

The Peculiar Situation of Svalbard in Arctic Geopolitics

Man and the environment (M2AS301)

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Introduction

Svalbard archipelago is situated halfway between mainland Norway and the North Pole. It ranges from 74° to 81° north latitude and is often known as the northernmost human settlement in the world. But this is not the only respect in which Svalbard is exceptional.

Svalbard is also a unique place in the world law regimes, Norwegian sovereignty over it being defined by the *ad-hoc* 1920 Svalbard Treaty, and the waters surrounding it having been placed under an idiosyncratic “Fisheries Protection Zone” by Norwegian authorities — the interpretations and consequences of those two specific regimes being still disputed. It holds an exceptional geographical place, not only northerly but also between what were the East

and West blocs for half a century. Svalbard has long been a coveted territory, was it for its natural resources, its location, or even as a symbol of national pride through its owning or the scientific breakthroughs it offered. Conflicts have emerged in and about Svalbard, often latent but sometimes blatant, from its discovery by a Dutch whaler in 1596 to WWII and to today, when diplomatic incidents in the Barents Sea may still occur. At a time when geopolitical conflicts around Svalbard seems to have diminished with the end of the Cold war, Svalbard is also at the core of potential conflicting views on its future since it holds precious resources.

Through the resources it holds, its strategic geographic situation and its peculiar position in the international law and politics, the archipelago is at the core of an inextricable nexus of political, economic, military, environmental and scientific interests. I would like to show what a peculiar status it holds, not only in the sense of a formal status defined by the law, but as a complex situation at the intersection of multiple stakes. To do this, I first focus on the international disputes over Svalbard's exploitable resources through history. Then I will go on to discuss its particular status in international law, and how this status emerged — reflecting national politics as well as international arrangements. In a third point, I will describe the geostrategic stakes Svalbard is linked to, from a restricted sense (its importance on military plans) to a broader view on the place the archipelago holds in Arctic and global politics.

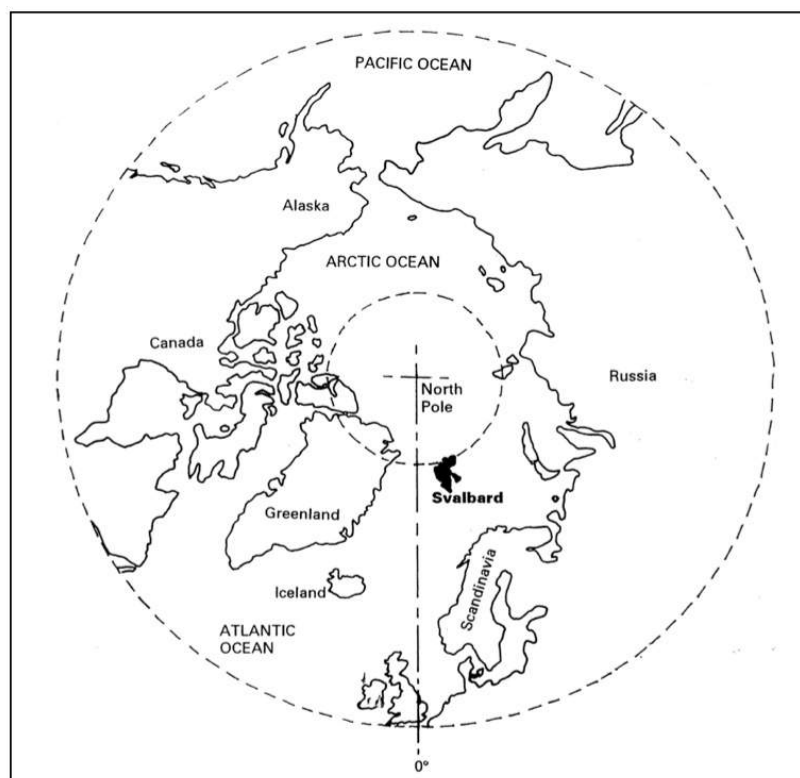


Figure 1: Svalbard situation in the northern hemisphere . Source: commons.wikimedia.org

1 From whale hunting to coal mining: international disputes over Svalbard resources

1.1 XVIIth century whalers and international disputes

Even though Svalbard archipelago may have been known for more than a dozen centuries, the first unequivocal account of its discovery was made in 1596 by Willem Barents, the leader of a Dutch expedition, who named it “Spitsbergen” (Dutch for “pointed mount”) for its mountainous aspect. The archipelago soon became a place famous all around Western Europe for the unequalled amount of sea mammals which may be found in its waters. Whaling companies were thus set up in order to organize hunting voyages to Svalbard, often from Norway, the Netherlands, England, and France. The main focus of those expeditions was to hunt right whales, which easily provided whalebones and a lot of oil once their blubber had been boiled. What is more, Svalbard coasts and fjords are surprisingly well accessible for such a northern place — which allowed for easy hunting and processing of the whales onshore.

Svalbard large-scale whaling industry did not last for more than a century though, since intensive hunting of the right whales made them almost extinct in the 1790’s. However, in the meantime, whale-hunting was not exempted from conflictual consequences on the international level. Indeed, some crews have at some point fight each other, ransoming and sinking each other [5]. This happened for instance in 1618, when the English and the Dutch rivalry “degenerated into armed conflict”, as Proulx puts it ([18], p.53). These conflicts emerged from rivalries about the locations on the shores as well as about sea resources, since all crews wanted to access the sites which were the best adapted for whaling purposes. This made national authorities send warships escorting their whaler ships, and claim ownership on the archipelago. An agreement, more or less implicit, was found in the 1610’s: the Dutch had the north-western coasts, the Englishmen had the fjords, the French had the North and high waters. However, this arrangement rapidly failed and companies and crews soon resumed competing and fighting against each other.

