choose those elements that they deem important from all the possible complex relations in the environment. They make a definition of the situation in which the policy process takes place. Therefore, in order to understand policy, that is, state behaviour or action, we need to know how policy makers define the situation. The manner in which policy makers define situations thus becomes another way of expressing how the state is oriented to action and why (Snyder and others 2002: 59, cited in Houghton 2007: 31).

The situation is defined by the actor in terms of the way he 'relates himself to other actors, to possible goals, and to possible means, and in terms of the way means

and ends are formed into strategies of action subject to relevant factors in the situation' (Snyder and others 2002: 64). Applying the policy maker perspective allows variables at different levels of analysis to be included, as the decision maker is the point where international and domestic politics intersect.

Jacobsen (1964) followed a similar logic by using the concept of problem structure. The problem structure includes (1) definitions of the situation, (2) value perceptions and (3) social identifications (Jacobsen 1964: 5). In order to reach a deeper understanding of the US approach to Norwegian energy policy in the high north, Jacobsen's typology of the problem structure is partially adopted by including the policy makers' definitions of the situation and value perceptions, but not the social identifications, as they appear to be less relevant to this particular case.

The free market ideology is a frame of reference and a value to which US policy makers constantly have to relate their actions. Value orientations might influence the way US policy makers perceive the tools available for implementing their policy, in that the political playing field is reduced as a consequence of the emphasis on free, fair and transparent energy markets. Also, it might reduce the perceived need to engage in energy regions in which market rules are already dominant.

The 'US approach' is defined according to the degree of interest shown in energy in the high north. By 'interest' is meant US actions toward Norway that are related to the topic of energy in the high north: they may be non-action, action in the form of oral or written official policy statements, or more specific actions taken by the US administration, such as participating in official meetings with Norwegian policy makers on high north energy issues.

Norwegian energy policy in the high north is defined according to its external aspects, or its foreign policy dimension. To date, it is mainly through the high north dialogues, expert meetings between Norwegian and US officials, and various speeches and presentations by foreign ministers and energy ministers that Norway has promoted the high north as an energy region. Norway's role in contributing to US energy security by developing the region's significant resources in a predictable and environmentally friendly way is an important part of this. More specific issues relevant to Norwegian policy are the Snøhvit gas project in the western Barents Sea, the delimitation line between Russia and Norway, and the continental shelf around Svalbard. The Snøhvit gas field is the first offshore project in production in the Barents Sea, led by the Norwegian company Statoil (now StatoilHydro). The question of the delimitation line between Norway and Russia concerns a more than 30 year old dispute which leaves a contested area of about 175,000 km² unexplored until the issue is settled. The continental shelf around Svalbard might hold interesting oil and gas potential. The question is whether Norway's rights on the shelf as described in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982:

paragraph 77) are restricted by the rights of other states under the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 (see Ulfstein 1995: 418–423). The present article studies to what extent US policy makers are aware of these matters, and what significance they attach to them. The high north dialogues were initiated by the Norwegian Government in 2004 in order to create a better understanding of Norway's high north policy and to promote Norwegian interests in the region among key allies (Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006: 1.4). The first such dialogue meeting was held between Norway and the USA in Washington DC in spring 2005 and was repeated in 2006 and 2007.

The topic of the high north as an energy region is fairly new and is not expected to appear frequently in official documents and policy. In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted in order to secure information that otherwise would not be available. Officials from the US Departments of State, Energy and Commerce were interviewed, as were officials at the US Embassy to Norway, energy experts, Norwegian officials and representatives of oil and gas companies. Altogether 26 informants were interviewed. Neither the US Congress nor the National Security Council is among Norway's main energy policy interlocutors, so they have not been included. The two most important actors in US-Norwegian energy relations are the Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Energy (DOE). The latter is the main interlocutor for Norwegian energy officials in the USA, mostly through expert meetings. The DOS coordinates the high north dialogue meetings with Norway, whereas the DOE and the Department of Commerce (DOC) have attended these at request from the DOS. While the DOS has to take into consideration a range of interests such as energy security and integrating economic interests with US foreign policy goals, the DOE's primary goal is to ensure energy security, and the DOC's focus is on supporting US companies abroad. However, the study found no significant differences in how these departments define US energy security interests, what issues are important to the USA, and how Norway and the high north fit into this picture. The article therefore presents the US approach without differentiating among the various departments in Washington.

The interviews showed that the following factors are important for how US policy makers define the situation in our particular case: (1) perceptions of the resource potential in the Barents Sea, (2) US oil companies' interest in the region, (3) perceptions of Norway as an energy producer, (4) US-Russian relations and (5) the type of message that Norwegian officials communicate to US policy makers. Domestic factors in the USA do not seem to play a significant role at this point and will, therefore, not be commented upon.

The US approach to energy in the high north

The US approach to energy in the high north and Norwegian high north energy policy will be studied according to

the degree of interest as measured in formal and informal policy. Formal policy is defined as official documents as well as public speeches and statements by US officials. Views expressed in meetings between the two countries are understood as informal policy as long as the meetings have not produced official statements. These points are derived from interviewees' accounts of the meetings. Such policy interaction is consequently understood as part of the policy making process without being formally declared as policy. Informal policy also includes US officials' own descriptions of the US approach to the topic at issue. In order for an action to exist, there needs to be subjective meaning attached to it (Weber 1985: 1), here defined as awareness of a topic to which one can react. The analysis therefore comments on the degree of awareness before the interest dimension is presented, with respect to formal and informal policy. If the high north as an energy region is a non-issue, there is evidently no awareness of it.

