

Analyzing frenemies: An Arctic repertoire of cooperation and rivalry

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ABSTRACT

Intensive transnational cooperation and manifestations of the NATO-Russia security rivalry have endured for over 30 years in the post-Cold War Arctic. Drawing upon the concept of repertoires from the social movement literature, this article seeks to make a conceptual contribution as to how we might better analyse and articulate the simultaneity of these practices and narratives of cooperation and rivalry in the circumpolar region. Repertoires are typically defined as bundles of semi-structured/semi-improvisational practices making up a context-contingent performance (for example, by civil society towards the 'state'). These repertoires are argued to be created and performed in 'contentious episodes', rather than structured by long-term trends or evidenced in single events. Translated to global politics, a repertoire-inspired approach holds promise for privileging an analysis of the tools and performance (and audience) of statecraft in 'contentious episodes' above considerations of how different forms of global order or geopolitical narratives structure options for state actors. The emphasis on the performance of statecraft in key episodes, in turn, allows us to consider whether the interplay between the practices of cooperation and rivalry is usefully understood as a collective repertoire of statecraft, as opposed to a messy output of disparate long-term trends ultimately directing actors in the region towards a more cooperative or more competitive form of Arctic regional order. The article opens with two key moments in Arctic politics – the breakup of the Soviet Union and the 2007 Arctic sea ice low. The strong scholarly baseline that these complex moments have garnered illustrates how scholars of Arctic regional politics are already employing an episodic perspective that can be usefully expanded upon and anchored with insights and methods loaned from social movement literature on repertoires. The 18-month period following Russia's annexation of Crimea is then examined in detail as a 'contentious episode' with an attending effort to operationalize a repertoire-inspired approach to global politics. The article concludes that a repertoire-inspired approach facilitates systematic consideration of the mixed practices of amity and enmity in circumpolar statecraft over time and comparison to other regions, as well as offers one promising answer to the growing interest in translating the insights of constructivist scholarship into foreign policy strategy.

1. Introduction

At the Arctic Circle conference in October 2016, American federal and Alaska state-level representatives stressed the importance of fostering cooperation with Russia across the Bering Sea and the need to shine a light on the peaceful and cooperative nature of the Arctic region in a world mired in many regional conflicts (Wilson Rowe, 2016). The same day, then President Barack Obama issued the first official statement concerning Russian involvement in the cyber-attacks on the Democratic National Conference and flagged broader concern about Russia's attempts as a hostile power to influence American elections.

The same-day juxtaposition of the statements serves as an illustration of how Arctic states cooperate extensively within the circumpolar region while at the same time maintaining and managing national foreign and security policies marked by the NATO (including Canada, Norway, Denmark and the USA)-Russia security rivalry. The state of being simultaneously both 'friends' and 'enemies' is not uncommon in global politics (see Chaban, Bain, & Stats, 2007 for a discussion of applying the frenemy concept). Scholars and pundits have used the idea of 'frenemies' to term snappily the complex relations amongst countries that are between alliance and rivalry in different fields or that can vary

rapidly. However, beyond observations of the complexity of being frenemies (Tahiroğlu & Taleblu, 2015 on Turkey and Iran, Tubilewicz, 2012 on Taiwan and China, Ladislaw, 2018 on shifting alliances American foreign policy), there is little conceptual work done on how to analyse and track the interactive aspects of logics and practices of amity and enmity at play simultaneously. Additionally hampering such an inquiry, these broader global logics of disruption and integration are usually treated separately and, frequently, by entirely separate analytical communities (Goddard & Nexon, 2016).

This article argues that such seemingly divergent circumpolar narratives and practices, which have been studied thoroughly in and of themselves, can be usefully re-considered as a context-specific collective performance of 'frenemies'. More specifically, the following explores how the vocabulary and methods of 'repertoire' – defined as a bundle of practices and cognitive commitments performed in a patterned fashion for a target audience – can take us further in analysing systematically the interactive dynamic of the logics and practices of cooperation and rivalry. The concept of repertoire, borrowed from the social movement studies literature, allows for considering how different resources, competing logics and incommensurable political storylines may be nonetheless combined and performed by political actors during

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periods of contention. While this article focuses primarily on the performances and interventions of state actors as an empirical delimitation, the literature on repertoires is equally applicable to the politics of non-state actors, such as the indigenous peoples' organizations and governments who have been instrumental for shaping Arctic political developments or NGOs (for more on these actors, see [Dodds & Nuttall, 2016](#); [Shadian, 2014](#); [Wehrmann, 2017](#); [Wilson Rowe, 2018](#)).

The article proceeds as follows: Two key moments in Arctic politics – the breakup of the Soviet Union and the 2007 Arctic sea ice low – are presented to introduce Arctic politics to readers unfamiliar with the region. These key moments are also an initial illustration of how thinking episodically – a key tenet of the repertoires-inspired approach – already figures into our scholarship on Arctic politics. The article then turns to the concept of repertoires, making a case that this concept has utility in understanding and illustrating the political Arctic. Next, the 18-month period following Russia's annexation of Crimea is examined in greater depth as a 'contentious episode', operationalizing and adapting methods and insights from the literature on repertoires and contentious politics.

The conclusion explores what is to be gained analytically if we move away from seeing military display and a certain level of antagonistic behaviour as an exception to the rule of a cooperative Arctic (or vice versa), and, rather, consider both logics to be the rule in a context-specific Arctic repertoire. The conclusion also considers the extent to which this approach answers calls by constructivist-oriented scholars of politics about the need to aggregate and scale up findings in order to facilitate comparative research across policy fields and to engage more incisively in the traditionally realist-dominated field of foreign policy strategy studies and advice.