Those whaling campaigns in Svalbard could therefore be political as well as economic, but not only as a consequence of rivalries over access to resources. Herubel [13] explains in his 1931 article how whaling companies were vividly encouraged by public authorities. France is a good example of this; the establishment of such companies was encouraged by Cardinal Richelieu, King Louis XIII’s chief minister, who founded the *Compagnie Havraise de Moscovie* and the “France Arctique” colony. This was pursued by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Controller-General of Finances in the 1660’s and at the same time Secretary of State for the Navy, Commerce and Colonies. Whaling expeditions were of national importance on several accounts. There was the country’s enrichment through obtaining and selling (often exporting) luxury goods — whale oil and whalebones and furs. There also were potential discoveries; governments were hoping for new lands to be discovered and occupied on the route to Siberia and far-East.

Last political aspect impacting the exploitation of Svalbard’s resources is how the international context and tensions influenced the whaling campaigns. Romanovsky [?] describes how the Nine Years’ war (1688–1697) was also played in the then-called Spitsbergen archipelago. Whaling there was essential for Dutch supplies, therefore the French decided to attack the Dutch on this critical point. The former built up polar warships on purpose of fighting the Dutch in Svalbard; it was a success for the French army which seized thirteen whaling ships in a battle close to Sorgfjorden. Thus, the setting up of rival companies, as well as the military interventions in Svalbard, highlight how whaling in the archipelago actually proved to be strongly interlinked with national economic and political stakes as well as potentially reflecting international conflicts.

1.2 Coal mining companies and the national framings of Svalbard

Once whales got rare in Svalbard surroundings, most stakeholders lost their interest in the place. No country claimed it until the end of the XVIIIth century, when new exploitable resources were discovered on the archipelago: coal. The exploitation of Svalbard’s resources on an intensive level then soon resumed. Two coal mining companies were created in 1900-1901. A first town was founded in 1904 (Advent city), and a second one 1906 (Longyear city). The latter was founded by Arctic Coal & co., an American mining company — which director’s name was Longyear. The American company built up several facilities buildings and a small port next to the mine, in order to export extracted coal. The company and the city were later sold to Norwegian Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani and renamed Longyearbyen.

In geopolitical terms, what is worth noting is that this exploitation was always set on a national basis — just as whaling had been. Companies belonged to a certain country, and mostly employed some of their nationals, who lived together in small towns built next to the mines. For a country to have companies owning, selling or buying mines was an major stake, since producing coal was essential for energetic self-sufficiency all along the XXth century. Even though the main coal extractors have been Norway and Russia, the Swedes have also established the coal mine of Sveagruva (today by far the more productive mine on Svalbard), and the Dutch founded Barentsburg — thus named in memory of the Dutch explorer thought to have discovered Svalbard. Norway and the USSR have bought back these mines from 1925 on. Today the two only cities on Svalbard (apart from camps and stations inhabited on a temporary basis) are still strongly shaped by nationalities. Longyearbyen is the administrative Norwegian capital, with all Norwegian State’s authorities on Svalbard, while Barentsburg is a Russian town, only inhabited by Russian people. Nationalities are thus taken as a proxy for place of residence by national statistics [25].

Mining activities, even if the most important industry on the archipelago in terms of turnover and employment, have consistently been in deficit for the last decades, and there is no sign to suggest a future improvement of the situation¹. Economically speaking, one

¹See for instance [26] for Norway

could imagine that it would therefore make sense for Russia and Norway to close the mines down. Nevertheless, even if dramatically costly, both countries maintain this activity as an element of a wider geostrategic plan: what is at stake through exploitation of Svalbard resources is the occupation and using of the territory, in order to not let it go back to a *de facto terra nullius* which may be claimed by another country using it. They want to keep a hold over the place for diplomatic and geostrategical reasons.

1.3 Prospection and upcoming exploitation

On this basis, one may wonder what the future perspectives for resources exploitation on Svalbard are. I have chosen to deal with the halieutic resources' complex question later on (see section 2.2, p.9), and to focus here on mineral resources. A lot of coal, ore, industry minerals and gas and petroleum reserves have been discovered on Svalbard — see fig.2, p.7, and are still to be exploited. Those reserves are gradually being studied and for some exploited — petroleum being drilled only in high waters for the moment. Every year, new deposits are found, thanks to improvements in scientific techniques but also global warming which makes the soil easier to drill. The decision of drilling or not also depend on external factors, like the price of those resources on global markets (which determine whether drilling is profitable or not) and the advancement of scientific knowledge and techniques. Norway is granting drilling licenses to Norwegian companies, to the great displeasure of other countries and especially Russia, which advocates for more transparency and a more equitable distribution of exploitation licenses. I will focus on the current and prospective international governance of the zone later on, but what needs to be understood here is that the stakes are at the same time scientific, economical, environmental and geopolitical. Apart from the argument that oil exploitation and use is in itself unsustainable — and all the more for shale gas which has been discovered on Svalbard in 2013 —, several stakeholders fear that drilling might put the whole ecosystem at risk. An oil spill in Svalbard might have terrible consequences, for it is situated in a peculiar place where Gulf stream waters meet the ice cap and are then rapidly diffuse in the whole North Atlantic ocean. These “environmental” stakeholders are NGO's, but also States and organisations such as the European Union who claim on top of that for a respect and renegotiation of the treaties governing the exploitation in the region. Countries like Russia resent the Norwegian politics as unfair and militate for more equity in the rush for fossil fuel exploitation, planning on their future profitability.

