

Cooperation in the Arctic Region: A case study of the Arctic Council in times of Crisis

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Abstract

This research project looks at cooperation within the Arctic Council and among its member states following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 with the aim of understanding how this seemingly distant event has shaped regional cooperation in the Arctic. In order to investigate varying levels of cooperation, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of Arctic Council documents as well as national initiatives and statements by the governments of the Arctic Council member states. We employ a neorealist and neoliberal line of thinking to explain our findings. Our findings suggest that cooperation within the Arctic Council has declined, security competition within the region has increased and cooperation efforts have moved outside of the Arctic Council, both on security but also environmental, scientific, and sustainable development issues, seemingly separating Russia from the rest of the Arctic members.

Table of Content

Introduction	4
Problem Area	5
Theoretical Framework	6
Neorealism	8
Neoliberalism	10
Methods	15
Research Design and Case	15
The Arctic Council	16
Data and Analytical Framework	18
Analysis	20
Cooperation within the Arctic Council	21
Cooperation outside of the Arctic Council	25
Arctic 7 and Regional Cooperation	27
Russia and Arctic Cooperation	29
Discussion	31
Challenges and Limitations	33
Conclusion	33
Bibliography	34

Introduction

The Arctic has historically been the arena of major strategic competition during the Cold War. This changed in 1996 when the Arctic Council was founded, creating the forum for cooperation among its eight member states (Byers, 2022). However, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine tensions between major Western powers and Russia have seen an increase, with the West being the main funder of Ukraine and an expansion of NATO, now with Sweden and Finland as part of the alliance.

Repercussions of the conflict can also be noticed in the activities of the Arctic Council, which has seen Russia suspended from chairing the council in its allotted 2021–2023 period. Furthermore, in 2023, Russia showcased its 2023 foreign policy concept document (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023e), which usually sets the geopolitical doctrine for the country. In this document, the Arctic is seen as a clear priority for Russian interests, and collaboration with the West is stated as a secondary target, highlighting a strategic doctrine focused on furthering Russia's goals of challenging the current global order in a pragmatic fashion (Lipunov, 2024). This, coupled with Russia being the country with the most 'hard' power in the region given the impressive size of its arctic fleet, as well as a significant part of the Russian nuclear deterrent being located in the region, raises questions of future cooperation in the region (Tamnes and Offerdal, 2014). Already when the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea erupted in 2014, serious concerns emerged about its impact on Arctic cooperation and how a military conflict would influence the operations of the Arctic Council, which is a voluntary forum for cooperation specifically designed to exclude military security issues and with its focus on "soft" power politics (Burke, 2019). This leads us to engage in the neorealist-neoliberal debate over the case.

This project aims to understand the impact of conflict and geopolitical tension on regional cooperation by analyzing how cooperation in the Arctic Council (AC) and among its member states has been influenced by Russia's increased assertiveness in the region as well as the overall geopolitical tension emanating from Russia's war against Ukraine. This is a theoretically informed study of the AC and the dynamics among its member states. With this project, we aim to contribute to the theoretical debate between neorealism and neoliberalism in attempting to

explain the dynamics of the international system in a post-Cold War era by analyzing the case of the Arctic from both perspectives. This project analyzes data such as documents published by the AC itself as well as data from national governments of the member states of the Council.

Problem Area

As the Council plays a significant role in Arctic cooperation and diplomacy by providing a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Arctic states and stakeholders, promoting shared concerns such as environmental protection and sustainable development, it raises the question about the extent of change that the forum is facing in the light of Russia's war against Ukraine (Burke, 2019). Although Ukraine is not part of the Arctic region, it is a partner state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the defense alliance established to counter the rise of communism and the security threat from the Soviet Union. All Arctic states, except Russia, are either members of NATO (Burke, 2019). According to Burke (2019, p. 32), "Systemic changes in international and regional politics also mean that the social and political landscape in which the Arctic Council was negotiated and created (the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s) has shifted, and the Arctic states now have to respond to these changes."

Arctic cooperation and the promotion of regional unity cannot thrive without Russia's participation as it presents the largest Arctic state and is central to many Arctic Council environmental clean-up projects. Regional unity and the purpose of the Arctic Council, which is to protect the Arctic environment, would be undermined if the largest Arctic state which makes up about 50% of the region were to withdraw (Burke, 2019). The pivotal role of Russian engagement in regional collaboration served as the impetus for establishing the cooperation frameworks, structures, and practices that define the forum. In the event of the Arctic Council's dissolution, smaller Arctic states arguably stand to lose more in terms of their status and diplomatic influence in international politics and channels of diplomacy. Considering a neoliberal line of thinking, consequently, these smaller powers may be inclined to overlook Russia's actions beyond the Arctic region to maintain cooperation within it (Burke, 2019). For small and medium powers, there is a "general interest in institutionalization" and a preference for

predictability. This is because the more ordered and predictable the principles of conflict resolution are, the more difficult it becomes for military resources to be converted into influence over outcomes, thereby somewhat neutralizing the relative advantage of great powers (Burke, 2019, p.48).

The following project investigates the impact of the changing international security environment on regional cooperation in the Arctic. We therefore ask the following research question:

How and why has the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted regional cooperation within the Arctic Council and among its member states?

By analyzing the Council's chairmanships, meetings, and protocols as well as the member states' own national strategies and their bilateral or even multilateral initiatives among each other, we aim to provide an understanding of how cooperation in the Council continues and how it navigates through significant global political upheavals involving its primary members. The Council is shaped by various factors, including the prevailing systemic context at the time of its establishment, the international standing of its member states, and the historical development of related institutions and institution-building efforts that preceded it (Burke, 2019).

The project now proceeds as follows: The next section develops the theoretical framework applied in this project, namely neorealism and neoliberalism. The subsequent section outlines the methods used for this research project. Following this, the project then moves to the analysis and discussion, where we discuss our findings in relation to our theoretical expectations. Finally, we finish this project with a concluding chapter.

Theoretical Framework

The following section engages with the debate between the two international relations (IR) theories of neorealism and neoliberalism, the so-called neo-neo debate, in relation to the case of

the Arctic Council (AC). It provides an overview of the main premises of the traditions and applies their concepts to the case, thereby putting forth arguments for why the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted cooperation among states in the AC.