2. State of the Arctic

Two moments in Arctic politics that have garnered high levels of scholarly attention are introduced here to give grounding in circumpolar politics to a reader unfamiliar with the region. That scholars of Arctic politics have already anchored their analysis in particularly significant political moments speaks to a core conjecture of the repertoire-inspired thinking laid out in the next section, namely that episodes of contention or change and the narratives and practices forged through them have more to say about political outcomes than long-term trends or structural features.

Firstly, however, it is worth noting that where and what the Arctic is varies in political action and organization and in analytical work. In political practice, the idea of 'what' or 'where' the Arctic is have been fascinatingly fluid and contested, very much dependent on the political context and constellation of actors at hand ([Depledge, 2017](#); [Dodds & Nuttall, 2016](#)). Analysts have varied in how they choose to describe/gain analytical purchase on the outline of the Arctic – from an Arctic 'stage' (to help us foreground the overlooked agency of the material Arctic, [Depledge, 2013](#)), through a global space criss-crossed by issues and communities ([Keil & Knecht, 2017](#)), a policy 'mosaic' making up a broader regime complex ([Young, 2009](#)), a circumpolar bazaar with core and peripheral spaces ([Depledge & Dodds, 2017](#)) and to thinking of the Arctic as a set of interlinked and overlapping policy fields ([Wilson Rowe, 2018](#)).

Conceptualizing the Arctic as a set interlinked policy fields of varied reach – and also stacked at depth – also allows us include the politics of depth that some in political geography have been exploring (see [Dodds & Nuttall, 2016](#) for an Arctic application of the concept and [Elden, 2013](#); [Steinberg & Peters, 2015](#) for a broader discussion). In other words, the same GPS coordinate in the Arctic Ocean could be mapped into a multitude of policy fields, some local, some national, some international and at multiple depths (relating to the subsea, migratory animals and fish, to the atmosphere above or to a geopolitical imaginary of military projection from adjacent states).

These kind of non-reductionist conceptualizations of Arctic space

have been an important first step in conceptualizing an Arctic that is not likely to be characterized by one of the broader global logics of disruption and integration over another. Our first illustrative episode also demonstrates this. In 1988, Gorbachev held his famous Murmansk speech, in which he outlined how tension in the Arctic region could be decreased and cooperation increased. A series of events had drawn attention to the environmental vulnerability of the Arctic. Radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl disaster and sulphur dioxide from Soviet nickel smelters, as well as the oil spill from the Exxon Valdez off the coast of Alaska, highlighted the fragility and interdependency of Arctic ecosystems ([Graczyk & Koivurova, 2014](#)). The increasing activism of indigenous peoples – who highlighted interconnectedness across the national borders that transect the Arctic – created a policy understanding of the Arctic as a socio-political region ([Shadian, 2014](#); [Tennberg, 2000](#)). In the spirit of these times, Gorbachev's Murmansk speech pointed to challenges that no one Arctic state could address alone and is widely seen as a major moment of great power leadership in 'thawing' the Cold War Arctic.

The ensuing years witnessed the establishment of the many new forums and network facilitated by the change in political climate at the end of the Cold War. The Northern Forum was launched in Alaska, bringing together regional (sub-state) governments, indigenous organizations and engaged academics ([Young, 2005](#)). The Barents Euro-Arctic Region and Council brought together a similar set of actors at the Nordic/Russian Arctic level. The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) was launched from Finland in 1991 and later served as the basis for the 8-country Arctic Council, in which the indigenous peoples of the region participate as 'Permanent participants' based on their sovereignty and peoplehood. Several scholars have noted how regional, patterned interactions in the Arctic during this time period generated shared discourses around the region that are also productive on the level of identity, shaping how actors involved in Arctic politics think about themselves ([Hønneland, 2013](#); [Medby, 2018](#); [Neumann, 1994](#); [Tennberg, 2000](#)).

In other words, Gorbachev's speech and the time period in which it was delivered marked the start of an unprecedented political mobilization to build new regional institutions. However, an often-forgotten point is that Gorbachev's Murmansk speech railed against NATO, which encompasses the Arctic coastal states of the US, Canada, Denmark/Greenland and Norway, and its activities in the North ([Åtland, 2008](#)). Although the subsequent decades were marked by greater dialogue in settings like the NATO-Russia Council than we see today (cf. [Pouliot, 2010](#)), these NATO alliance-Russia tensions and disagreements remained unresolved (see [Legvold, 2016](#) for an overview of key issues).

Turning to a second episode in Arctic politics: The same year that Putin gave his 2007 Munich speech, which underlined that a Russia riding high on petroleum-rents would no longer be 'taking lessons' from the West, a science/exploratory team planted a Russian flag on the seabed at the magnetic north pole. This technical feat and patriotic display of capacity – partly under the auspices of the International Polar Year and part of Russia's data-gathering for making a claim to the Arctic seabed under international law – sparked a round of rhetorical outrage from Arctic countries. The same year, Russia resumed, after a 15-year hiatus, reconnaissance and bomber aircraft on regular deployments in the Arctic. All this, in combination with a record summer sea-ice low the same year confirming that the Arctic Ocean was undergoing a 'state change' ([Young, 2009](#)), fed longstanding policy and media discourses about the Arctic as ungoverned space on the precipice of conflict over resources ([Powell and Dodds, 2014](#); [Steinberg, Tasch, & Gerhardt, 2015](#); [Wilson Rowe, 2013](#)).