Formal policy

Norway is mentioned as an important energy producer in US energy policy documents, such as the National Energy Policy (NEP) Report (United States 2001: Chapter 8: 7). However, searches in relevant energy policy and strategic documents from the Departments of State and Energy, as well as the Congress, show no mention of developments in the Barents Sea. By contrast, the Caspian region and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline are mentioned seventeen and seven times respectively in the NEP Report, reflecting the high attention that US policy makers have paid to energy infrastructure developments in the Caspian region. Moreover, Russia is mentioned twenty times, mainly with comments on the investment climate in its energy sector. The high north would thus seem to be a non-issue in formal US policy documents.

On the other hand, officials such as Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, US Ambassador to Norway from 2002 to 2005, John Doyle Ong, and Ambassador from 2005, Benson Whitney, have shown awareness of and interest in the topic in formal speeches and interviews made in Norway. They have mentioned the Barents Sea, the high north dialogues, the Snøhvit project, the delimitation line, and encouragement with regard to development of the region (see *Adresseavisen* (Trondheim) 19 November 2005; *Stavanger Aftenbladet* 28 January 2005; *Dagbladet* (Oslo) 25 November 2005; *Fædrelandsvennen* (Kristiansand) 1 February 2006; US Department of State 2007; Ong 2005; Whitney 2005, 2006a, 2006b and 2007). However, the shelf around Svalbard has not been mentioned. Moreover, Ong has noted that the USA is interested in trilateral cooperation with Norway and Russia on oil and gas in the high north (Ong 2005). This indicates a relatively high degree of interest, as the Ambassador has suggested including the USA even more in high north energy discussions, referring to the resource potential in the area: 'We must all turn increasingly toward cooperative efforts to tap this great wealth'. Whitney, has shown a somewhat

more moderate interest in Norwegian high north energy policy than his predecessor. Soon after taking up his post, Whitney noted that the high north was 'a central focus of Norwegian policy and is of great significance to the United States and that 'energy development in the Barents region is obviously an area of profound mutual interest' (Whitney 2006a). This and other statements do not indicate such a high interest as that expressed by Ong as they lack specific suggestions for action. Moreover, Whitney's enthusiasm about the high north seems to have lessened in his later speeches. At the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Tromsø in January 2007, he was to speak on US interest in the high north, but spent most of the time talking about US climate policy, signalling that interest in the first topic has declined somewhat. Generally therefore, US official interest seems to have been higher at the outset of the Norwegian high north initiative, decreasing with time. The next sections will show whether the interest articulated at the official level within the Norwegian context mirrors actions and beliefs at the informal levels of interaction between Norway and the USA.

Informal policy

Interest' in informal policy refers to initiatives or willingness to discuss energy issues in the high north with Norway and the monitoring of Norwegian high north energy policy and the developments in the Barents Sea within the US administration.

Officials working with Norway and to a certain extent those working with Russia have a relatively high awareness of high north energy issues as well as the high north dialogues. All 17 US officials interviewed knew of the Barents Sea as an energy region. A majority of them had also heard of the Snøhvit field, the border dispute between Norway and Russia, the high north dialogues and the jurisdictional issues with regard to Svalbard. On the other hand, both US and Norwegian interviewees noted that the high north was not a topic that top Washington officials were well informed about or in which they showed a special interest.

US policy-makers associate the high north with Norway and the Barents Sea region. The term 'high north' seems to have entered the US vocabulary sometime around 2005. One person who had worked quite intensively with Norway up until leaving the DOC in spring 2005 was not familiar with the term; another noted that he had 'never heard the term until 16 months ago.' However, when US officials think about the Arctic and more specifically about energy in the Arctic, the high north is not the first area that comes to mind. The administration's own long lasting debate on whether to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) for exploration drilling, together with exploration and production in Canada and Greenland, are the major Arctic energy topics to US policy makers, who thus have a different definition of important Arctic energy regions than the Norwegians.

As a direct result of Condoleezza Rice's trip to Oslo in spring 2007, her energy advisor and a deputy assistant secretary in the State Department visited the gas processing plant for the Snøhvit field at Melkøya. Other US officials have also visited Melkøya in recent years, which indicates a certain interest in the topic.

The delimitation issue had been brought up in US-Norwegian relations, as Ong had mentioned it on some occasions (see for example, *Dagbladet* (Oslo) 21 November 2005 and *Stavanger Aftenblad* 28 January 2005). However, later there was no more talk of it, and the interviewees described this as a bilateral issue between Norway and Russia in which the USA did not want to get involved. Yet, the issue is perceived as relevant to global and US energy security as it is one among many above ground issues in the world that leave possibly huge oil and gas resources off limits. Interviewees described it as an issue that they did not spend time on, although they were generally more positive to the idea of Norway, rather than Russia, developing the resources in the disputed area. Thus, there seems to be a certain amount of interest in the topic, but not enough for active engagement.

The high north dialogues were Norway's initiative, and the Department of State acts as the US coordinator. Initially Norway wanted to have some of the high north meetings in Norway, but the few meetings that have taken place have been in the United States, which could indicate a moderate US interest in the topic. The Americans have not been particularly active at the meetings. They have not asked much but have, as a Norwegian official put it, 'listened politely'. One topic that they have asked a little about, but which the Norwegians have not wanted to discuss, is the issue of the continental shelf around Svalbard. However, although they were aware of the matter, interviewees did not seem too well informed about it. One of them noted that he was not sure what it was, but that the State Department definitely did have a position on Svalbard.