The distinctions between absolute and relative gains in international relations theory highlight the core differences between neoliberalism and neorealism. Neoliberals argue that a wide range of concerns beyond military and diplomatic dimensions should be considered. They focus on pursuing "absolute" rather than "relative" gains in international interactions. According to neoliberals, states are individualistic and define their interests in terms of individual gains. The "absolute gain" theory evaluates the overall effect, including power, security, economic, and cultural impacts of an action. Neoliberals are indifferent to relative gains and suggest that all states can benefit peacefully and simultaneously through comparative advantages, implying a non-zero-sum game. In contrast, the realist "relative gain" theory is primarily concerned with the impact of actions on power balances. Realists view international relations as a zero-sum game where states must compete to pursue their own interests and ensure their survival (Grieco, 1988).

In light of current discourses around a return to an arguably Cold War-like international order, the two traditions of neorealism and neoliberalism seem most relevant to understanding this case. Both the neorealist concept of balance of power and the neoliberalist concept of complex interdependence attempt to explain Cold War dynamics as well as the post-Cold War international system (Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012; Byers, 2017). Following the neo-neo debate and the changing international system, new theoretical approaches such as constructivism and institutionalism emerged. Regional cooperation has become a global trend since the aftermath of World War II, evolving through two distinct periods: the Cold War and the post-Cold War eras.

However, as Byers (2017, p.394) argues, since the Crimea crisis in 2014, "relations between Russia and the West have reverted to a late Cold War-like mix of conflict and cooperation" which "brings post-Cold War issues to the more enduring debate between realism(s) and liberalism(s)." While the current era shares certain characteristics with previous periods, it is distinct in terms of economic and military capabilities, technological advancements, and the spread and use of information. This uniqueness is further highlighted by the high level of

complexity and interdependence of national interests on a global scale, which underpins societal, cultural, political, and economic differences, and transcends geographical barriers (Byers, 2017). The two traditions inform this project by making sense of the interactions between states in the international system, both conflicting and cooperative interactions. On the one hand, by applying the two theories, the case contributes to the key debate of the schools and, on the other hand, contributes to the understanding of cooperation within the AC, the dynamics among the AC member states, and the impact of conflict. Both theories follow a rationalist line of thinking and share many of the same premises from the underlying condition of anarchy to the centrality of states. However, they come to different conclusions about the political state and future of the Arctic.

Neorealism

Neorealism varies from realism in its assumptions about why states seek power. While realists believe it is inherently human nature, neorealists believe that structural constraints determine behavior, hence, also called structural realism (Dunne et al., 2021). According to neorealists, the structural constraints are based on a combination of five core assumptions, namely that the international system is inherently anarchic with great powers as main actors, that all states have offensive military capabilities to some extent, that states cannot be certain about the intentions of other states, that the main goal of states is survival and that states are rational, unitary and utility-maximizing actors within the international system (Dunne et al., 2021; Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012).

The balance of power concept is central to neorealist theory. States are mainly preoccupied with gaining the power to ensure their survival in a self-help system where it is important that the balance of power is shifting in their favor or at least that no other states are gaining power at their expense, the so-called zero-sum game. Neorealist theories argue that a state's behavior is determined by the position of a state in the international system and its relative strength. This is not to say that alliances are impossible, however, states will ultimately put their own interests and survival ahead of the interests of others. International anarchy fosters competition and conflict among states and inhibits their willingness to cooperate even when they share common

interests and international institutions are unable to mitigate the constraints of anarchy (Dunne et al., 2021). For neorealists, the power of a state is mainly defined by its military capabilities, the dominant form of power according to Mearsheimer, but also its 'latent power,' which is "defined as the entire socio-economic structure of the state that has to be solid and robust in order to allow the expansion and enhancement of the military power" (Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012, p.107).

Neorealism is divided into two strains, separated by the question of how much power is enough power. Offensive realists argue that states should always be looking for an opportunity to increase and maximize their power and that their ultimate goal should be hegemony (Dunne et al., 2021). They are, accordingly, ready to disturb the Balance of Power whenever they see an opportunity and they should have no restraints in doing so because their own survival is at stake. But, since the acquisition of power is an endless task, Mearsheimer argues that at the 'end of the road' lays hegemony; of course when the circumstances will be ideal for such an enterprise. (Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012). Defensive realists, such as Kenneth Waltz (1979) in *Theory of International Politics*, on the other hand, argue that balancing will happen when a state aspires to too much power. If a great power attempts to acquire more power and thereby disturb the balance, to maximize its power, or pursue hegemony, the system will eventually punish its behavior with a balancing act from other great powers (Dunne et al., 2021).

Polarity is a fundamental concept in the neorealist tradition, profoundly shaping academic perspectives on international relations. In neorealist theory, polarity, which is essentially the number of great powers, serves as a crucial organizing principle of the international system. It influences the interactions between great powers and determines the functioning of mechanisms such as the 'balance of power' and the 'security dilemma.' According to neorealists, the international system of post-World War II is defined by bipolarity and refers to the combination of nuclear military build-up between the two ideologically opposed superpowers, Russia and the US, along with the presence of two groups of smaller states that aligned with the socioeconomic system of their respective leaders (De Keersmaeker, 2017).

From a neorealist perspective, the Arctic region presents an opportunity to increase national power by pursuing resources and newly opening economic opportunities. Thus, due to the

exploration of new trade routes and the general increase in human activity in the region, an increase in military activity and the expansion of military capability by the Arctic states could be expected (Mearsheimer, 2001). Furthermore, the rules and agreements established by international regimes and institutions such as the AC are going to be irrelevant and disregarded when it is not in the national interest of the AC members. While there is a shared interest among the Arctic states in preserving the region's environmental sustainability and managing its resources effectively, Russia's control over half of the Arctic territory and the strong alliances among the other Arctic states present unique dynamics. Cooperation in the Arctic is thus influenced not only by common interests but also by power dynamics and security considerations. Russia's dominance in the region could potentially shape the terms of cooperation and impact the degree to which other Arctic states can assert their interests (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Coming back to our research question: How and why has the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted regional cooperation in the Arctic Council and among its member states? Following a neorealist line of thinking, the theoretical expectation would be to see the substantial effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on cooperation as other states react to the invasion by counterbalancing against Moscow and the formation or strengthening of pre-existing military alliances to pursue so.

Neoliberalism

Unlike neorealism, neoliberalism is more optimistic about the prospect of international cooperation. It is a variant of liberal IR theory with a focus on international institutions and their role in obtaining collective outcomes between states in an anarchic international system. This is because, other than realism, neoliberals account for "greater faith in the ability of human beings to obtain progressively better collective outcomes that promote freedom, peace, prosperity, and justice on a global scale" (Dunne et al., 2021, p. 90). Though neoliberalism agrees with neorealism that cooperation is difficult in an anarchic international system and shares other parallels with the realist tradition such as the state-centric, unitary, rational, utility-maximizing approach, actors can design and shape international institutions to overcome the negative impact of anarchy on international collective action. Keohane recognizes that even

though states are the main actors in the international system, they are supplemented by other actors such as NGOs, IGOs, and Transnational Corporate Networks (Byers, 2017).