However, while the year 2007 did indeed spark controversy, it also sparked intensified diplomatic efforts, particularly amongst the Arctic coastal 'five' (Russia, Canada, Kingdom of Denmark, the USA and Norway). The 2008 Ilulissat Declaration underlined the commitment of the Arctic states to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as the basic governing 'constitution' of the region and to resolving any remaining

issues cooperatively and, importantly, amongst the Arctic states themselves (Dittmer, Moiso, Ingram, & Dodds, 2011; Steinberg et al., 2015; Wegge, 2010; Wilson Rowe, 2013). The key policy documents of the five Arctic coastal states (Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia, USA) issued shortly after the Ilulissat Declaration were striking in the extent to which they complement one another in highlighting problems and opportunities of importance for the Arctic region. For example, all Arctic national policy statements issued at the time represented the region as peaceful and pointed to climate change, increased human traffic and presence (e.g. shipping) and the promise of natural resources extracted in a fragile environment as drivers of political attention to the Arctic (Bailes & Heininen, 2012; Wezeman, 2016).

While all Arctic states publicly eschewed the notion of conflict in the Arctic, the events of 2007/2008 also resulted in renewed, if uneven, attention of Arctic coastal states to questions of national military capacity in the Arctic (Markowitz, 2020; Wezeman, 2016). At the same time, the growth in capacity and military-attention to the region was attended by the establishment of joint training exercises in the Arctic between NATO alliance countries and Russia (such as Norway and Russia or Russia/US/Canada), as well as the establishment of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable Meetings in 2011 (Byers, 2017; Wezeman, 2016; Zysk, 2011; Østhagen, 2018).

The extensive diplomatic and military modernization response from Arctic states after the Arctic sea ice low in 2007 echoes the mixed nature of Gorbachev's Murmansk speech and ensuing years of region-building and enduring NATO-Russia rivalry dynamics. Neither 1988 nor 2007 and the immediately ensuing years were exclusively marked by logics of integration or disruption, but rather illustrate how both of these long-term logics of international relations have been in interplay following departures from the status quo.

3. State of Arctic Politics scholarship

So, how does current scholarship speak to this complex interplay of logics and performances? Dittmer et al. (2011) note that our literature on Arctic politics certainly does cover the range of diverse impulses, logics and practices at play in Arctic politics. However, they argue that this body of literature is bifurcated by realist approaches to IR, emphasizing conflict and rivalry, and liberal approaches, examining circumpolar cooperation and stability and suggesting that the threat pictures painted by others are 'not only false but potentially dangerous' (Dittmer et al., 2011: 5). This observation speaks to an unfortunate outcome of sub-disciplinary battles within the discipline of international relations, which resulted in a dichotomous approach to international politics, with military might and realpolitik ('hard' power) on the one side and the liberal institutional order, attraction and marketplace of ideas ('soft power') on the other side (Goddard & Nexon, 2016). Looking more broadly at the literature, this bifurcation is reflected with two strong, but largely separate, baselines of research on the cooperative/liberal order side of Arctic politics (legal regimes, cooperative forums, formal and informal diplomacy) (e.g. Byers, 2014; English, 2013; Hønneland & Stokke, 2010; Keskitalo, 2004; Koivurova and Alfredsson, 2014; Lackenbauer, Nicol, & Greaves, 2017; Tennberg, 2000; Wilson Rowe, 2018; Young, 1998) and on the pursuit of state, especially national security interests, in the region (e.g. Heininen, 2015; Sergunin & Konyshv, 2015; Kraska, 2011; Markowitz, 2020; Zysk, 2011).

There has certainly been a scholarly effort to reconcile and address the presence of both cooperative and conflictual logics. One strand of literature seeks to understand why and how 'spillover' of conflict does not take place and explores why regional 'immunity' from conflict may exist and how cooperation can be insulated (Byers, 2017, Wilson Rowe & Blakkisrud, 2014; Wilhelmsen & Gjerde, 2018). Interestingly, while this literature serves to capture some of the surprising interplays between regional and global politics, the usage of the metaphors of containment/spillover/immunity serves to reinforce the broader tendency in international relations to place the dynamics and practices of

cooperative behaviour in a separate conceptual world than conflictual behaviour.

Another strand of literature coming from a critical geopolitics vein focuses on representations or long-term trends that cut along different lines than the conflict/cooperation dichotomy (Dodds & Nuttall, 2016; Powell and Dodds, 2014; Steinberg et al., 2015; Wilson Rowe, 2013). Book length treatments examine a range of policy framings (from conflictual to cooperative to conservationist to indigenous homeland in Steinberg et al., 2015) and a broad range of trends (scrambling, governing and extracting in Dodds & Nuttall, 2016), and examines one representation or trend in each chapter. The sequential treatments of overlapping trends and representations serves to thoroughly document and bring into high relief the co-extensive and overlapping narratives and frames shaping Arctic politics, but are not intended to interrogate the simultaneous performance of diverse narratives and frames.

Dittmer et al. (2011) concluded their argument about the bifurcation of Arctic political literature with an injunction that analysts should address this divide by examining how the liberal and neo-realist rationalities are indeed entangled and co-constituted. This article seeks to address this exhortation by exploring the extent to which these practices of amity and enmity can be understood as a repertoire forged and utilized in contentious Arctic episodes.