The political question of drilling licence attribution is nothing new. A famous controversy emerged in 1963 when Norway refused to grant the Soviet oil company Arktikugol the same oil exploitation licence as the one it had granted the Texan company Caltex the previous year. Norway justified the refusal by saying Arktikugol brought insufficient elements to support its claim — since the applicant companies had to prove that there was an appropriate quantity of oil to drill where they intended to forage. Nevertheless, Arktikugol insisted and the Norwegian Department of industry administration, knowing that another rejection could possibly damage

Norwegian-Soviet diplomatic relations, granted the licence.  strenge ([16], p.35) notes that then “it was clearly recognised that what was at stake was not geology but politics [...] Because foreign policy consideration proved the decisive element in Svalbard administration, Norway probably avoided political complications with the Soviet Union.”

2 The Svalbard Treaty and Norwegian national politics

2.1 The Svalbard Treaty and its underlying stakes

The set of rules which apply to region follows from the famous Svalbard Treaty. It is well-known as a unique piece of international law, since it recognizes one country’s sovereignty under a certain number of conditions granting all parties to the Treaty equal rights on the archipelago. Describing the context in which it was agreed upon and signed (see list of signatories: table 1, p.18), as well as looking at the way Norway effectively enforces it, helps understanding how this agreement is used by stakeholders to pursue their self-interests. On the whole, the formal agreement the Treaty represents is not all that consensual, but rather proceeds from the fact that several countries may have judged, at some point, that the ratification of the Treaty was an acceptable way of pursuing some of their interests. Other goals of the same countries may actually diverge, just as the interpretations they make of the Treaty, the latter representing in the end a dynamic equilibrium rather than an settled set of politics.

Principles and contents of the Treaty

First article of the Svalbard Treaty states that the contracting parties “undertake to recognise, subject to the stipulations of the present Treaty, the full and absolute sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen.” The main objective of Norway having this treaty signed was indeed to make her sovereignty over the archipelago recognised — and here it is acknowledged “full and absolute”. Nevertheless, the restrictions implied by “the stipulations of the present Treaty” ought not to be underestimated.  strenge ([16], p.14) sums up the contents of the Svalbard along six main principles.

- (1) The principle of full Norwegian sovereignty applies. It implies that Norway is charged with the responsibility to protect the area.
- (2) Internationalisation of the right of access and to economic exploitation: vessels and subjects of all contracting parties shall have equal rights to exploit Svalbard resources.
- (3) Non-discrimination: the subjects of all contracting parties are to be equally treated on Svalbard.
- (4) Svalbard is demilitarized. The archipelago shall not be used for any military purpose.
- (5) Any taxes levied in Svalbard are to be spent in Svalbard.
- (6) Previously established rights, acquired through occupation of land, are recognised.

The most important known coal, ore and industrial mineral resources and petroleum drillings at Svalbard