Neoliberalists argue that certain historical developments of the 20th century, such as interdependence due to technological and industrial advances which creates mutual dependence and hegemonic stability, facilitated this ability to overcome the fear and uncertainty of the anarchic international environment and to cooperate. According to Keohane (1984), international cooperation “occurs when states ‘adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others’ so that ‘the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating the realization of their own objectives’” (Keohane, 1984 in Dunne et al., 2021, p.89). Neoliberalist analysis, therefore, focuses primarily on international institutions, formal and informal, as they create a platform for dialogue as well as shared “rules, norms and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge” (Dunne et al., 2021, p. 90).

Keohane and Nye’s *Power and Interdependence* presents the seminal work within the neoliberal tradition and challenges the conventional realist pessimism but utilizes the assumptions of neorealism. It is based on the notion that cooperation in global politics can be improved by developing and supporting multilateral institutions founded on liberal principles and introduces the concept of complex interdependence. Complex interdependence is “primarily based on the transactions between states, in terms of flows of money, goods, people and messages” and comprises three main characteristics, namely multiple channels of connection, absence of hierarchy among issues, and the decreased role of military force (Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012, p.108). In other words, Keohane and Nye argue that other issue areas are equally valued vis-a-vis military capabilities. According to Keohane and Nye (2012), in a world characterized by complex interdependence, states are driven not only by the pursuit of power but also by various other interests, such as economic prosperity, social stability, and environmental sustainability.

Keohane’s (1984) *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* delves into the role played by international institutions in facilitating cooperation among states (Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012). He argues that institutions, such as international regimes

and organizations, provide a structure that reduces uncertainty, manages conflicts, and promotes cooperation by establishing norms, rules, and procedures for interaction. Keohane emphasizes that institutions can act as mechanisms for achieving mutual gains, even in the absence of a hegemonic power to enforce compliance. They form a common ground under the presence of anarchy and in the absence of a world government or a cosmopolitan system and “reduce uncertainty by promoting transparency. On the other hand, despite the enormous influence of great powers on institutions, the policies followed are different than those that the great powers would follow unilaterally” (Evaghorous and Martzanidis, 2012, p.110). Keohane and Nye used the terms ‘international organization’ and ‘international institution’ interchangeably and identified these bodies as the third political process of complex interdependence. Under complex interdependence, institutions will be ‘significant as agenda setters, areas for coalition formation, and as arenas for action by weak states’. Often these weak states are afforded this additional influence through favorable rules or procedures within the institution (Byers, 2017). Under realist conditions, the politics of agenda setting is less relevant because agendas are formed by changes in the balance of power, and threats to security, whereas under complex interdependence, the politics of agenda setting are more subtle, affected by international institutions, transgovernmental, and transnational channels of contact, and domestic politics (Byers, 2017; Dunne et al., 2021).

The characteristics of complex interdependence, namely the absence of hierarchy among issues, and the presence of transgovernmental and transnational channels of contact, are arguably present in the Arctic region and the dynamics among the Arctic states had achieved a state of complex interdependence by 2014. The AC as an increasingly institutionalized forum for diplomacy and international cooperation clearly falls under the scope of what neoliberals would identify as an international institution. The Council increased the likelihood of cooperation by creating a platform for multilateral negotiations, increasing the symmetry between its member states, and improving the quality of information between member states through funding shared research projects and working groups. It covers a wider range of issues such as environmental protection, sustainable development, and indigenous rights but has no issue linkage with the military. This design of the AC has made it easier for the Arctic states to distance the institution from the Ukraine crisis and any changes in the general power

relationships between Russia and Western states. Moreover, the Council benefits member states by reinforcing and safeguarding their roles as the primary actors in Arctic international relations, a status affirmed by the acceptance of non-Arctic states applying for observer status. This second aspect is particularly noteworthy, as it illustrates how an international institution, through its political processes, can cultivate a collective interest in its own continuity. This shared interest extends beyond the specific issues addressed in daily operations and can potentially help contain crises.

The agenda setting in the AC and the general purpose of the Council is centered around common issues and opportunities in regard to dealing with climate change, indigenous rights, and sustainable development in the region and not due to conflict. This carefully crafted design allows Russia to discreetly obstruct outcomes it opposes, ensuring its continued support for the Council even during crises. The Arctic without the Council would afford Russia less control, making the Council's existence advantageous for Russia. As the largest Arctic state, Russia's involvement is central to governing the Arctic region. In the event of the Arctic Council's dissolution, smaller Arctic states arguably stand to lose more in terms of their status and diplomatic influence in international politics and channels of diplomacy. Consequently, these smaller powers may be inclined to overlook Russia's actions beyond the Arctic region to maintain cooperation within it (Burke, 2019). The systems maintenance of the Arctic Council and the existing international political arrangements that recognize the Arctic states as central and dominant actors in regional governance are primarily of interest to the small and medium power member states. These states are more motivated to maintain order compared to the great powers, such as the United States and Russia, who possess greater resources (both hard and soft power) to advance their agendas and likely have less to lose if the initiative fails (Burke, 2019, p. 48).

Neoliberals also advocate for hegemonic stability, asserting that a hegemon is essential for states to trust and participate in free trade within an anarchic environment. By supporting the capitalist economic and free trade system through formal institutions like the IMF, the USA created a period of hegemonic stability in the latter half of the twentieth century. Although the primary motivation for this stability was economic self-interest, it also laid a crucial foundation for the

growth of interdependence in economic and other areas. Neoliberalism argues that even if US relative power and interest in maintaining these cooperative arrangements declined, interdependence would still provide a rational, strategic incentive for other states to continue cooperating with one another (Dunne et al., 2021; Keohane, 1984).

After the Crimea crisis in March 2014, the AC continued to operate normally because its member states chose to avoid linking the institution to military issues, a crisis that has arguably altered the general power relationship between Russia and the West. Neoliberalism would then argue for the continued relevance of the AC even during times of conflict particularly referring to the Russian war against Ukraine since 2022, due to complex interdependence and robust institutions, even if the institution would be less active for a while the forum would continue to exist. As Keohane and Nye also argue, “institutions are sometimes able to operate even after the power relationships giving rise to them change because they acquire a degree of independence and inertia through their rules and procedures, ongoing operations and recognition on the world stage. Moreover, institutions will often continue to provide some benefits to the powerful states behind their creation, even if their design and those states’ interests no longer perfectly align” (Byers, 2017, p. 392).