4. Why 'repertoire'?

The literature on repertoires is anchored in studies of contentious politics, which focus on social movements and political change at the local or national level. Charles Tilly, a key scholar in this quite diverse field of sociology, used the idea of repertoires to capture the dynamic of both repetition and innovation that characterized his findings about contentious politics from revolutionary France to industrializing England (Tilly, 2006). A key aspect for Tilly was that repertoires of contention were forged and enacted between claimant pairs (such as protesters and states) and formed by – and performed in – specific contexts. As Tilly writes:

Claim-making usually more resembles jazz ... than the ritual reading of scripture. Repertoires vary from place to place, time to time, and pair to pair. But on the whole, when people make collective claims they innovate within the limits set by the repertoire already established for their place, time and pair Thus, social-movement activists in today's European cities adopt some mixture of public meetings, press statements, demonstrations and petitions, but stay away from suicide bombing, hostage taking and self-immolation. Their repertoire draws on a long history of previous struggles (2006: 35).

Alimi, in a review of the literature on repertoires in social movement analysis, notes that repertoires are used by social movement scholars to conjure up the notion of a 'stock of special skills' that are deployed in performance, which 'is congruent with the idea that collective action involves not only what people know how to do, but also what those on the receiving end would expect and understand' (2015: 410–411). McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2009) argue further that, of course, elements of a repertoire can be copied and practiced elsewhere, but the repertoire itself is rooted contexts marked by specific claimant pairs. These repertoires persist as the repeated performance of the repertoire makes it more legible to – and likely more effective for – those involved. They put it this way: 'existing repertoires channel contentious politics by producing widely recognizable and practicable forms of coordination and signalling. They also accumulate information about political opportunity structure: the recent record of a particular performance tells potential claimants and objects of claims about the likely outcomes of different strategies' (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 265; see also; Jansen, 2016).

The vast majority of the literature explicitly utilizing a repertoires-inspired approach literature is applied to social movements/contentious

politics within states or sub-state levels of government (see [Goddard, McDonald, & Nexon, 2019](#), for an exception). So, how do we apply the notion of repertoires to interactions in transnational space – and what is to be gained? There are three aspects of the literature on social movements and repertoires that can offer insight to or nuance our approaches to global politics and foreign policy.

Firstly, a focus on repertoires helps us move away from existing dichotomies of hard power versus soft power that characterize our scholarship on global politics and are evident in our scholarship on Arctic politics as well, as discussed above. The bifurcation in the literature has to do with different metacognitive commitments of different strands of international relations and also with the necessity of delimitation of analysis when engaging in context-heavy case studies. If analyzing military displays, legal developments or diplomatic meetings at great depth, analysis will likely capture internal dynamics within that policy field, but may struggle to discern interactions across policy fields. The necessity of limiting empirical scope and the bifurcation of the literature explored above makes it too easy to miss how the institutions of liberal order are also marked by the dynamics of dominance and subordination, soft competencies can also be important to pursuing security interests, and political leaders engage in all forms of statecraft simultaneously and can certainly elect to balance certain state resources (e.g. military) against other resources (e.g. engagement around shared environmental problems) ([Goddard & Nexon, 2016](#)). As Biggs put it in his study of the evolution of repertoires, repertoires describe how people engaged in claims making will select a tactic from their ‘repertoire’, which can be understood as ‘a small subset of all possible tactics’ ([Biggs, 2013](#), p. 407). It would indeed be a disservice to the empirical purchase of our scholarship, seen in summation, cultivated the division of hard and soft competencies more carefully in the world of analysis than the distinction manifests itself relations between states. By ‘putting the toolkit first’, ahead of the already heavily researched and debated ideal-typical forms of global order, the (sometimes logically incongruent) decisions states can make and consequences of that statecraft for global order are brought into the analytical limelight ([Goddard et al., 2019](#), p. 10; see also; [Phillips & Sharman, 2015](#)).

Secondly, the literature on contentious politics provides a methods clue for capturing how actors in global politics perform multiple geopolitical narratives and political practices simultaneously in global politics. The social movement literature's use of repertoires devotes analytical attention to defining time periods of analysis (‘episodes’) and posits episodes of contention as particularly productive of long-term political outcomes. Scholars in the field of contentious politics argue that an episode focus constitutes the larger performance of politics in ways one cannot discern with a purely event-focused perspective or with a focus on one long-term macro-trend ([Tarrow, 2008](#)). Events are often identified with preconceived definitions (a march, an assembly, a riot, a show of military strength, a diplomatic meeting), whereas attempting to delimit an episode and then examine all forms of activity within the episode may bring to light how there is a combination of different types of practices and rhetoric at work.

Thirdly, repertoire emphasizes both performance (and audience) and strategic improvisation and thus posits somewhat strategic actors. This ties into a broader emphasis in political geography and global governance research, namely a shift from making assumptions about what counts as power to the examination of the performance of power and what power does in practice ([Adler & Pouliot, 2011](#); [Dodds, 2010](#); [Mamadouh & Dijink, 2006](#); [McConnell, 2018](#); [Muller, 2012a](#); [Jones & Clark, 2015](#)). As Tilly notes (2006: 41) a focus on repertoires, and how they are strategic performances, takes a step away from structurally-forced behaviour or ‘dumb habit’ and creates conceptual room for acknowledging that participants in contestation can innovate and combine a diversity of discourses/practices/narratives/resources in their political performance. Envisioning political actors as imbued with greater strategic capacity speaks to one of the central conundrums of practice theory, namely the tension between the regulative and erratic

character of practice ([Bueger & Gadinger, 2015](#)). Barnett, in a recent review article, notes that there has been a general move within the practice literature to fight against theories of constraint and to reconceptualize actors as making ‘choices but not necessarily under the conditions of their choosing’ (2018: 319; see [Medby, 2018](#) for a similar argument about more conscious/strategic approaches of political actors and their ‘Arctic’ identities). As the next section explores, the methods and empirical approach of the repertoires literature also gives cues as to how we can document and analyse such strategic, yet patterned, political performances enacted amongst Arctic claimants.