To the degree that they pay attention to the Barents Sea in an oil and gas perspective, it is the Shtokman field in the Russian part of the Barents Sea that is of interest: 'The real focus has come with Shtokman.' Shtokman was seen as a benchmark issue for energy developments in Russia and for where the US-Russian energy dialogue would go. However, the US government's focus on Russia seems to be general and not regional. For example, there are no positions set aside for analysing energy developments in the Russian Arctic only.

The Norwegian oil and gas company StatoilHydro (before the merger on 1 October 2007 this was two separate companies, Statoil and Hydro) also seems to generate some interest among US policy-makers. The two countries have for years had an energy dialogue which included regular high-level meetings between the US administration and the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, with representatives of the respective foreign ministries also attending. The dialogue was especially strong in the 1980s in connection with the start up of gas

export from the Norwegian continental shelf. When this energy dialogue became less intensive during the 1990s, the US government kept meeting with Statoil, to get its perspectives on energy matters. However, this was not particularly motivated by developments in the high north, but concerned other activities like Statoil's engagement in the Caspian region, as well as technological aspects.

This material supports the overall conclusion that, between 2005 and 2007, US policy makers were aware of, and have shown, a certain but somewhat declining interest in the Barents Sea as an energy region through their interaction with Norwegian policy makers on high north issues. The next section seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the US approach based on an analysis of US policy makers' problem structures.

Understanding the US approach by studying US policy makers' problem structures

Firstly this section asks whether the relatively high degree of awareness of the high north as an energy region among US officials is a result of Norway's efforts to promote the high north as an energy region. Secondly, an explanation will be given for the moderate and somewhat decreasing interest by drawing a picture of US officials' problem structures that includes their definitions of the situation and their value orientations.

To a certain extent, US awareness of the high north as an energy region is probably connected to Norwegian efforts to inform US policy makers. The best indication of this is the fact that almost all the US officials interviewed used the term 'high north' when talking about the Barents Sea: and here it should be recalled that this was a term that few of them had even heard until the start of the high north talks. That said, awareness of such specific high north issues as the delimitation issue and the Snøhvit field would probably have existed independently of Norway's high north initiative, as Statoil (now StatoilHydro) has had its own dialogue with the US administration and as there has been expert level contact between the two states independent of, and prior to, the high north talks. However, even persons not working directly with Norway knew about and had attended the high north dialogues. As one interviewee noted: 'We would be without a pulse if we did not notice Norway's efforts to promote the high north, because every Norwegian talks about it.'

What Norway probably has managed is to create awareness among a wider group of officials in the US administration than those who were already interacting directly with Norway in established bodies at the expert level.

US awareness of the Barents Sea as an energy region and of the Norwegian high north initiative implies that the US approach either represents an action or a series of actions directed toward Norway, or it represents a decision not to act. The first action taken by US policy makers was to establish the high north dialogues on Norway's initiative and to follow up on the talks by

contacting Norwegian officials about high north energy issues, especially in order to get more information about the energy potential and to discuss developments in the Russian energy sector and Russian Arctic policy. After a while, interest lessened, and it seems that US officials decided not to take any specific action other than to keep meeting the Norwegians for high north talks when they so requested.

The remainder of this article is an attempt to understand this moderate interest by drawing a picture of US officials' problem structures, which include their definitions of the situation together with their value orientations. We also discuss the degree to which Norway's high north initiative has influenced the US approach in a wider sense than by merely creating awareness. The aim is to assess the relationships between different mechanisms, under which conditions they are activated and the possible impact on the overall US approach.

Value orientations and the definition of the situation

Liberalisation is a value that is deeply embedded in the American culture and which underlies US foreign energy policy. Liberalisation is held to increase US energy security, but it also represents a deeper frame of reference for US policy makers, a value to which they constantly must relate their policies. The G.W. Bush administrations have continued on the path of free market ideology in energy policy started by President Reagan in the 1980s. One example is found in the 2006 National Security Strategy (United States 2006: 27): 'Protectionist impulses in many countries put at risk the benefits of open markets and impede the expansion of free and fair trade and economic growth.' Thus the possibility should be considered that the free market ideology might have affected the US approach also in the case studied here. Value orientations influence how US policy makers perceive of the tools available for implementing their policy, in that the political playing field is reduced as a consequence of the emphasis on free, fair and transparent energy markets. Also, as noted above, it might reduce the perceived need to engage in energy regions where market rules are already dominant.