Coming back to our research question: How and why has the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted cooperation within the Arctic Council and among its member states? The theoretical expectation following a neoliberal line of thinking would entail a limited effect on cooperation as the Council provides an efficient forum of dialogue and a platform for the pursuit of soft power in the pursuit of other interests, such as economic prosperity, social stability, and environmental sustainability. If the Arctic Council were to dissolve, smaller Arctic states would likely lose more in terms of their status and diplomatic influence in international politics and diplomatic channels. Therefore, these smaller powers might be inclined to overlook Russia's actions outside the Arctic region to preserve cooperation within it (Burke, 2019).

Our two theoretical expectations follow the same structural event in the Russian Invasion of Ukraine but they differ in fundamental understandings of the issue. Neorealism would argue that by all measurable metrics such as economic power, hard power, and strategic coalitions the structure of the International System is being tested but it is still so far unipolar with the USA as

the main hegemon, the shakeup, however, is indicative of a return to strategic competition in the region and lower cooperation, while Neo-liberal expectations would that we would see limited effects on Cooperation within the Arctic council due to Institutional resilience of IOs and due to the still strong importance of the Council for cooperation and as a forum of soft power projection.

Methods

The following section renders the research design of this project focusing on the case and its characterization. It further discusses the type of data used to conduct the research as well as the analytical framework that is utilized to guide the analysis of the data.

Research Design and Case

To research the impact of conflict on cooperation among states, we have chosen to employ a case study design. The intensive examination of the case of the Arctic Council allows for an empirical, two-level understanding of the effects of the Russian war against Ukraine on cooperation with Russia in other regions, in relation to which we then engage in a theoretical analysis using the two IR theories neorealism and neoliberalism. According to Gerring (2004, p.342), a case study is an “intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units.” Within this definition, “a unit connotes a spatially bounded phenomenon.” The unit of this project is the Arctic Council (AC) composed of eight member states, spatially bound to the region of the circumpolar Arctic. The member states therefore present ‘subunits’ of the case, considering the theoretical basis of states as primary actors in the international system and considering that the AC itself “lacks agency, in the sense that anything discussed, funded, or agreed upon at the forum requires state approval and support” (Burke, 2019, p.30). In other words, the Arctic states have the agency to formally direct the forum and its decision-making processes.

The case has a temporal component, as we aim to analyze the impact of conflict on regional cooperation, in particular, the impact of the Russian war against Ukraine beginning in 2022 on cooperation in the AC and among its members. We therefore include data from as early as 2014

with the Russian annexation of Crimea to understand if the level of cooperation has changed over time.

The case can be characterized as a critical case but also possesses characteristics of a unique case (Bryman, 2016). Bryman (2016, p.62) identifies critical cases to be when “the researcher has a well-developed theory, and a case is chosen on the grounds that it will allow a better understanding of the circumstances in which the hypothesis will and will not hold.” As a theoretically informed study, this critical case will give us a better understanding of the circumstances under which the theories, of neorealism, and neoliberalism, are going to hold. However, the AC is also unique in its composition of member states, regions, and mandates. Contrasting this case to other cases of regional cooperation such as for example the European Union, the AC differs in scope and extent of integration and agency but it remains critical and exclusive for the region to promote cooperation for environmental protection and sustainable development. Cooperation through the AC is important to preserve the environment of the region. A dissolution could potentially have repercussions for the climate on an international level.

Investigating how conflicts manifest and are managed within the AC and among its members can offer valuable lessons for addressing similar challenges in other regions of the world. The AC presents a relevant case for regional cooperation that is potentially conflicted due to Russia's war against Ukraine as a forum that has been prominent for the governance of the Arctic region, the cooperation among the states that comprise it, and the navigation of aforementioned issues such as the region's environment and sustainable development and with Russia as one of its core members. According to Burke (2019, p.30), the AC “is often seen – and spoken of – as the pre-eminent forum for the region, the Council does have a power that its core members cultivate, protect, and draw upon to influence perceptions of initiatives proposed for the Arctic.”

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum that promotes cooperation among the Arctic states and indigenous peoples of the Arctic. It was established in 1996 by the Ottawa Declaration

and consists of eight member states, namely Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States (Nord, 2016).

Among the eight sovereign states within the Arctic Circle, those with shorelines along the Arctic Ocean, namely Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States, are termed “coastal states.” Conversely, the “non-coastal states,” comprising Iceland, Sweden, and Finland, possess territory intersecting the Arctic Circle but lack shorelines or internationally recognized coastlines along the Arctic Ocean (Burke, 2019).

The primary and initial focus of the Arctic Council has been on issues related to sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic region. It addresses a wide range of topics, including climate change, environmental conservation, pollution prevention, and sustainable resource management. The Council facilitates collaboration and information-sharing among its members through working groups and projects (Nord, 2016).

However, “the Arctic Council is explicitly designed to exclude military issues and makes a point of avoiding discussions about military matters.” This mandate is crucial, as it draws a clear line to be a regional military alliance or discussion platform, and the forum lacks direct influence on hard-power issues in the region (Burke, 2019, p. 30).

The first move towards cooperation of states in the Arctic region came in the form of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), the predecessor of the Arctic Council. The AEPS was initially proposed in 1989 by the nonaligned Finland as an effort to address both a general concern with environmental degradation in the Far North and specific transboundary pollution problems emanating from its much larger neighbor, the Soviet Union. Finland issued a call in early 1989 for interested parties to begin the process of establishing an international environmental monitoring regime for the region. This effort became known as the “Finnish Initiative” and eventually led to the creation of the AEPS in 1991. The AEPS was agreed to by all eight of the circumpolar states in the form of a ministerial declaration made at Rovaniemi, Finland, in 1991 (Nord, 2016, p.30).

In the subsequent years, Canada started to call for a new body to govern the Arctic region. Canadian proponents of the Arctic Council outlined four major goals for the organization, including expanding contact among northern peoples, enhancing environmental protection, reducing military presence, and recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples. However, the idea

of establishing an Arctic Council faced challenges. The Russian Federation initially supported it, while Nordic states like Norway and Finland had reservations. They eventually agreed to participate on the condition of active involvement from Russia and the United States (Nord, 2016). Concerns arose from Washington regarding the potential interference of the Arctic Council's multifaceted operation with the US's military-focused approach to the region. Moreover, there were apprehensions about creating a bureaucratic entity and reluctance to allocate significant resources to it (Nord, 2016).