5. A contentious episode: Arctic interactions 2014–2015

Russia's annexation of Crimea in February–March 2014 led to a new post-Cold War low in Russia-Western relations ([Legvold, 2016](#)). The backstory and dynamics leading to this moment are complex and rooted in a tangle of political and economic interests and divergent narratives of post-Cold War political and security developments held by Russia and its European and North American counterparts (for more on this, see [Charap, 2017](#) and [Toal, 2017](#)). Solidarity within Europe and within the NATO security alliance – rhetorically, politically and economically/financially – became the central foreign policy tenet of many European and alliance country states (see [Wilhelmsen & Gjerde, 2018](#) for the case of Norway). The enactment of a sanctions regime against Russia included a suite of measures also directed at hampering Russia's offshore Arctic petroleum development ([Aalto, 2016](#); [Fjaertoft & Overland, 2015](#)). The fact that 4 of the 5 Arctic coastal states are members of NATO – and the other country is Russia – resulted in media and public debates about if and how Arctic cooperation would continue. However, the political discourse at the time demonstrated that the Arctic states were publicly committed to managing the region peacefully and highlighted a number of shared interests in the region (see [Byers, 2017](#) for an analysis).

This section explores if we can discern the contours of a circumpolar repertoire by demarcating and considering the post-2014 period to be a contentious episode for Arctic politics. This case study section considers several methods and delimitation considerations. These are addressed in detail as a main aim of the article is concept development, which makes operationalization especially important.

5.1. Identifying a contentious episode

The literature on social movements reviewed above places emphasis on distinguishing between events, episodes and long-term sociological trends. The wager, on the whole, is that episodes of contention enacted between claimant pairs (often civil society and the state) likely shape political outcomes more than long-term trends. Research in this vein, which is largely carried out at the national or sub-national levels, is often reliant on assembling large quantitative and qualitative data sets to analyse the activities, narratives and outcomes of these contentious episodes and map the relationships between claimant pairs. How to translate this trifecta of events, episodes and trends into study of global politics remains an avenue for future research.

For the sake of this article, with its aim of an initial exploration of the utility of the idea of repertoires in relationship to circumpolar politics, an analytical tip from [Goddard and Nexon \(2016\)](#) is employed to identify periods of contention. They argue that contentious episodes in global politics are marked by ‘mobilization’, be it mobilization of military, diplomatic, economic or civil society resources.

The year and a half following Russia's annexation of Crimea was certainly marked by the mobilization of resources, not least Russian military and political resources influencing outcomes in Ukraine, but also European and North American resources in establishing and structuring an economic and political sanctions regime in response. Likewise, as [Fig. 1](#) shows, there was an uptick in mobilization and demonstration of military capacity directed across the Russia/NATO alliance divide.

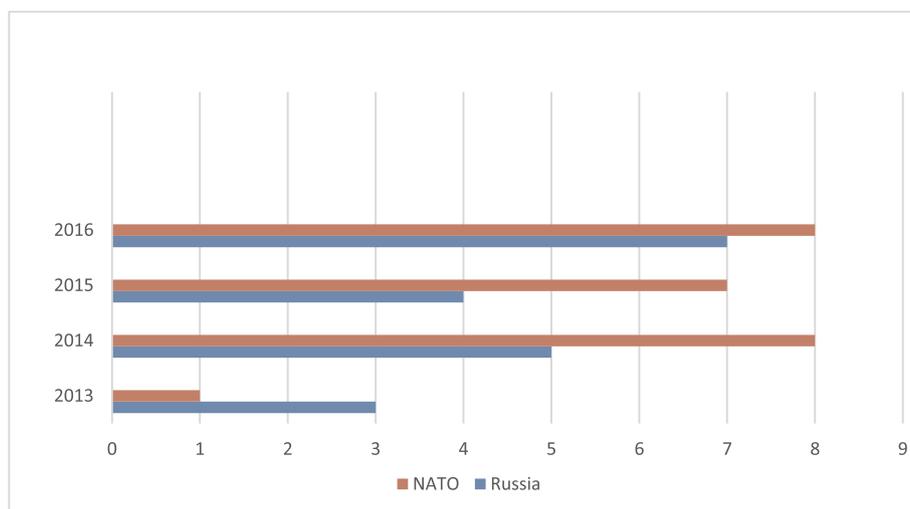


Fig. 1. Mobilization: NATO exercises and Russian military exercises 2013–2016 (Data source: Brzezinski & Varangis, 2016).

The first high-level meeting of the Arctic states following Russia's annexation of Crimea — the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council hosted by Canada in Iqaluit — provides another indication of mobilization of resources. 6 of 12 high-level statements made by foreign ministers or heads of the indigenous organizations addressed the ongoing contention in broader global politics. For example, Finland's foreign minister addressed the broader geopolitical situation, stating: 'the question whether and to what extent the strained international situation will affect Arctic cooperation can be answered in a positive tone and quoting our declaration saying that we are committed to maintaining peace, stability and constructive cooperation in the Arctic. It is in no-one's interest to let problems elsewhere to impact negatively on Arctic cooperation and the Arctic Environment' (MFA Finland, 2015: 3). Minister of Natural Resources, Sergey Donskoy, represented Russia at the ministerial rather than the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and addressed the difficult political atmosphere between Russia and Europe/North America:

Arctic cooperation has been steadily developing despite the external circumstances ... Russia sees the Arctic as a territory of dialogue and cooperation and is interested in strengthening international cooperation in this region, both on a bilateral and multilateral basis ... Russia sees huge potential in the Arctic to promote and expand a constructive agenda for our common region, built on the basis of national interests of all the Arctic states ... There is no room for confrontation or aggravation of tension in the Arctic region — especially from outside sources — and there is strong public demand for joint responses to common challenges and for joint use of shared opportunities in the Arctic. Russia opposes any attempt to politicize the development of Arctic cooperation (Ministry of Natural Resources, Russian Federation, 2015: 1).