The reader should be reminded of the suggestion of Snyder and others concerning how the actor defines the situation according to which he develops his approach. The situation is defined in terms of the way the actor 'relates himself to other actors, to possible goals, and to possible means, and in terms of the way means and ends are formed into strategies of action subject to relevant factors in the situation' (Snyder and others 2002: 64). Some important questions to ask in reconstructing the actors' definition of the situation or orientation to action are as follows. What goals were prevalent? What was defined as relevant by the decision makers in a particular situation, and how did the decision makers link the various relevant factors? (Snyder and others 2002)

While it is a declared US policy objective to reduce dependence on foreign sources of energy (see Bush

2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and United States Department of Energy 2006a and 2006b), one important goal in Washington's foreign energy policy in recent decades has been to reduce vulnerability to supply disruptions by expanding (US and) worldwide oil and gas production capacity (see for example United States 2001: 8.5–8.6, 2002: 19–20, 2006: 28). Washington has also aimed at stimulating oil and gas development and excess production capacity outside the Persian Gulf (see for example United States 2001). The favoured tool for reaching the goal of increasing and diversifying the global production of energy is that of promoting the free market ideology. For example, the 2006 National Security Strategy noted that the Administration will 'work with resource-rich countries to increase their openness, transparency, and rule of law,' as this is believed to 'promote effective democratic governance and attract the investment essential to developing their resources and expanding the range of energy suppliers' (United States 2006: 29). Accordingly, the role of the US government is to create an atmosphere conducive to commercial interaction.

That said the non-renewable character along with the geopolitics of oil and gas resources challenge such an orthodox market liberal approach. Although the basic value is liberalisation, the Bush administration and administrations before that have shown political engagement in energy regions that stand in sharp contrast to liberal values. For instance, although the energy security gains are not obvious (see for example Claes 2005) several authors have suggested that the latest Iraq war was motivated by the need to control the oil resources in the Middle East (see for example Klare 2001). A more telling example is perhaps the Bush continuation of the Clinton administration's engagement in energy infrastructure developments in the Caspian region. 'In part to create countries that could stand on their own without Russia and become U.S. allies, and in part to maintain the isolation of Iran, the U.S. government has devoted enormous attention to the Caspian region during recent years ... [O]ne of the key manifestations has been the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline (Nanay 2005: 139–40). Thus, while the basic value is market liberalism, the US Government's energy policy line is in practice located on a continuum between the non political and the political. A pertinent question is therefore what factors that impact the approach in a more market liberal direction and what conditions contribute to place US policy closer to the political part of the continuum. The following discussion will illuminate how this plays out in the case of the high north. The main assumption is that the market liberal approach is the starting point for the US administration, but that the approach can become more politicised depending on other aspects of the decision makers' definition of the situation. One implication of this is that if conditions are in line with market liberal values in one specific case, the perceived need to engage politically will be less.

Snyder and others argued that the situation is defined as 'comprised of a combination of selectively relevant factors in the external and internal setting as interpreted by the decision-makers' (Snyder and others 2002: 64). The interviewees identified five particular factors as relevant for their definition of the situation: (a) perceptions of the resource potential in the Barents Sea, (b) perceptions of US companies' interest in the high north, (c) perceptions of Norwegian energy policy and its role for European energy security, (d) perceptions of developments in Russian (Arctic) energy policy, and (e) the domestic character of Norwegian high north policy and the resulting 'Norwegian message' to US policy-makers. These factors structure the following analysis. The possible impacts that value orientations, and perceived goals and tools, might have had are discussed as integral parts of the analysis.

Resource potential

A lack of belief in, or at least significant uncertainty concerning, the resource base in the Norwegian Barents Sea seems a crucial factor for understanding the rather lukewarm US interest. Questions from one interviewee were. 'What is up there? We don't know for sure. The region is still mostly unexplored.' Another noted that the Barents Sea would have to 'demonstrate its size to be something like the Caspian before the right people would start to notice.'

That said the belief in the resource potential seems to have been greater at the start of the Norwegian high north initiative. In fact, one of the motivations behind the US interest in the Norwegian high north initiative in the first phase seems to have been the resource potential. The interviews indicate that this initial interest began to fall off when US policy makers did not receive more detailed data on the potential. It is conceivable that the high north dialogues were initiated because of the already close political ties between the USA and Norway. However, it is unlikely that this was the only reason. As one US official noted, 'the State Department wouldn't engage in the dialogue if they weren't interested.' If that had been the case, as another noted, the high north would just be an agenda item at a larger meeting and not the main focus of the meeting. It thus seems that a combination of an initial interest in the resource potential and diplomatic conventions has led the USA to engage in high north dialogues with Norway.

The greater US interest in the Russian Shtokman field than in the Norwegian Snøhvit field is probably therefore partly based on the huge difference in the potential resources in these fields. Although greater uncertainty attends the Shtokman figures, the field is held to have 3,700 billion m³ of estimated gas resources against the 200 billion m³ of proved gas reserves in Snøhvit. Moreover, it was noted that in the future the region might function as a valve to reduce some of the pressure. The fact that development lies relatively far into the future seen from a US perspective also contributes to the rather moderate interest at this point. In sum, uncertainties about the

resource base seem to dampen the US interest in the Norwegian high north. At present, the region cannot contribute significantly to the expansion of worldwide oil and gas capacity.

Interest by US companies in the high north

US policy makers have the impression that US companies are not particularly interested in the high north at this point. Also, as one interviewee noted, it is not clear whether foreign companies are going to be interested in the Barents Sea. A majority of the interviewees argued that if US companies were more active in the region, political interest would follow because it is a US goal to support its companies abroad. This was confirmed by Norwegian diplomats in the USA, who had been told from various sources that if Norway wanted a dialogue, there would have to be more US companies present on the Norwegian continental shelf. However, the USA is still interested in Saudi Arabia and has a close energy dialogue with them even though that country is closed to foreign investors. More strategic and security reasons probably tie into this, together with a significant resource base.