Nevertheless, the Arctic Council was established in 1996 by the Ottawa Declaration which establishes the legal framework and, consequently, the essential foundation for conducting daily activities, such as making decisions, setting rules, and norms, and implementing the Council's programs (Nord, 2016). In 2013 at the Ministerial Meeting in Sweden, the Council admitted six new observer states, China, Japan, India, Italy, Singapore, and South Korea, in recognition of growing interests in the north amounting to a total of 13 observer states (Keil, 2016).

Furthermore, an independent secretariat in Tromsø was established to facilitate the work of the AC and to archive knowledge (Simpson, 2023).

Data and Analytical Framework

Empirically, we base our inquiry on two-level qualitative data, meaning from the national governments of the members of the AC as well as from the AC itself. This includes primarily official documents, especially the declarations and statements from the Ministerial Meetings, chairmanship documents, and the Strategic Plan that have been published by the AC since 2014 using the AC's website and digital open-access archives. Furthermore, we include national data of the AC members due to the lack of sufficient data from the AC. The national government's data comprises policy statements concerning the Arctic and joint declarations between the states such as statements that mention cooperation with other Arctic Council member states.

For the data from each of the eight countries, we examined their government websites, searching for keywords such as 'Arctic', 'Council', 'Cooperation', 'Russia', 'Ukraine', 'Military', 'Security', 'Environment' and 'Northern' from the periods 2022 to 2024. We found that most documents addressing the region did not mention the AC, making 'Arctic' the most important

keyword for sorting through the data. For contextualizing our analysis, we relied on external reports comparing strategic capabilities, such as those from Reuters, CSIS, and High North News.

By introducing a second level of analysis, we aim to make a distinction between state interactions that take place at different levels in the international arena trying to nuance regional relations and cooperation and advance the way we understand and describe dynamics in the Arctic at different levels. Some regional dynamics are indeed best understood through the following twofold distinction: institutional interaction through the AC and bilateral or multilateral interaction by the member states outside the AC. We categorize the eight Arctic nations into two groups: the Arctic 7 (A7) and Russia. The A7 nations share strong economic and political ties, are all NATO members, and control roughly half of the Arctic coastline. Russia, controlling the other half, has a distinct strategic and geopolitical outlook.

We aim to answer the ‘how’ part of our research question by identifying changes in cooperation within and outside of the AC and to answer the ‘why’ part by providing theoretical explanations for our findings. We found that measuring the level of cooperation empirically is rather challenging, also considering the data that is available. We, therefore, chose to measure the level of cooperation not in absolute terms but in relative terms. More precisely, relative to regular operation and procedure by identifying changes and irregularities within the procedures and operations of the AC by doing a qualitative content analysis of official documents taking into account funding, suspensions, and general disruptions that have occurred in the AC since 2014.

Our framework for the qualitative content analysis was guided by Flick’s framework (2014, p.429) using categories derived from our theoretical model. This approach reduces data, is systematic, and flexible.

To operationalize qualitative content analysis, we:

1. Identified key themes, priorities, and positions of AC member states.
2. Focused on expressions of mutual interests, cooperation norms, and institutional commitments to cooperative governance in the Arctic

3. Examined statements related to security concerns, power dynamics, and the role of military capabilities in shaping state behavior in the Arctic region

We analyzed the language used to describe posturing towards one another, with A7 countries referring to other members as friends or allies, while Russia was referred to as a threat, invader, or disruptor. On the Russian side, we focused on language concerning their view of the international system, member states, and the state of the AC, as well as statements conveying intent for cooperation or military buildup.

Analysis

In this section, we will analyze the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on cooperation among states in the Arctic region. This analysis focuses on the Arctic Council and its members' interactions both within and outside the Council, highlighting how recent geopolitical developments have reshaped the cooperative landscape of the region. Since its inception in 1996, the Arctic Council has been the primary forum for Arctic governance, bringing together the eight Arctic nations. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has introduced significant tensions and divisions, challenging the previously stable framework of cooperation.

To understand the shifts in Arctic cooperation, we utilize two theoretical frameworks: neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Both theories recognize the anarchic nature of the international system but offer different explanations for state behavior and cooperation. Neo-realism emphasizes the distribution of power, highlighting the role of hegemonic powers like the USA in maintaining order. In contrast, Neoliberalism, particularly through hegemonic stability theory argues that a hegemonic power can provide public goods and sustain international norms and institutions.

Our analysis is situated within this theoretical context, examining how the Russian invasion of Ukraine has disrupted existing power dynamics and cooperative mechanisms in the Arctic. By focusing on specific instances of altered cooperation and tensions, we aim to provide a detailed understanding of the invasion's impact on Arctic relations.

Cooperation within the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council mainly concerns itself with issues related to the sustainable development of the region, climate change management, indigenous rights, and scientific research and exploration. Effective Arctic governance on issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and scientific research has overall benefits for all the eight Arctic nations, the region is very expensive to operate in due to its harsh climate so cooperation on research efforts allows for proper cost management for all the parties.

By looking at the AC data from the Ministerial meeting declarations and statements identifying changes and irregularities within the procedures and operations of the AC and taking into account funding, suspensions, and general disruptions that have occurred in the AC since 2014, we aim to analyze changing levels of cooperation within the AC.

When comparing the declarations of the Ministerial Meetings that conclude each chairship, the document that was published for the 13th Ministerial meeting of the AC in Salekhard, Russia on the 11th of May 2023 is visibly different. The document presents a short statement with seven key points such as: “Recognizing the historic and unique role of the Arctic Council for constructive cooperation, stability and dialogue between people in the Arctic region” (Arctic Council, 2023a). No ministerial declaration was signed, only the statement was issued. In accordance with the AC’s rules of procedure, ministers had the authority to appoint a representative to participate and sign the declaration. Consequently, this meeting marked the first instance where it was not classified as a ‘Ministerial’ meeting. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, the Council was suspended on March 3rd, 2022, in a unified action by the seven other Arctic member states (Norwegian Government, 2023b) While certain programs that didn't involve Russian participation resumed in the summer of 2022, all major meetings were put on hold. Meanwhile, Russia proceeded with its chairship independently and pursued its domestic agenda, hosting events such as the ASM4 in St. Petersburg, which was not attended by the other seven Arctic member states (Canova and Pic, 2023).