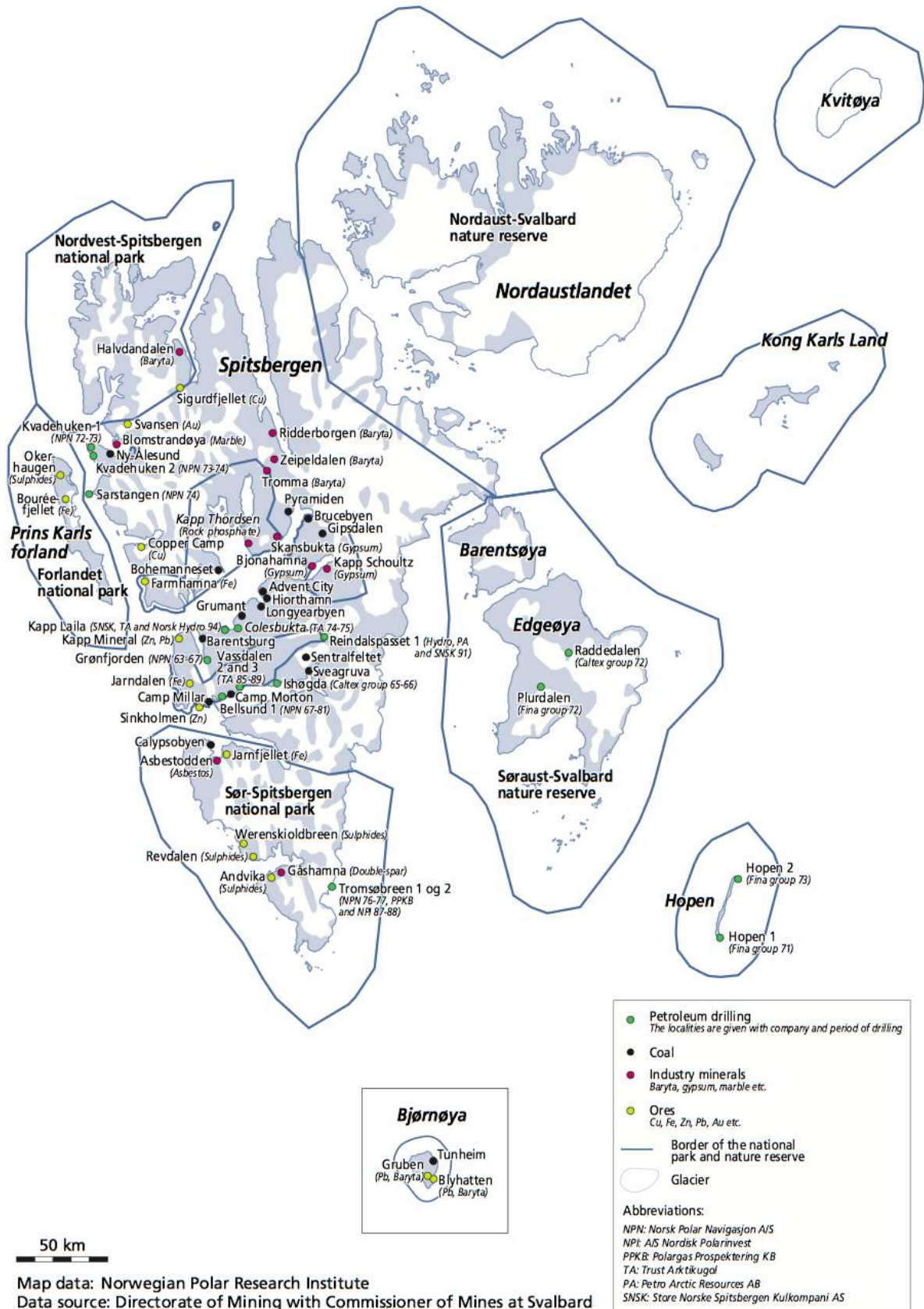


Figure 2

Despite the wording of the Treaty, the sovereignty of Norway on Svalbard is actually restricted, since equal rights for all parties are recognised as a way of compensation for Norway's sovereignty. According to the wording of the Treaty, it seems that Norway is in charge of managing an international *common*, since all signatories have an equal right to engage in research and commercial activities on and around the islands. For Norway, this Treaty was a way to make the access to Svalbard resources conditional to the recognition of her sovereignty over the archipelago — and thus to secure the latter. The subtle equilibrium from which the wording and the signing of the Treaty proceeds cannot be understood out of the context of their elaboration.

The Treaty as a reflection of a complex context

The Treaty was negotiated and signed during the 1920 Peace Conference in Paris, by a specific commission on “the Spitsberg”. Before First World War, Norway had already called for three conferences in order to settle the disputes about the *terra nullius* Svalbard then was, but they were unsuccessful. The archipelago was claimed by Norway, but also Russia, and to some extent Denmark and the Netherlands. The war radically changed the situation. During WWI, given the risks of ships getting torpedoed or bombed by marine mines in international waters, maritime circulation dropped all around Northern Europe. In the Barents and the North Seas, Norwegian merchant navy was almost the only one who dared going at sea. She lost 2000 sailors and 900 ships, that is, 49% of her national tonnage, according to Fife [9]. This backed up her claim on Svalbard, since the recognition of her sovereignty could be seen as a compensation for her losses in the WWI. Norway wanting to see her claim on Svalbard accepted, she got involved in diplomatic negotiations, for instance with Denmark: Danish diplomats accepted to make no difficulties about Svalbard if Norway backed up the Danish claims on Greenland, which Norway diplomats accepted. Thus, political status of the archipelago was in part determined by historical as much as ideological factors.

These geopolitical factors may also be observed in the motives behind the ratification of the Treaty. Germany and the Soviet Republic were not present at the Paris Peace conference, since they were considered the losers of the WWI. However, it was a major stake for Norway to have them sign the Treaty, since the Soviet Republic was not only geographically close to Svalbard, but also had claimed it as belonging to her territory. Norway sought their acceptance of the Treaty afterwards, and obtained German signature in 1924 and Soviet signature in 1925. For these two outcast regimes, it was an opportunity to negotiate steps of their re-acceptance on the international stage. Through explicit diplomatic correspondence, Soviet adherence to the Treaty was exchanged against Norway's official recognition of the Soviet regime. The same may apply to the recent adherence of North Korea to the Svalbard Treaty². Analysts have highlighted that the signing of the Treaty might be a sign of interest in the Arctic for the North Korean regime, which may be interested in oil, gas and coal deposits, as well as in the

²see for instance [24].

exploitation of halieutic resources of the archipelago. But in a diplomatic view, it is also a way for this outcast regime, isolated on the international stage, to access a certain recognition as a signatory to one the best-accepted and stable existing international agreement.

2.2 Svalbard and “Norwegianization” policies

What is at stake for Norway in this recognition of Svalbard is not only international politics, but also *national* ones. In his 2013 article, R. Berg [3] frames the concept of “norwegianization” to characterize a set of Norwegian policies between 1820 and 1925. Along with the international claims on Svalbard, Norway led internal policies of norwegianization, especially aimed at indigenous peoples — that is, the Sami people of Norway. Norway effectively colonized the Sami districts of her mainland at the same time it led extensive politics of colonization of the archipelago. This offensive was especially led through language — Sami children being imposed teaching in Norwegian for instance. It is also seeable in the toponyms. This period of norwegianisation was the time when Norwegian oceanographers renamed the North Ocean into the Norwegian Sea (1870’s), and the time the Dutch name “Spitsbergen” was replaced by Norwegian “Svalbard” — the former only applying to the main island of the archipelago since then. The same applies to the capital’s name, that is, Longyear, an American named norwegianized into “Longyearbyen” by the Norwegian authorities.