The next question then is are US companies not interested in the high north? The answer is both 'yes' and 'no.' ExxonMobil withdrew from the region in the early 1990s after disappointing exploration results and has not showed much interest in the region since then. It did not apply for blocks in the area in the 19th licensing round in Norway where companies bid for licences in the Barents Sea. Chevron, on the other hand, has engaged in cooperation with Statoil on a block in the Barents Sea. In its 2006 annual report (Chevron 2006: 21) the Barents Sea is listed as one of the company's major exploration areas. Moreover, Chevron withdrew from the Shtokman discussions in April 2007 and accordingly seems more interested in the Norwegian than the Russian Barents Sea at the moment. ConocoPhillips does not have any blocks in the Norwegian high north. The most specific interest that the company has shown in the European Arctic is mostly linked to the Russian Timan-Pechora region and the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea, but the company also bid (unsuccessfully) for a block in the Norwegian part of the Barents Sea in the 19th licensing round. In its 2006 annual report for Norway, the managing director of ConocoPhillips Norway, S. Våge, states more generally that the company is looking to increase its knowledge base as to the specific challenges linked to activities in the northern waters (ConocoPhillips Norway 2006: 7). However, there is no direct mention of the Barents Sea in the report.

Thus, US companies have shown some interest in the Norwegian Barents Sea. However, this does not seem to play into how US officials define the situation. Their perceptions are that US companies are not very interested at this point, and that gives them one reason for not engaging in the region at the political level. Actually, one reason why US policy makers think that US companies are not interested might be that the companies have not

requested government backing in Norway or the high north, simply because they have not encountered many problems when operating in Norway. As one interviewee noted, 'if things are good, the companies do absolutely not want the government involved.' This brings us to the question of US perceptions of Norwegian energy policy.

US perceptions of Norway as an energy producer

Andersen and Austvik (2000: 33) note that how Norway formulates its energy policy is relevant to the superpowers and point to the fact that Norway was dragged into the conflict over the Siberian gas pipeline by 1982. In his discussion on the operational code, A. George (1969: 200) notes that a state's belief system about the nature of politics is shaped particularly by its orientation to other political actors. While George emphasises the opponents in this regard, it is evident also that the allies of a nation are important, and that this affects each others' definition of the situations in which interaction takes place. Accordingly, US perceptions of Norwegian energy policy in general might affect the US definition of the situation and thereby its approach to Norway's more specific energy policy in the high north.

Although persons who worked directly with promoting the interests of US companies in Norway drew a somewhat more differentiated picture (for example that Norwegian companies are favoured on the Norwegian continental shelf), the general view among US officials was that Norway's energy policy does not pose any problems and that US companies do not ask for help in Norway. Whitney has mentioned that 'Norway stands as an excellent model of a stable and reliable energy supplier' (Whitney 2006a). While the environmental lobby and domestic political interests also are among the driving forces behind the development of the oil and gas resources on the Norwegian continental shelf, US policy makers see commercial interests as the key driver. This means that to the extent that they have a belief in the resource potential, US policy makers take the Norwegian share of the Barents Sea resources for granted. They are not concerned about how Norway develops the resources. As one US official put it: 'We don't hear of any political instability, so we assume more oil and gas will be flowing. We also assume that Norway will make rational economic and financial calculations to produce.'

Another interviewee noted that 'I am not sure whether there is an energy dialogue, but we might not need it because everything is working well.' As we have seen, there was an energy dialogue between the USA and Norway, but interest in this more formalised dialogue has decreased largely because the US side argued that there were no issues to be settled between the two countries. Thus, when market liberal values are present, there is less need to involve politically. With its goal of liberalising energy markets, Norway is not a focus country for US foreign energy policy. Ironically, Norway's exemplary behaviour as an energy producer and supplier has meant little political attention from the USA, on energy and the

high north. As one US official noted, '[t]he increased focus on energy security has not had implications on US-Norway energy relations. Norway has always been a reliable supplier.'

Additionally, Norway and the Barents Sea region are politically stable, which also plays into the US assessment that more oil and gas will be flowing anyway, which again highlights the paradox in the favourable framework conditions in Norway. Several interviewees argued that Washington has been more reactive than proactive in its foreign energy policy. Thus, the US energy administration responds to specific events and spends time on problems that need to be solved. In Norway, there are few problems to be solved because the issues that most concern US policy makers tend to be of the investment-climate kind. By contrast, in Russia the challenges are numerous.

Russia

The resource potential in the Russian part of the region is believed to be huge. As many interviewees noted, the USA has to relate to reality, which is that Russia has major energy resources, and also in the Arctic. Moreover, with the USA wanting more opportunities in the global market, Russia's monopoly control is a major concern. Accordingly, from a US point of view, Norway and Russia differ in resource potential and investment climate or market liberalisation, although Norwegian protectionism in the energy sector has traditionally also been the source of some concern to US policy makers.

A majority of the interviewees emphasised that Russian energy policy was of great interest to them, and that talks with the Norwegians were at least interesting to the extent that they included discussions on developments in Russia. Thus we need to ask is the moderate interest in Norwegian high north energy policy merely a side effect of US-Russian (energy) relations, or has Norway exerted its own influence on the US approach? Why is the USA interested in Russia? Is the interest greatest when developments are proceeding smoothly and there is optimism for the future, or the converse, when things are not going well in the US view?