This act can be seen from a neorealist perspective as an example of the limited importance of institutions, given that the joint statements on the Russian Invasion (Norwegian Government, 2023b) label Russia as a threat to International Law and sovereignty, and the suspension of activities is strong signaling of the A7's interests in protecting the current system, as evidenced from statements such as "Finland needs to adapt its operations to the realities of the new Cold War" (Government of Finland, 2023a) or Pillar 1 of the US strategy for the Arctic region (White House, 2022a)

However, it is important to highlight that this scenario is not unprecedented. Finland chaired the AC from 2017 to 2019 during which Finland prioritized environmental protection, education, economic development, and cooperation, among other issues. The chairmanship was particularly notable, despite Finland's diplomatic efforts, the ministerial meeting failed to produce a joint declaration for the first time in the Council's history due to the US refusal to include a mention of climate change (Østhagen and Raspotnik, 2021). The US objected to the Ministerial declaration containing the term "climate change," a similar approach to the 2023 occurrence of approving only a statement agreed upon by all parties was adopted. This decision aims to demonstrate that, despite being minimal, a certain level of unity persists (Canova and Pic, 2023). Prior to the AC meeting in Rovaniemi in May 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also delivered an unusually confrontational speech criticizing Russia and China (Østhagen and Raspotnik, 2021).

On the occasion of the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Arctic cooperation within the AC was first challenged, raising tensions between Russia and other Arctic states to their highest level since the Cold War and there was concern that the annexation of Crimea could impact the Arctic Council. In April 2014, Canada abstained from participating in a meeting of an Arctic Council task force on black carbon in response to Russia's occupation of Ukraine and its ongoing provocative actions in Crimea and other regions. However, Canada did not propose the suspension of Arctic Council operations. When announcing the boycott, Canada emphasized its commitment to continuing support for the significant work of the Arctic Council (Byers, 2017).

The crisis led to the suspension of most military and economic cooperation between the Arctic states. Nevertheless, cooperation continued in other areas, arguably resulting in the Arctic Council focusing on areas it is better equipped to deal with such as environmental protection, and sustainable development (Byers, 2017).

Furthermore, the statement of the 13th Ministerial meeting announced that the AC would be chaired by Norway from 2023 to 2025 (Arctic Council, 2023a). Notably, in the document which presents the goals of chairship mentions:

“At a difficult and challenging time for international cooperation, when cooperation within the Arctic Council is also being affected, it is crucial to maintain our focus on long-term development trends in the Arctic.” (Arctic Council, 2023)

In order to continue operations in the AC, various diplomatic tactics were necessary given the consensus-driven approach of the Council. The statement mentions “that the work plans outlined in the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials’ Report to Ministers adopted in Reykjavik in May 2021 along with the Reykjavik Ministerial Declaration and Arctic Council Strategic Plan (2021 – 2030), will form the basis for continuing Council activities for 2023-2025” (Arctic Council, 2023a; Arctic Council, 2023b). The revival of AC activities and working group programs is grounded in these documents, which were endorsed by the A8 prior to the conflict in Ukraine.

Despite the need to maintain an ongoing circumpolar dialogue, one can question the continued effort of the Arctic states to maintain the institution. After all, it was made clear on several occasions by Arctic diplomats that none of the A7 intended to withdraw from the AC despite the temporary suspension. Similarly, Russia has never explicitly voiced a desire to withdraw from the Council, albeit expressing certain concerns regarding the future terms of its involvement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023a). The AC focuses on environmental protection and sustainable development, however, it made it clear in the founding document, the Ottawa Declaration 1996, that “The Arctic Council should not deal with matters related to military security” to deliberately avoid linkage (Byers, 2017).

Nevertheless when the Arctic Council resumed operations in June 2022 with a Joint statement from the A7 (U.S. Department of State 2022) only the projects that do not directly involve Moscow were resumed clearly signaling an unwillingness of the A7 to cooperate.

This is also very important because Russia controls around 50% of the Arctic region and makes up a vital part of most of the Arctic Council projects, posing a serious threat to Arctic governance (Lipunov, 2023).

Neoliberalism offers us great insights into the success of the Council in these areas as under this framework state behavior is driven by a specific attention to absolute gains and cooperative intent. This recounting of the AC exemplifies one of the key concepts of Neoliberal theories: institutional resilience. The AC has been the cornerstone of Arctic governance since the Cold War, during this time it has managed to create a forum for discussion and development of norms, and even tough military and strategic developments both in 2014 with the Annexation of Crimea and in 2022 with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Council has still maintained cooperation efforts in areas such as sustainable fishing practices, protection of the environment, scientific exploration and indigenous protection. The resilience of the institution to systemic changes is likely due to its commitment to avoid discussion of strategic topics in favor of focusing on common goals. Furthermore, the Council still is an important forum for soft power, even though its activity is lower, it can still function as a platform for dialogue that allows states to put forth their interests and influence others.

Neoliberalism offers a different perspective on the situation that is equally valuable. The Russian Invasion of Ukraine has resulted in the Arctic 7 halting Arctic Council activity in protest. This aligns with the Neo-Realist assumption that International Organizations are less important than state Interests, and therefore the Arctic 7 have acted according to Russia's Invasion by counterbalancing with limiting cooperation.

The Council's future and resilience are still at play, as Russia has become the first country to halt its annual payments (The Moscow Times, 2024) to the AC since the inception of the institution and has for the first time declared that all options are available for Moscow when it comes to engagement with the Arctic including withdrawal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023a).

Cooperation outside of the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council (AC) has been the main forum for the eight AC members to interact with each other. Yet, in the last few years with waning cooperation within the Council and many eyes present on the Arctic's large untapped resources, increased security competition worldwide, and Arctic trade routes becoming more economically viable due to climate change the cooperative landscape of the region is evolving (Gautier, D. L. et al. 2009)). In order to understand how cooperation has shifted in this region we need to explore the strategic landscape of the Arctic.

Starting with Russia, the area is of vital importance for the country's economy, with much of Russia's natural resources coming from the Arctic region. Since 2008, Russia has been investing in its Arctic fleet and the region more broadly. Russia has reopened and modernized all of its military bases and currently Russian military capabilities outnumber the one of the Arctic 7 (A7) by about a third (Reuters, 2022). Furthermore, Russia currently has six bases, 14 airfields, and 16 deep-water ports (Burgess, 2023). As of 2021, the Russian Northern fleet, currently operating around Murmansk has been fully fledged as a Russian military district with its own strategic command. The Northern fleet is composed of 20 surface vessels and 25 submarines, of which are equipped with Ballistic missile capabilities (ibid.) and armed with nuclear weapons making it the cornerstone of Russia's Nuclear Deterrent (Delanoë, 2023). Russia is also the power with the largest icebreaker fleet counting around 40 total vessels including top-of-the-line nuclear-powered models, necessary to effectively navigate civilian and military operations in the region (Ibid).