Reflective of most statements made by indigenous representatives (the 'Permanent Participants'), the President of the Saami Council Aile Javo addressed geopolitical tension head-on:

[we] the generation that has seen the Cold War come to an end. The Saami Council has seen the relationship with our brothers and sisters in all countries flourish again after decades of separation. Since 1992, the Saami Council has worked in all four countries the Sami people reside in ... Most of the Permanent Participant organizations represent an indigenous people that reside in more than one country. In times of geopolitical instability and changing economies, the indigenous peoples' communities will be the first to be negatively affected. Our pledge to you all is that we need to safeguard the unique work of the Arctic Council. We need to continue to cooperate as one Arctic family learning from each other and respecting each

other. That is our responsibility and is important to sustainable and well-being of all (Saami Council, 2015: 1).

On a similar note, Michael Stickman from the Arctic Athabaskan Council noted that they had to speak openly about the tensions between Russia and the West and about the absence of Lavrov: "We are not naïve, but this council and its individual members should shield our cooperation from broader political and geopolitical rivalries' (Arctic Athabaskan Council, 2015).

Commenting on global political and security issues external to the Arctic Council is not common practice in this forum, which remains largely focused on areas of cooperative interest and opportunity for aggregating science or harmonizing regulation on socio-economic and environmental issues (Rottem, 2019). Therefore, even with only half of the high-level statements speaking to the situation in Crimea and the low point in broader relations between Russia and its Arctic counterparts, the Iqaluit ministerial statements represent a striking mobilization of diplomatic resources, which is a key indicator of contentious politics as opposed to routine politics.

After identifying that processes of mobilization are at play, there is still the question of how to define the duration of an episode. Even within the field of contentious politics, analysts have struggled to find clear definitions of contentious episodes (Tilly, 2006) and distinguishing them from events, longer-term trends, and routine politics. Tilly suggests that delineating an episode could be done in a bottom-up fashion, such as inferred from participants' own understandings of interlinked events, from media or historical periodization or from the creation of 'arbitrary but uniform units of observation'. In delimiting the time specific time examined in the post-Crimea episode below, a tip is taken from Tilly's observation above that arbitrary units of time are one way forward in defining the length of an episode. Consequently, the event set studied below begins after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and continues for an 18-month period.

Another methods challenge for the contentious politics literature is distinguishing between routine and 'non-routine' politics (Tilly, 2006). In the midst of a contentious episode, an analyst will see the deployment of both performances specific to that episode or repertoire but also the continuation of routine politics and practices that are not specific to that episode (or even to that repertoire). Therefore, the episode study presented below assembles events and actions where states have latitude for quicker reaction, with a focus on novel ad-hoc diplomatic efforts and military. This serves as a delimitation of data and keeps analytical attention on areas in which Arctic actors have latitude to adjust activities and are signalling internationally with their actions. So, for example, the 2014–2015 fruition of Arctic countries' earlier decisions about military

Date/date range	Logic coding	Further detail
March 4, 2014	Cancellation of biennial US-Russia-Norway naval exercise in the Barents Sea	
March 2014	Chief Heads of Defence in the Arctic cooperation was immediately suspended	
March 7-22, 2014	Cold Response exercise	Held biannually in northern Norway since 2006. Involving Norwegian, NATO and other allied troops.
March 18-19, 2014	Task Force on Arctic Marine Oil Spill Pollution Prevention (TFOPP) meeting in Reykjavik	Full participation from all Arctic countries.
April 8-9, 2014	Task Force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic meeting in Helsinki	At this meeting both Russia and the US present drafts with text for an agreement focused on reducing barriers to scientific cooperation in the Arctic.
April 14, 2014	Task Force on Black Carbon and Methane meeting in Moscow	Hosted by Russian Ministry of Natural resources, but held without the participation of Canadian representatives who officially boycotted the meeting due to Russia's annexation of Crimea.
May 17-21 2014	NATO alliance member-led exercise 'Cold Response' in northern Norway	Cold Response is part of a longstanding exercise series
May 21-22, 2014	Arctic Council Task Force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane in Helsinki	
May 27-28, 2014	Task Force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic meeting in Reykjavik	
June 12-13, 2014	TFOPP meeting in Ottawa	Full participation from Arctic states
September 2014	Cancellation of planned Russia/US/Canada Vigilant Eagle Exercise	Annual exercise since 2010, cancelled at the initiative of the US and Russia due to Russia's interventions in Ukraine.
September 10-11, 2014	TFOPP meeting in Nuuk	Russia provides text. Agreement to pursue a non-binding agreement.
September 19-26, 2014	Russia's 'Vostok' exercise	This exercise was also part of a broader training exercise pattern (also held in 2010 and again in 2018), but was seen exceptional by analysts at the time because 1) it was preceded by a snap drill by the Eastern Military District and 2) it was the largest post-Soviet military exercise in absolute numbers and 3) part of the exercise was conducted on a newly created military base in the New Siberian islands, along Chukotka's coastline and on Wrangell Island, all Arctic locations.
September 30-October 2, 2014	Task force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic meeting in Tromsø	Confirmed that meetings would proceed only if all involved parties were cleared to pursue a binding agreement, which involved garnering support in national capitols for further work (which continued).
September 29-October 1, 2014	Arctic Council Task Force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane meeting in Iqaluit	
November 17-18, 2014	Arctic Council Task force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane meeting in Tromsø	
November 24-25, 2014	TFOPP meeting in Helsinki	Chaired by Norway and Russia
February 25-26, 2015	Meeting of the Task Force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic in Oslo	Agreed to extend the work into the U.S. Chairmanship, Russia and the United States were, by this point, co-chairing the process

Fig. 2. Table of 'elective' events post-Crimea Arctic episode (2014–2015).