Recent years have seen a negative trend in US-Russian relations (see for example Council on Foreign Relations 2006: 22–28), and energy issues are no exception. Russian energy policy appears more closed today than it did three to four years ago. The optimism from the beginning of the century has been replaced with uncertainty about future developments in Russia's energy sector. According to the Department of Energy (2005: 32, paragraph 91), advancement of the US-Russian energy relationship 'has been hampered by recent actions that have raised concerns with the investment climate in Russia'.

If we assume that attention in US foreign energy policy is directed to problems that need to be solved, then attention to the Russian Barents Sea should be high because of what are perceived as negative developments in the Russian energy sector and the resultant need to put further political pressure on the Russians in order to

get the development of the region moving forward. By contrast, Norway would not get much attention because of the few problems it causes. This of course presupposes a high belief in the resource potential on the Russian side, which, as we have seen, seems to exist. On the other hand, US political interest in the Shtokman project declined after US companies were excluded from the project, and Washington slowly lost interest in the Murmansk pipeline project when it became clear that the project was not going to be implemented. It therefore seems that even problems that need to be solved cannot sustain US attention over time if US companies are not engaged or if the problems prove intractable.

Another possibility therefore takes into account Washington's relative impatience in foreign policy relations. As Wiarda (1996: 41) notes: 'The United States is not a notably patient country in foreign affairs. Americans want quick results and are often impatient with protracted conflict and diplomacy.' Thus, a less reliable Russia means a less certain development in the Russian Barents Sea, which in turn might weaken the general US interest in the Barents Sea as a source of diversification of energy supply. This might successively lead to less interest in the Norwegian high north because the resource potential on the Norwegian side is not perceived as very large. Thus, when the USA loses interest in Russia, it may be that interest in Norway decreases as well.

A third possibility is that problems in Russia might lead the Americans to concentrate on Norway because it is Russia's neighbour and might have channels to Russian business and politics that the Americans are interested in, or because Norway could represent a diversification away from what is perceived as an unpredictable Russia. Another important question is therefore: Do US policy makers see Norway's high north energy policy as a solution to the challenges facing US energy security? Based on the foregoing analysis, the answer is 'not at the moment' as US policy makers consider the resource potential on the Norwegian side to be too small to provide much diversification. Yet, the interview material indicates that US policy makers appreciated discussing developments in Russia with the Norwegians, probably motivated by what were perceived as negative developments in the Russian energy sector.

The USA had high hopes that Russia would contribute to US energy security when the Russian energy market was in a process of opening up after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A US-Russian energy dialogue was therefore established. The Yukos case, with the arrest of the Chief Executive Officer M. Khodorkovsky in October 2003 and the later tax evasion charge, led to US worries about the rule of law and the investment climate in Russia. When Gazprom in October 2006 announced that no foreign partners were to be given stakes in the Shtokman field, the Americans were widely disappointed. Interviews confirmed that US policy makers had lost interest in Russia starting with the Yukos case and culminating with the Shtokman decision. This might be an indication of

Washington's foreign policy impatience: if things do not work out, interest is lost after a while. In the course of 2007, there was a tendency toward a more active Russian engagement in Arctic resources. The process for selecting investors for the Shtokman project is the most concrete example. Other examples include plans to upgrade the port of Murmansk based on expectations that Arctic shipping connected to offshore projects will grow in importance in the future (*Barentsobserver* 2007), as well as a more general focus on the Arctic by establishing a Russian national Arctic Council to create a stronger and better coordinated Russian policy in the north (*Barentsobserver* 2005). The most spectacular move was when the Russian flag was planted on the North Pole seabed in summer 2007. This question is of course much bigger than the developments in the Barents Sea region. Also, while the Arctic circumpolar energy resources are still part of the motivation, overall geostrategic considerations enter the picture when it seems that a powerful Russia is again to be taken into consideration. The energy potential is merely one of several reasons to pay attention. Thus, lessened interest in specific energy projects in Russia does not seem to have had a negative effect on attention to Norway. On the contrary, a sustained general interest in Russian energy policy seems to have motivated discussions with Norway on high north issues that have increasingly included discussions on developments in Russia.

Thus, Russia is a central part of US policy makers' perceptions of the environment in which they develop their approach to energy in the high north. Why is this? Russia's role as an actor on the world stage, and in Europe not least, is of profound interest to Washington. The USA wants to keep stability in Europe without Russia as a dominant power. The gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine in January 2006 sparked renewed concerns as to Europe's energy security. In the eyes of most US policy makers, with this incident Russia proved its ability and willingness to use energy as a political weapon, and thus turning the energy issue into a strategic question of the division of power in Europe. The situation is similar to that of the 1980s when the Reagan administration was concerned about Europe's dependence on Soviet gas (see for example US Department of Energy 1987: 228). At that time, the USA engaged actively in Norway, partly with the more general aim of supporting development of resources in stable countries and regions after the oil embargoes of the 1970s and the Iranian revolution, but also in order to make sure that Norwegian gas supplies to Europe increased so as to reduce dependence on Soviet gas. If there prove to be sizeable resources on the Norwegian side, the USA will therefore probably see this as an opportunity for both itself and Europe to bolster their energy security. On the other hand, since the resource potential is relatively uncertain at this point, Norway might be interesting to the USA in its capacity as Russia's neighbour and increasingly close energy partner, rather than because of energy developments in the Norwegian sector of the Barents Sea. Close relations between Norway

and Russia can mean increased attention from the USA for at least two reasons, which both are results of the chill in US-Russian relations. Firstly, if US policy makers believe that the Norwegians should be more wary of the Russians, Washington might activate initiatives toward Norway on security grounds. And secondly, good Norwegian-Russian relations also imply that Norwegian policy makers might possess information and analyses that US policy makers would be interested in.