2.3 “Protection” and “non-discrimination”: univocal interpretations of the Treaty

The Svalbard Treaty establishes for Norway an obligation to protect the archipelago, and to enforce non-discrimination principles on the access to resources (see principles (2) and (3), p.6). This creates a complicated situation for Norwegian authorities: they should at the same time provide the same access to Svalbard resources to any of the numerous signatories of the Treaty, and make sure the resources are not overexploited. On top of that, the Treaty states that rights acquired previously to the establishment of the Treaty ought to be respected — that is mainly Russian mining and Greenlandic and Icelandic fishing. Since the second half of the XXth century, Norway has interpreted those principles in a way benefiting her self-interests — which has often implied making important concessions to USSR/ Russia in order to preserve pacific relations.

Norway endorse a literal and restrictive interpretation of the Svalbard Treaty implications, and considers the non-discrimination principle to apply only to the area “mentioned in the Treaty”, which is what the Treaty states. Therefore, she applies this principle only to the “territorial sea” of Svalbard, that is, 12 nautical miles beyond the shores. However, many parties to the Treaty contest this reading of the Treaty, saying the principle should apply to a 200-mile zone, since this is now the international norm, even if it was not the case at the time

the Treaty was signed³. Norway declared the 200-mile zone a “non-discriminatory” fisheries protection zone (FPZ) (see map p.14); in this zone, she regulates the establishment of quotas, technical measures and reporting of catches. However, the Norwegian authorities bend the protection and non-discriminatory arguments to the profit of the Norwegian economic and diplomatic interests. Indeed, Norway unilaterally allocates up to 95% of the fishing quotas to its own fishing fleet (part of which she then redistributes to Russia). This of course leads to long-lasting disputes on which I will come back later on. Nevertheless, what may be pointed here is that this maritime policy is part of a wider integrated national policy. Indeed, maritime authorities are backed up by scientific reports when they allocate those quotas; the latter are enforced by the Norwegian civil forces (the Coast guard), and supported by the Supreme Court of Norway which stated that it was legal for Norway to establish quotas on the basis of traditional fishing activities (see Tiller [19], p.377) — even though this criteria is actually based on nationality, which could have been interpreted as violating the Svalbard Treaty.

3 Geostrategy of Svalbard: conflicts of cooperation in the Arctic?

Svalbard’s resources are not the only wealth at stake when its status is debated among international stakeholders. Its location is also a major point of interest for the — often interlinked — objectives of military and scientific institutions. Focusing on it will lead us to discuss the place of Svalbard in more global interaction between political and civil powers.

3.1 Svalbard, a strategic location in the world’s geography

The archipelago is a strategic location in the northern hemisphere (see fig.1, p.2). Regarded South, it delimits the Barents canal with Finnmark, that is, the entrance door to the Barents sea from the Atlantic, and more generally, it guards the North-West passage towards Russia and the Bering Strait. West Svalbard delimits the Fram strait with Greenland, that is, the entrance door for the Arctic Ocean. And in the East, during the Cold war, it was a strategic place between Western Europe and Russia, a geographic vanguard for the party which hold it. Moreover, its exceptionally northern location combined with its easy access make it an important site for the production of meteorological data.

For all these reasons, holding on to Svalbard was a major strategic point during Second World War. The Allies decided to evacuate it in September 1941 — against Norway’s opinion, which can be interpreted once more as an indication of her will to maintain continued settlement and occupation backing up its claim on the land. Before evacuating, they destroyed all facilities, forecasting a potential seizing of Svalbard by the Axis. Indeed, the Germans established a small garrison in Longyearbyen. This rapidly proved problematic, since it meant a potential access to fuel resources (even if it would have taken a long time before effectively

³On these questions, see Tiller [20] and Pedersen [17] for detailed discussion, of Ulfstein [12] for a comprehensive approach.

exploiting the mines) and worse, a privileged access to meteorological data which are of the uttermost strategical interest in times of war . The Germans effectively built up a meteorological base there — Dege and Barr wrote a whole book on the subject [8]. The Allies therefore decided to win Svalbard back and sent a fleet of two ships and fifty men in April 1942. During the time when the Allies had no working weather station anymore on Svalbard, it is estimated that it cost them the loss of 200 aircrafts because of the lack of information ([16]).

After the WWII, USSR claimed Bear Island (*Bj rn ya*) as a part of their territory and a shared management of Svalbard — quite like Norway did for the whole archipelago after WWI, in both case counting on sympathy regarding their huge losses in the war. Nevertheless, Norway refused, and placed Svalbard into the newly created NATO — the main institution of the Western Bloc in the emerging Cold War. Coal mining then resumed on Svalbard for interlinked economic and geopolitical reasons, as Hough summarizes it in a clear formula: “For the Norwegians, it represented their only domestic supply of the fuel, and for the Russians, it presented an opportunity to retain a foothold in ‘the West’ in the new political landscape of the Cold War.” ([14], p.10). Indeed, the Soviet presence on Spitsbergen was strategical: securing the Svalbard–Finnmark passage was a way of guaranteeing that in case of an outbreak, USSR would be able to ship her northern fleet out of Murmansk into the Atlantic as quick as possible.