March 9-18, 2015	NATO exercise, Joint Viking	Annual exercise held in Norway at various locations in northern Norway for cold weather training of NATO troops
April/May, 2015	Arctic Offshore Regulators Forum established	Stemming from TFOPP but an independent body. 'Arctic Offshore Regulatory Forum' for civil servants working on offshore oil and gas regulation and issues.
April 24, 2015	Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation was formed	The mandate of this new Task Force is to consider future needs for strengthened cooperation around the governance and regulation of Arctic marine areas.
May 25-June 5, 2015	Arctic Challenge Exercise	Norway was the lead country for a large military training exercises. First held in 2013, thereafter every 2 years. Involving Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish air forces. Primarily a cross-border exercise for Norway, Sweden and Finland, but where NATO alliance partners are invited to participate
May 25, 2015	Russian snap military exercise	Carried out in Northwest Russia
June 4, 2015	Russian-Norwegian "Barents-15" search and rescue exercise takes place	Cooperative biennial exercise in the Barents region, this time involving the Northern Fleet and rescue forces and the Norwegian Joint Recue Centre of Northern Norway, among other actors.
July 16, 2015	Arctic coastal states meet and issue the 'Declaration Concerning the Prevention of Unregulated High Seas Fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean'	Joint declaration from Russia, Canada, United States, Denmark/Greenland and Norway on intentions to deter the growth of unregulated fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (joint measures, joint scientific work). Commenced process leading to Central Arctic Ocean fisheries agreement, which was finalized in 2018.
September 2-3, 2015	Founding meeting of Arctic Economic Council	Mandate from Iqaluit Ministerial 2015, officially established in 2016
September 21- 22, 2015	Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation meeting held in Oslo	co-chaired by Norway, Iceland and the United States. All key actors in attendance.
September 28- October 1, 2015	Barents Rescue Exercise takes place	In Finland, joint all-Barents exercise in preparedness and rescue, including Russian actors
October 30, 2015	Establishment of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum	Independent, informal body bringing together all 8 Arctic Coast Guards to discuss soft security issues and coast guard matters.

Fig. 2. (continued)

modernization or expansion are excluded, as many of the original decisions and budget allocations took place at earlier junctures.

Similarly, regular meetings or outputs within the Arctic Council (at the Senior Arctic Official level or within the working groups) or other multilateral bodies were excluded from the event set as these are longstanding, highly institutionalized meeting places that are closer to routine politics than contentious politics. Rather, the focus here is on Task Forces, which are more temporary committees within the Arctic Council established at the behest of states, and thus are reliant on states' continued willingness to cooperate (see [Rottem, 2019](#) for more on Task Forces in the Arctic Council).

In sum, the event set analysed includes: 1) Arctic Council Task Force and other ad-hoc diplomatic activity and 2) Arctic military exercises, which, while requiring planning, are a more immediate resource that can be marshalled to display military strength or adjusted to accommodate other interests/mitigate threat perception. In other words, there

are certainly other activities and events that could be analysed here. However, the events included are somewhat commensurate and equally delimited, which serves to minimize cherry picking events of only one kind or another.

Finally, in the event set given below, state actors and their activities are the primary focus as an empirical delimitation. However, the literature on repertoires is well-suited to encompassing the contentious politics initiatives of non-state actors at the domestic level and could (and should) be extended to a wider net of actors, including indigenous peoples' diplomacy. These actors may share in this state-led repertoire or bring their own repertoire of contention to Arctic politics.

5.2. Interpreting the event set

The event set table ([Fig. 2](#)) is organized in chronological order. The events included are delimited according to the criteria discussed above

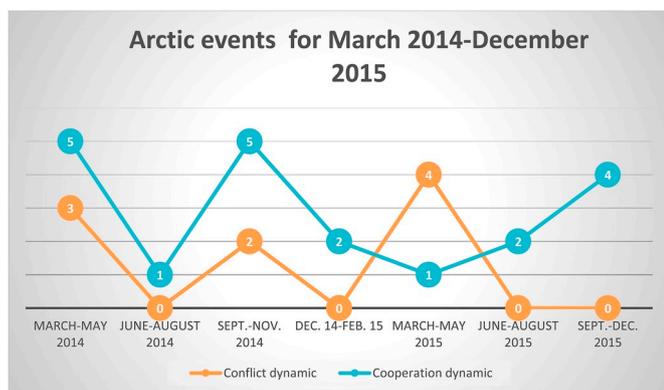


Fig. 3. Timeline plotting events in three-month windows.