When it comes to the A7, the situation is quite different, with significantly fewer military capabilities in the region, partly as a result of the decaying interest in the region after the Cold War. The A7 has eight airfields, seven military bases, and currently only three deep-water ports, two in Greenland and one in Canada (Foreign Policy, 2020). The A7 are also outnumbered almost 3 to 1 in terms of icebreakers with a combined 15 between the seven countries. Contrary to Russia's approach, the Arctic has not been seen as a fundamental area for the A7 until recently therefore most of the facilities present are still from the Cold War era and investments to increase capabilities have only been put in motion since 2018 (ibid). In terms of naval capabilities, the A7 has access to the vast NATO fleet which is currently the most powerful in the world, with vast capabilities in terms of surface and submarine capabilities. The issues however come from the lack of a defined Arctic command, and the lack of deep water ports for stationing and deployment (with the exception of Alaska) creating vast disparity in terms of deployment capabilities (Reuters, 2022).

In pure neorealist terms, Russia is clearly the dominant power in the Arctic in terms of infrastructure and capabilities, although its overall naval capabilities are severely limited due to most of the Russian navy being deployed in Murmansk with a few ships in the black sea, while NATO and its members have a more global presence (CSIS, 2023)

As a clear response to Russia's aggressive posturing toward the established international order, NATO is also going to conduct the single biggest exercise since the Cold War: Operation Steadfast Defender (NATO, 2024). This operation aims at simulating various scenarios of Russian attacks on the European and Arctic regions with over 90.000 NATO troops from all 32 member states being deployed to participate in the simulation. This can be seen from a neo-realist perspective as a strong counterbalancing and posturing measure aimed at deterring Russia.

Arctic 7 and Regional Cooperation

This matters for cooperation because the A7 has started enhancing cooperative initiatives outside of the scope of the Council. First and foremost Finland and Sweden joined NATO in 2023 and 2024 respectively.

The Swedish Government's official documents address Stockholm's Arctic initiatives from multiple points of view. First and foremost, Stockholm's Statement of Government policy which followed the NATO ascension (Government of Sweden, 2024b), strongly reiterated Sweden's commitment to further security and commercial Cooperation with all NATO members and partners. Furthermore, Sweden has also, alongside Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Iceland signed the Vision 2030 document which aims at further developing Nordic security in the region (Government of Sweden, 2024a).

In addition to participation in the above-mentioned initiatives, Finland has also started focusing its cooperative efforts outside of the AC, (Government of Finland, 2023) with about four billion being pledged to be invested in NATO capabilities and foreign aid to Ukraine (Government of Finland, 2023), while their long term plans highlighted in their Strategy for Arctic politics papers reiterating the commitment Finland has to minimize engagement with Russia and foster cooperation outside of the boundaries of the AC and within NATO (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Cooperation has also not only been limited to the Nordics with the five Nordic countries issuing joint statements of engagement with Canada aiming at cooperation in the Nordic Region in the areas of security but also climate change, protection of indigenous populations, and safeguarding the Arctic ocean (Government of Sweden, 2023b; Government of Iceland, 2023). We are also seeing investments in typically, AC related areas of cooperation such as environment, Indigenous arctic population, and technology with the involvement of the US (Government of Sweden, 2023a)

Canada and the US have also both engaged in new investment plans for their respective Arctic security infrastructure, joint initiatives funding research and safeguarding of the Region with about 15 billion CAD investment in NORAD infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2024), Focusing on strengthening existing alliances and International Organizations, which interestingly lists many such as UN, G7, G20 but no mention of the AC even if the arctic got his own section of the Joint Statement (White House, 2023b).

From the initiatives we have analyzed here, we can see two main trends in cooperation in the Arctic region. Firstly Cooperation in areas typical to the AC such as climate change, protection of Indigenous populations, sustainable development, and exploration of the region are still ongoing and they feature in Joint Statements, Arctic strategy papers, and press release statements from all the A7. Yet, most of them do not mention the AC directly, or if they do they mention its lower activity level. According to a neoliberal perspective, institutions are sticky and even though right now we see the AC role being sidelined, the institution still is functioning and it is difficult to work effectively without Russia. Cooperation, therefore, seems to have moved outside the Council, with a more state-to-state approach. The national papers still present a focus on cooperative efforts, typical of neoliberal expectations of absolute gains.

Nevertheless, a large part of the documents featured in our analysis presented mainly a focus on strategic deterrence and the need for defense spending. The power imbalances in the Arctic and the challenges Russia has put on the international system have motivated a response from the A7 that is characterized by a strengthening of NATO and a very meaningful investment flow towards strategic capabilities in the Arctic. With the A7 currently limiting their engagement with Russia paying special attention to the relative gains, cooperation with Russia might present and act as a counterbalance towards Moscow's increased militarization in the Region.

The region is also vastly unexplored, especially regarding its seabed which various sources claim to see the potential for almost 20% of the worldwide hydrocarbon supplies to be there, as well as deposits of Uranium and Rare earth minerals (Keil, 2014). Exploration of these resources and fair and effective division of the territorial borders of these nations can provide at least some

amount of gains for all parties involved, and in some sense, it already has as the A7 as a block all have good economic ties with each other and Norway, Canada, USA, are already extracting and exporting hydrocarbons located in this region, Greenland (under Denmark) has received investments for the development of extraction sites for rare earths, while Russia has almost 11% of its GDP coming from the resources in its Arctic and 20% of its global exports flow out region such as Yamal peninsula (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023b).

Therefore, all the Arctic regions are currently benefiting from the absolute gains that cooperation has promoted in governing the Arctic region.

Russia and Arctic Cooperation

The Arctic region has been an arena for security competition during the Cold War. During this period, both blocks invested heavily in developing nuclear deterrent capabilities, military capabilities, and Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance infrastructure (Byers, 2017).

According to our data and various publications on this topic (Conley, H.A. and Melino, M. 2023), we are now starting to see a return to those dynamics. The increased security competition and Russian military buildup have sparked various instances of what realists would call security dilemmas. According to its Strategic white paper, Russia sees the Arctic as vital for its survival (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2024) due to about 20% of its GDP coming from the extraction of Natural resources from this region, coupled with Murmansk being Russia's only warm water port (besides Sevastopol in Ukraine) makes the region vital for Moscow.