Thus a kind of interested cohabitation took place on Spitsbergen, where Norwegian and Soviet mines remained. The underlying geopolitical conflicts have shaped the landscapes, not only in the digging of the mines, but also in the installation of monuments celebrating the superiority of one block against the other, such as the famous Lenin statues which have remained in Pyramiden and Barentsburg so far.



Figure 3: Lenin statues in Barentsburg (left) and Pyramiden (right). Sources: cf. p.17

3.2 National, regional and international stakes in scientific operations

Meteorological data which was critical during WWII is only a part of what Svalbard has to offer in terms of scientific knowledge. This has also been a major subject of international disputes and cooperation throughout history.

As any remote place, even if relatively easily accessible, Svalbard has long offered opportunities for exploration — which also was a case for international rivalries. Once the right whale was almost extinct, there was a real rush for exploration on Svalbard. In 1863, a Norwegian captain, Carlsen, sailed all around the archipelago for the first time, thus definitely proving that Svalbard was not linked to any continent. It was a major landmark in the knowledge of the archipelago and such a discovery reinforced Norway in her claim over the archipelago. From the XIXth century on, Svalbard was considered the best departing point for expeditions to the North pole — whether by foot or by air. This was also an important element in the building of national histories, many European countries hoping one of their national would be the first to succeed in such expeditions. Local toponyms still bear the traces of the adventures, such as the Perriertoppen, named after the French expedition which climbed it first.

International collaborations also developed in Svalbard. Best example for it is the station of Ny-Ålesund. This former mining town, the northernmost settlement in the world, is now an international and multidisciplinary research centre, including studies in air pollution, geology, oceanography, ozone studies, solar radiations, meteorology, biology, etc. Many countries have established a station there, as they are allowed to do so if they sign the Svalbard Treaty guaranteeing them an access to the land just as for any other signatory. Even though research is conducted on a national basis, Norway has promoted international exchanges and cooperation. This is why NySMAC — Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee — was set up in the 1990's. The goal of such an institution is to promote coordination among researchers, making them meet each other and present their countries' activities in Svalbard, and to organize research through international programs. Those scientific programs however are not exempt from rivalries and may reflect national conflicting politics. Thus China has recently opened (and hugely mediatized this opening) a research centre in Ny-Ålesund. This was a way for the Chinese regime to put forward its Arctic interest [11], and to send a sign to its Russian rival — that it may be challenging that far away, in a sense. Even though scientific programs seem to be developing under cooperative patterns, national rivalries still exist.

Last level of scientific cooperation in Svalbard is regional. In this regard, the founding of UNIS (University Centre in Svalbard) was a important step for it took place within the wider framework of the University of the Arctic, and international network between higher education institutions. This framework was set up in the 1990's and participated to the elaboration of a consistent "Arctic region" on a scientific level. Within this framework, students' exchanges are facilitated; students going through Longyearbyen among other Arctic destinations thus effectively construct international networks in which Svalbard is included. Regarding the previously highlighted rivalry, it is worth noting that the programs at UNIS includes teachers both from Russia and China.

3.3 Enduring disputes in a pacified zone

The long-lasting territorial dispute between Norway and USSR / Russia

The maritime boundary between Russian and Norwegian waters was not settled by Svalbard Treaty. Part of a maritime zone North-West of the Archipelago was claimed by both countries, since Norway argued that the boundary had to follow the median line between the two coasts, while USSR argued that the so-called “sector line” (departing from the Pole) had to be followed — thus granting her larger territories (on the Russian “sectoral concept” and its uses in the Arctic, cf. Timtchenko [21], p.34). In the disputed area were potential oil drilling sites, which of course envenomed the debate. It became a diplomatic dispute in 1957, when the territorial seas were delimited. In the 1970s, a temporary agreement was reached — the “Grey Zone Agreement”. The two parties quite surprisingly reached an agreement in 2010, signing a treaty “on the maritime delimitation and cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean” in Murmansk and divided the disputed area “in two parts of approximatively the same size”.

The long-lasting dispute gave way for serious diplomatic incidents. The most famous one may be that of the *Elektron* in 2005 (cf. Åtland and Ven Bruusgaard [2]). The *Elektron* was a Russian trawler arrested by the Norwegian coastguard for fishing in the disputed zone. Her captain resisted and escaped Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone into the Russian Exclusive Economic Zone holding two Norwegian coastguards as captives. It was therefore chased through the Barents sea into the Russian EEZ by Norwegian authorities. After the incident, Russia deployed a destroyer in the disputed zone in order to protect Russian ships. Tiller and Nyman [20] insist that Russia still hasn’t officially recognised the FPZ status, and thus incidents may still happen — minor incidents actually did happen since 2010; but the management of the FPZ being quite rather beneficial to Russia as far as the fish is concerned, there are few chances she will effectively contest it.