(elective, rather than routine, political/security events) and drawn from both extant scholarship that has already examined the years 2014 and 2015 extensively (Byers, 2017; Conley & Rohloff, 2015; Wezeman, 2016) and records of Task Force meetings (Arctic Council Secretariat, 2018). Event coding is based on what kind of logic the event represented in a circumpolar context. So, for example, military exercises on either side of the NATO-Russia military rivalry are coded as rivalry/disruption (gray) and ad-hoc diplomatic initiatives or meetings across the NATO-Russia military rivalry are coded as integration (white) for cooperation. The one event coded in lighter gray is a cooperative event – a task force meeting held in Moscow one month after the annexation of Crimea – that was attended by all Arctic states, with the exclusion of Canada, which boycotted the meeting.

The event set within the post-Crimea episode shows that ‘non-routine’ activities of both dynamics (cooperative/integrative and disruptive/conflict-oriented) were actively pursued by the Arctic states. Activities that showed diplomatic willingness to cooperate *and* displays of military strength were continuously planned and carried out by the Arctic states. Plotting these activities in to a line graph (see Fig. 3) almost seems to imply causality in some three-month time window. For example, in September–November 2014, there is an uptick in both rivalry-oriented activities and cooperative activities. By contrast, the period of March–May 2015 could be interpreted as showing an inverse relationship between the two. This article cautions against attributing causal relations between these activities, as if Arctic state were carefully deploying diplomatic meetings to be timed with military exercises. That would assume far too an integrated and fine-grained approach in the foreign policy of any state.

Rather, the relative simultaneity of both rivalry-demonstrating and cooperation-demonstrating events indicates that Arctic states used both military and diplomatic instruments simultaneously within the Arctic region during a contentious episode. Further research remains to be done to explore if and how this episode following the annexation of Crimea differs from non-contentious periods of more routine politics or other Arctic contentious periods. However, assembling the event set illustrates clearly that the period following Crimea was marked by the mobilization of the resources and logics of both integration and disruption.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This article has outlined a conceptual approach to analyzing the simultaneous performance of both cooperation and rivalry amongst the states in the Arctic region. Thinking with ‘repertoires’ allows us to consider systematically events and practices that are usually handled by separate scholarly communities, focused on either the structures and practices of liberal order or security dynamics. By delimiting the inquiry to particularly contentious periods of time and non-routine politics, we are better equipped to capture how states make use of the

instruments of statecraft available to them in global politics and can perform a coherent repertoire of political action assembled from tools drawn from diverse traditions and rooted in divergent trends. This builds upon a strong baseline of scholarship that has emphasized the complexity of the region and allows us to consider more specifically degrees of complexity and change over time. Additionally, if we accept the observation from the social movement literature that episodes matters more in shaping political outcomes than long-term trends, we also have a better chance of understanding long-term political results by gaining analytical purchase on these periods of intensified mobilization.

Cashing out the full analytical scope of this approach would require systematic, comparative research on multiple episodes of Arctic politics, beyond the illustrative episode and exploration of concept and methods provided here. Likewise, further research should be done along similar lines in other regional political fields to explore if regional politics is marked by a greater ‘frenemies’-style repertoire of rivalry and cooperation than global politics more generally. Another issue for further research ties into a question that has also been challenging for the social movement literature, namely accounting for ‘routine’ politics in contentious episodes. At the global politics level, this would include sorting out how to account for the disciplining effects of institutional cooperation, discourse and communities of practice. Nonetheless, by ‘putting the toolkit first’ (Goddard et al., 2019, p. 10) and looking at the repertoire performed by Arctic states in a contentious episode of heightened mobilization, we can see simultaneity and an overall pattern that reminds us that the Arctic (and probably global politics more generally) does not conform to one ideal-typical international system or another. In this perspective, Arctic cooperation is not shielded or insulated from conflict, but rather involves both logics and practices of rivalry and cooperation in a broader performance amongst and for ‘frenemies.’

The event set and interpretation presented above do indeed come across as thin representations of complex realities, compared to engaging with a deep study of one political event or the rich tracing interlinked geopolitical narrative over time. However, recent review articles in political geography and international relations underline the importance of finding tools and concepts that allow us to zoom-out from and compare across context-rich studies. Barnett (2018: 319) points to challenge of making practice theory something more than a sum of many micro-cases and presents a way of categorizing practices within the field of humanitarian aid to allow for cross-study comparison and aggregation of different findings. Likewise Megoran and Dalby (2018), in their study of peace and peace research in political geography, call for greater attention to methods and approaches that allow us to gain insights from the context-laden local, without losing the ability to assemble a broader analytical picture. The repertoire-inspired framework explored here lends itself well to consolidating the findings of case-study based research, in that it would be difficult to discern the contours and contents of ‘contentious episodes’ without drawing upon the richness and depth of the broader field of extant scholarship.

An aggregated view that avoids thin universalizing or predictive theorizing about global affairs and geopolitical spatializations may also answer the growing call to build strategies of state action from constructivist-inspired social science disciplines. While liberalism and constructivism-informed research approaches have elucidated many of the practices and discourses of peaceful change, there have been few abstracted strategies identified for peaceful change and the sub-field of foreign policy strategy has been largely ceded to classical geopolitics/realist-informed thinking. However, as Paul (2017) argues compellingly: ‘strategy is not all about war or narrow national security ... we need to encourage our discipline and foreign policymakers in major powers in particular to think about peaceful change more effectively. Statecraft and grand strategy are studied as managing the continuation, termination and absence of war and peaceful change is not treated as an independent subject of statecraft’ (Paul, 2017: 6). A fully-fledged

longitudinal study of the repertoires of ‘frenemies’ across multiple contentious episodes in the circumpolar region may indeed serve as a basis for positing how the simultaneous performance of rivalry and cooperation can function as a strategy for stability in situations where peace and amity more fully realized remain out of reach politically.

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