Therefore, Russia, which perceives NATO's expansion as its own security dilemma, has pushed Moscow to invest heavily in the Arctic. The Arctic region is becoming more and more securitized as both the A7 / NATO and Russia have amped their investments and expansions in complete legitimacy according to International Law. Yet progressive efforts to enhance one's security have incentivized the opposite side to condemn the act and further militarize, therefore, creating an upward spiral typical of security dilemma dynamics highlighted by neorealist scholars.

However, Russia has also a strong incentive to keep cooperative efforts with the AC and with other players such as China. The Arctic is, as we established earlier, fundamental to Russia's economy and strategic interests. This makes it important for Russia to keep tensions low in the region, as evidenced by a mild initial response to the suspension of AC activities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023a). Furthermore, Russia also has a need to keep things calm in the Region as it has invested heavily in the Northwestern Passage, which borders Russia's Coastline, is under Russian administration, and has seen steady increases in ships navigating in the region in the last years (PAME, 2020). The NWP is also of particular interest to China, the only state with interests in the Arctic that Moscow is currently involved with (Ostreng et al., 2013). China is not only a permanent observer of the Council, but it also has large investments into the Arctic region via the Polar Silk Road project, which has many joint initiatives with Russia among which 30% of ownership of the Yamal LNG infrastructure. This partnership has also a very meaningful strategic component, as both China and Russia have engaged in large-scale "war games" style exercises in 2021, 2022, and 2020 (CSIS, 2024) similar to NATO's steadfast defender, which signals strong ties and interests of both nations in the Arctic. These are also explicitly mentioned in the Russian Maritime Doctrine of 2023 (Vázquez, 2022) (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2024) and Russia's strategic doctrine published in 2023 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023b).

This highlights two main interests: firstly, Russia is still trying to act defensively and protect its interests within the Arctic region, even to the point of severing international ties to uphold its vision of the international system and vision of the Arctic region thus pursuing a relative gains strategy according to realist terms. Secondly, Russia is also still seeking the development and strengthening of its economy, with its economy and China being very interconnected both in the Arctic region and outside.

Discussion

The analysis of this project has involved data from all eight Arctic countries, the AC, and some papers from other relevant IOs like NATO. We gained a deeper understanding of Arctic cooperation and on how the Council has dealt with shakeups in the international system since 2014.

Our main theoretical expectations as outlined in our theoretical framework were that from a Neoliberal standpoint, we would see limited effects on cooperation due to the absence of issue hierarchy and the role of the AC as a reliable institution that can be used as a forum to exert soft power would make it disadvantageous for the parties involved to dissolve the Institution, especially for the smaller states of the Council.

Our findings suggest that cooperation within the AC has decreased compared to the period prior to the Russian invasion, mainly as a result of the A7 suspension of activity in 2022 and subsequent suspended funding from Russia since 2024. However, the Council, although working at a reduced capacity, continues to exist and a dissolution does not seem imminent. Yet even though the institution is still currently standing the suspension of cooperation with Russia within the Council and a reduction of engagement outside of it from all of the Arctic 7 certainly raises questions on the longevity of the international organization. Having a great power such as Russia being minimally involved in the Council, strongly lessens the soft power projection potential of all Arctic states.

From a Neo-realist standpoint, we expected to see substantial effects on Cooperation and the formation or strengthening of previous alliances to Counterbalance Russia's increased aggressiveness in the International System.

Our findings suggest that cooperation within the bounds of the Council has decreased substantially, as for cooperation efforts more broadly, we see a substantial amount of cooperative efforts in both security and defense initiatives. These initiatives involve a strengthening of NATO and a deepening of strategic ties between the A7 suggesting that our theoretical expectations were met and we see the A7 are signaling meaningful counterbalancing intentions towards Russia's growing assertiveness in the International system, and to address the infrastructural imbalance in the Arctic.

Coming back to answer our research question: How and why has the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted cooperation within the Arctic Council and among its member states?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has reshaped the Cooperative landscape of the Arctic. Cooperation within the AC has substantially declined given the suspension of collaboration from the A7 on issues that involve Russia as well as Moscow's halting of its payment to the AC. Cooperation has moved outside of the Arctic Council with Joint initiatives between the Arctic 7 being plentiful and involving a prevalence of defense and security elements as well as environmental, scientific, and sustainable development initiatives, while Russia is pursuing a deepening of ties with China as an emerging actor in the region. Therefore we see signals that point to a return to Cold War-era politics with state publications from the Arctic states and Russia both mentioning this exact notion in their national documents.

Challenges and Limitations

A limitation of this project could be the case study design, as case studies are often criticized for their limitation to generalize to a broader population and the lack of external validity. However, as Gerring (2004) argues, this does not take away from the relevance of studying the case.

Instead of viewing our case as a sample, we consider our case study as an opportunity to provide empirical insights into the theoretical schools of neorealism and neoliberalism.

The amount of data that is available to us from the AC and the governments of the respective member states is a further limitation to this project. As is the amount of time which limited the possibility of triangulating this study.

Furthermore, a challenge of this project was how to measure cooperation empirically as the concept turned out to be hard to grasp by data.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research gave us an understanding of Arctic cooperation and how cooperation in this area has morphed.

Our research question states the following:

How and why has the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted regional cooperation within the Arctic Council and among its member states?

Our findings suggest that cooperation within the Arctic Council has declined, security competition within the region has increased and cooperation efforts have moved outside of the Arctic Council, both on security and also environmental, scientific, and sustainable development issues, seemingly separating Russia from the rest of the Arctic members and suggesting a return

to Cold-War era politics. This happened due to Russia being now perceived as a threat to the A7 and the international system and also due to the refusal of the A7 to further cooperate with Russia within the Council. This can also be further explained by the imbalance of power in the region which due to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and Moscow's superior infrastructure in the region is threatening the A7.

We believe our research paper meaningfully contributes to the pre-existing research surrounding the Arctic, we aimed to situate ourselves in the Neoliberal and Neorealist debates surrounding the area while offering a nuanced perspective that incorporates both theoretical frameworks. As the situation is still developing and the future of the Arctic Council is definitely in a more questionable state than it was before we encourage further research on the topic, especially from International teams with the knowledge base to dig deeper into the documents of all Arctic Nations, more research on the Economic capabilities of the Arctic and how that impacts cooperation would also be useful to better understand this complex region.

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