The widely disputed management of the FPZ

The case goes differently for other stakeholders which feel unfavourably treated by the Norwegian management of the fisheries protection zone. Focusing on it will help understanding the plurality of actors involved in such geopolitical processes. The FPZ is managed by the Norwegian authorities attributing fishing licenses mostly to Norwegian and Russian companies. Indeed, in spite of the aforementioned territorial dispute, a “Joint Norwegian–Soviet Fisheries Commission” was established in 1976 on the political–economic purpose of managing halieutic resources in the Barents Sea, and it is still running today as the “Joint Norwegian–Russian Fisheries Commission”. As I previously mentioned, this leads up to 95% of the fishing quotas being shared only between Norway and Russia. Thus many fishing companies, joined by their national administrations and the bodies representing them, have been lobbying against it. A good example of such lobbying is a letter [23] written by Europêche and Copa-Cogeca to the EU

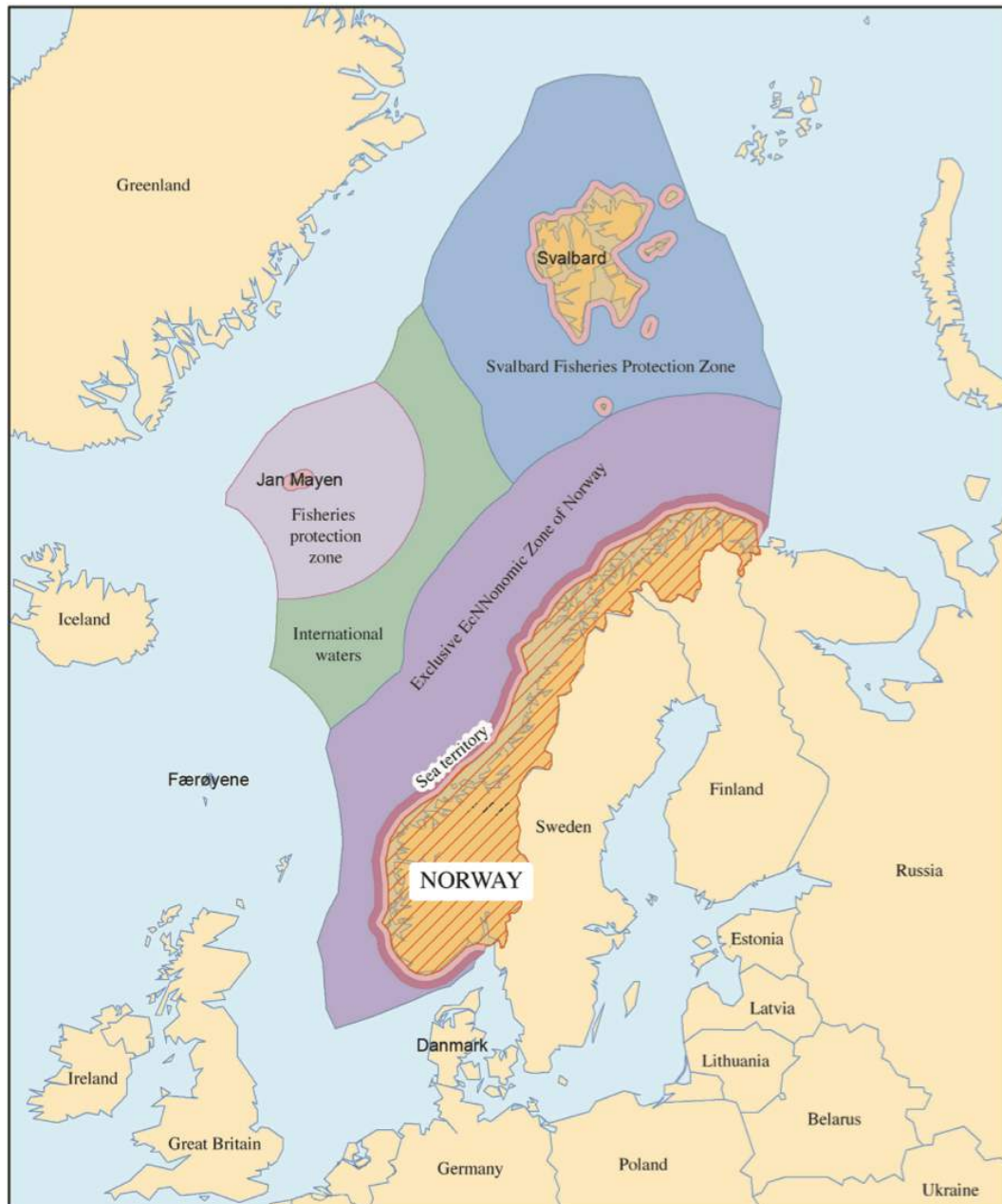


Figure 4: The Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone and surrounding areas in the Norwegian Arctic. Source: Tiller, Nyman [20], p.142.

Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries in order to complain about their eviction the fishing zone. Europêche is an association representing fishermen and national organisations of fishing enterprises in the European Union and Copa-Cogeca is a joint association representing European farmers and agricultural cooperatives. What the two associations actually do is lobbying the European authorities in order to obtain a change in the management of the FPZ.

On the other side, the Norwegian mission to the European Union is also actively engaged in lobbying in favor of the status quo benefiting Norwegian fishing companies. Even though Norway is not a member of the EU, it has a mission to the EU, which is especially used for this

kind of purposes. Wegge, in his 2013 article [22], describes “Norway’s strategies for influencing the maritime policy of the European Union”; Norway’s mission to the EU practises networking (developing relationships with key representatives in the different organs of the EU), always presenting and insisting on the Norwegian viewpoints, and shares its expertise on many issues — making the EU bodies benefit from its expertise and at the same time presenting things in a way which does not contradict Norwegian interests. Thus the questions of the management of the halieutic resources imply private actors as well as States’ and international institutions, and goes through many channels among the power networks — whether official or not.