On the other hand, too much emphasis from the part of Norway on its role as a possible source of diversification away from Russia might be perceived as negative by the Russians. Norway, having common energy policy interests with Russia and a higher degree of common foreign policy interests with the USA, has to find a balance in the relationship to these two states that absorbs both considerations and keeps as good relations as possible with both actors.

In sum, Norway does not seem to have exerted its own influence on the US approach to the high north, other than by creating awareness. To a large extent, the US interest in Norwegian high north policy is motivated by developments in Russia. Although specific energy projects and US company engagement are important factors, more general developments in the Russian energy sector seem to be motivating the US interest in talking to the Norwegians. Russia is central to how US policy makers define the situation in which they develop their approach to Norwegian high north energy policy.

The character of Norwegian high north policy and Norway's message to the USA

Norwegian officials have faced some challenges in the high north dialogue with the United States. One problem has been a lack of specificity in Norwegian high north policy at home. The white paper on the high north (Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005) did not present many specific priorities and necessary actions, and as a result, Norwegian officials found it difficult to present their country's interests to US policy makers. The 2006 Management Plan (Norway, Ministry of the Environment 2006: 122–126) and the 2006 high north strategy (Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007) made it somewhat easier. The management plan specified areas that were not to be opened for exploration activity, and the high north strategy summed up Norway's priorities in the high north more clearly than before. However, these two documents did not solve all the problems. The Norwegian message was still blurred and difficult to present because of its many different and sometimes conflicting aspects.

Many different interests have been involved in the process of forming Norway's high north policy, and these were not coordinated before translating the policy into foreign policy. The process included such widely differing issues as delimitation of maritime boundaries, jurisdiction over the maritime areas around Svalbard, management of fish stocks, Norwegian-Russian relations in general,

Norway's new role in the post cold war world, security politics in the region, regional politics, indigenous rights, the potential for new oil and gas resources and not least the many environmental questions linked to development of the area. Moreover, the debate on future developments in the region is a process where no final conclusions have been reached on such matters as the pace of oil and gas exploration and development. Although the government decided not to open the northern part of the Barents Sea, the management plan will be revised in 2010, and this decision might then be reconsidered. The domestic fight over the future of the high north resources is very much a continuing process in Norway.

When policy of this kind is translated into foreign policy, it does not become much clearer. For example, before the management plan was finished, the Norwegians did not know what areas would be opened for exploration and development. As a result of the unsettled issues at home, Norwegian diplomats have informed US policy-makers concerning the matter, but without asking them for anything or being able to offer them anything specific in the high north dialogue. Several of the American interviewees expressed their confusion with this lack of specificity. One interviewee's reaction to a presentation in Washington DC by the Norwegian Minister of Petroleum and Energy (Enoksen 2007) was that the minister was informing about the high north more in order to secure attention, and that the presentation 'was not too profound'. Moreover, when they came back from meetings with the Norwegians, US officials did not have a list of concrete actions to take, because all the Norwegian side had done was to inform them about the high north. To begin with, the Norwegians took a general approach to high north issues, meeting the Americans for the first high north dialogues with environmental experts, energy experts, nuclear clean up experts and others. Because of an absence of an overarching US policy goal on Arctic issues, the Americans were not used to placing these policy fields under one large umbrella and saw this as an unwieldy combination. Thus, the Norwegian government's goal of creating an overarching policy for the high north (see Traavik 2005), initially failed to have the desired effects. Adding to the rather lukewarm US interest was the fact that there already existed bilateral and multilateral channels for working on many of the issue areas, such as cooperation on nuclear waste management in northwest Russia, environmental cooperation within the Arctic Council and energy cooperation within the International Energy Agency (IEA). Consequently, the Americans felt that the Norwegians were asking them to establish a new bureaucratic level of US-Norwegian interaction for no reason.

Nor has coordination always been smooth. Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Ministry of Petroleum and Energy seem to have differing perceptions of the resource potential in the high north, and their ideas do not always seem to have been coordinated before presentation to the Americans. As we have seen, one of

the Foreign Ministry's main arguments in order to get US policy makers interested in the high north has been what has been described as a major resource potential (see for example Støre 2006). To begin with, US officials found this interesting and wanted more information on the topic. However, when Norway sent over its energy experts, they proved to be more moderate in their estimates of the energy resources in the region than the foreign policy generalists had been. The minister of petroleum and energy (Enoksen 2006) has for example noted that 'the Barents Sea is by far the least explored part of the NCS (the Norwegian continental shelf)'. Moreover, when US State Department officials asked the Norwegians when they would be back with more information, the latter were unable to provide further details because of the uncertain production curves. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs based its arguments on uncertain figures that the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy could not confirm, further contributing to the mixed and unclear Norwegian message. Another reason behind the mixed and unclear Norwegian message is that the goal of increased attention from the USA does not seem to be shared by the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, because increased attention from an energy policy perspective means increased foreign involvement in a question that is perceived as a national issue. Thus, although most of them have the impression that Norway wants attention from the USA because of the unresolved legal issues in the region, particularly with regard to relations with Russia, US policy makers do not fully understand what Norway wants with its high north initiative. The fact that the national debate on the high north has not yet produced much specific, agreed policy represents an important limitation in the presentation of Norway's high north policy abroad, which stands out as lacking clear policy goals other than that of drawing attention to the high north.

Concluding remarks

This article has examined how the USA relates to the Barents Sea as an oil and gas region, and more specifically to Norway's efforts to promote the region in its high north policy abroad. It has also assessed whether Norway, through its high north initiative, has succeeded in influencing the US approach toward that area as an energy region. This has been done by studying US policy makers' problem structures linked to the case of the high north as an energy region. The advantages of the foreign policy approach to studies of international relations have been demonstrated. A study of US policy makers' definition of the situation in which US policy is developed has enabled a deeper understanding of underlying factors than would have been possible with a deductive approach based on assumptions about such factors.

To the extent that the goal was to heighten Washington's awareness of the high north as an energy region, the study shows that Norway has succeeded. The term itself seems to have been imported from Norway by US policy

makers: all the interviewees who were aware of the high north dialogues noted that it was through this initiative that they heard about the 'high north' for the first time. Also, US policy makers seem to be quite familiar with the high north as an energy region and specific high north issues that are of importance to Norway.

The aim of Norway's high north initiative has also been to create interest in Norway and the high north among US policy makers. Norway has informed the USA about the following aspects of energy in the region. Firstly, the resource potential is significant and, secondly, Norway is a stable energy supplier with secure and predictable framework conditions for international companies operating on the Norwegian continental shelf. With these favourable conditions, policy makers seeking to increase US energy security should direct their attention to Norway and Norwegian energy policy in the high north. However, our analysis has shown that Norway has managed to create only moderate and later somewhat declining interest among US policy makers. Perceptions of the energy potential and not least developments in Russia, together with a market oriented approach to foreign energy policy seem to be important factors for US policy makers' problem structures in our particular case. It is important to note, however, that even though market liberalism is a value that US policy makers have to relate to, even the most market oriented of US administrations have shown political interest in Norway's energy policy. In the early 1980s for example the Reagan administration made political efforts to get Norway to develop the Troll field as an alternative to Soviet gas to Europe (Noreng 2005: 191). With its relatively small resource potential, straightforward investment climate and unclear high north strategy, Norway and the region do not stand out as very interesting to the USA, which is looking for investment climate problems to be solved in regions with huge energy resources.

How the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines the situation seems to have played into its understanding of how US policy makers define the situation. To Norway as an exporting country, the high north makes up a large part of the context within which its own energy policy is formed. The USA, as an importing country, has a much broader geographical focus in its energy policy. Oil is imported from all over the world, and it is still quite far into the future until Liquefied Natural Gas will be sold on the global market as oil is today. Furthermore, to Norway, and especially to the Hammerfest area, the Snøhvit project is important, and it is a means of promotion. To the USA, the Snøhvit project may be welcome and interesting for technological reasons, but it is small and not that important. As a result of misperceptions of how US policy makers define the situation, Norwegian policy makers seem to have developed excessively high expectations of their US counterparts' interest in the high north as an energy region and consequently in Norway's high north energy policy. In the words of one interviewee: 'we have come to a situation where people think that what is very

important for Northern Norway is also important to the United States and the rest of the world.'

Thus, we have seen that Norway has not affected US officials' definitions of the situation to any considerable degree with its high north initiative. The resource potential is assessed as too uncertain, the impression is that US companies are not interested, and the fact that Norway is an exemplary energy producer and supplier does not seem to play to its advantage within this context. Norway seems to have misjudged the US definition of the situation, particularly the effect of Norway's exemplary behaviour. Rather than playing to Norway's advantage, from a US perspective it means that the USA can concentrate on other energy regions where there are problems to be solved. Thus, US policy makers do not see any reasons to engage actively in Norwegian energy policy at the moment. The topic is placed at the non political end of the continuum, which is also in line with basic US values. However, since more market liberal US administrations have engaged politically before, it seems that these values do not play a significant role in all instances, perhaps depending on the case at hand more than on the values of the specific administration in question. The implication of this is that value orientations are only one factor along with others playing into the definition of the situation, and the outcome relies on the combination of these different factors.

However, our discussion has shown that strategic interest in the topic raises the chances of the USA becoming actively interested over a longer period of time. A strategic energy interest is activated by a combination of factors. Two conditions that increase the probability of a strategic energy interest are a big resource potential and security concerns linked to Russia's role in Europe and the Arctic. If these two factors exist in combination, the probability of an active US interest in Norway's high north energy policy increases. Just how big the resource potential would have to be and how uncertain US policy makers would have to be of developments in Russia is, however, difficult to quantify. The more resources there are and the worse US-Russian relations are, the more attention will probably be directed to Norway. Consequently, the closer Norway manages to link its high north energy policy to developments in Russia, the more attention is likely to be forthcoming from the USA.

Epilogue

Developments after the summer of 2007 seem to indicate a slightly growing US interest in the high north. This is confirmed in informal conversations with US officials in autumn 2007. One important condition that seems to be changing involves developments in Russian Arctic policy, as mentioned above. Moreover, Norwegian policy makers seem to have adjusted their approach by focusing on fewer and more specific issues in their talks with US officials. Since both the US approach and the Norwegian strategy

are constantly changing, the article should be understood for what it is: a study of the US approach to Norway's high north policy in its first phase and not an assessment of current US or Norwegian policy.

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