Svalbard, a place for peace?

Even though those acute disputes still go on, sprinkled with more or less serious incidents, it is worth noting that the area has been relatively peaceful since the WWII — at least regarding how high and sensitive the stakes in the area are. Several remarkable examples of cooperation have developed there.

The aforementioned Joint Fisheries Commission between Russia and Norway provides a good example of this. Grønnevet in his 2015 article [10] describes how scientific cooperation has been integrated into the work of this Commission, thus paving the way for a long period of scientific cooperation (especially in fishery biology), on top of the more directly political resource management aspect. This cooperation has proved beneficial for the production of knowledge as well as for the mutual understanding of the administrations from the two countries — and for that matter, from the two sides of the iron curtain.

The same idea is pushed forward by Hough [14] regarding the 1973 agreement on the conservation of polar bears. This multilateral treaty between USSR and Western countries, regarding Svalbard territory in the first place, was at the time unimaginable anywhere else in the world than in the Arctic. It was a landmark for Gorbachev’s “Détente” era — and maybe ultimately the end of the Cold war. The Polar Bear Treaty, an international agreement made possible by its focus on the preservation of an Arctic resource (in the continuation of the USSR – Norwegian partnership) “crossed the Cold War divide” ([14], p.99). After the end of the Cold war, cooperation in the surroundings of Svalbard was pursued with the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic region in 1993, aiming to promote relations across the old East/ West divide.

Thus even though Svalbard has been — and to some extent still is — at the core of international rivalries, on the other hand it may be considered as an element of hope regarding the absence of open conflicts in an area where they could have occurred. Østreng summarizes this idea about the Svalbard Treaty: “not only did the Svalbard regime survive the postwar period ; but alongside the confrontation of the two major power blocs, it held hope for peaceful coexistence” ([16], p.13).

Conclusion

From its official discovery by a Dutch explorer to the current rivalries over the exploitation of its underground resources, Svalbard archipelago has played an important role in the geopolitics of the Arctic. From whale hunting to the status of a fishery protection zone and from coal mining to prospective oil drilling, the economic resources of Svalbard’s land and sea have provoked international conflicts and have had effects on diplomatic relations beyond the scope of the Arctic. In spite of its remote location, Svalbard has been a place reflecting national policies — whether Norwegianization policies or Soviet measures to ensure it kept a foothold in the West. Its geographic highly strategical position has been coveted by many meteorological and military institutions and the WWII was also played there, highlighting how interlinked scientific and military stakes may be. Disputes over Svalbard status in the form of the fishing quotas attribution process continue to generate intense debates in international institutions such as the EU, even though Svalbard and Norway are not a member of the latter, and between all types of stakeholders — whether regional, national, international, public or private.

All this clearly puts forward how this territory is a nexus between economic, diplomatic, politic, military, scientific and environmental stakes. It embodies how complex the relations between these interlinked domains may be in the Arctic. But beyond the international rivalries and the latent conflicts climaxing over the archipelago, it has to be noted that apart from the WWII, since 1920 Svalbard has embodied in many ways the potential for a relatively peaceful cooperation, whether economic, political or scientific. To pick up Gorbachev’s famous words in his Murmansk speech, Svalbard might be a good example of how the Arctic, despite all conflicting views and interests, may actually be an experimental “zone of peace”.

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Pictures

- [27] fig.3 by Bjoertvedt <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21834455> (Barentsburg) and Svein-Magne Tunli <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6319928> (Pyramiden)

Annex: parties to the Svalbard Treaty (by date of entry into force)

Country	Date of entry into force
Australia	August 14, 1925
Belgium	August 14, 1925
Canada	August 14, 1925 (extension by UK)
China	August 14, 1925
Denmark (then Iceland)	August 14, 1925 (extension by UK)
Finland	August 14, 1925
France	August 14, 1925
India	August 14, 1925
Italy	August 14, 1925
Japan	August 14, 1925 (extension by UK)
Monaco	August 14, 1925
Netherlands	August 14, 1925
New Zealand	August 14, 1925
Norway	August 14, 1925
Romania	August 14, 1925 (extension by UK)
South Africa	August 14, 1925
Sweden	August 14, 1925
United Kingdom	August 14, 1925
United States	August 14, 1925
Saudi Arabia	August 14, 1925
Switzerland	August 14, 1925
Egypt	September 13, 1925
Bulgaria	October 20, 1925
Greece	October 21, 1925
Spain	November 12, 1925
Germany	November 16, 1925
Afghanistan	November 23, 1925
Dominican Republic	February 3, 1927
Argentina	May 6, 1927
Portugal	October 24, 1927
Hungary	October 29, 1927
Venezuela	February 8, 1928
Chile	December 17, 1928
Austria	March 12, 1930
Estonia	April 7, 1930
Albania	April 29, 1930
Poland	September 2, 1931
Soviet Union (then Russia)	May 7, 1935
Ukraine	May 7, 1935
Iceland	May 31, 1994
Czech Republic	June 21, 2006
Lithuania	January 13, 2013
North Korea	January 25, 2016

Table 1: Source: Svalbard statistics