

Precarious existence or staying the course? The foundations and future of Arctic stability

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The Arctic is one of the world's most stable regions, but whether this trajectory will continue is a source of growing debate as the region becomes more connected within an international landscape increasingly defined by great power competition, specifically between the United States, China and Russia. Many Realist-based analyses argue stability has largely been a function of the Arctic being a strategically unimportant space, but its opening economic and military potential will increasingly attract great power interest and result in contestation between them over shaping the regional landscape to their advantage: a process the region is poorly equipped to mitigate against. Conversely, many Institutionalist and Constructivist-based analyses argue a thickening institutional network of organizations, practices, and identities, based on and in conjunction with durable common interests, has and will continue to foster cooperation, involvement in and support for the current Arctic regional order by these great powers despite increasing tensions between them elsewhere. Both accounts have strengths and weaknesses, but in general this debate creates the impression that Arctic stability is predicated on whether great power competition is/will become a major influence in regional politics (unstable situation) or not (stable situation). Alternatively, this paper proposes that regional stability can remain even amongst augmenting levels of great power competition. This is so for the Arctic strategic landscape as it is premised on a Latent Balance of Power- defined by the region's geographic division of authority, strategic alignments, and state coherence – that has ensured stability and the emergence of a decentralized but robust regional order. Great power competition is and will increasingly become part of Arctic politics, but this specific balance of power configuration is well positioned in attenuating it. This does not guarantee the maintenance of the status-quo, however, for beyond the popular portrayals of the region as either on the brink of debilitating contestation or maintaining its 'exceptionalism' is a third possibility: sub-regionalization into continentally anchored configurations of power based on exclusionary logics employed by great powers to deny each other position and influence in certain parts of the Arctic. Determination of the region's continued coherence, however, is not solely the purview of great powers but the ways in which regional states work through and adjust to great power competition manifesting in the Arctic.

Introduction

The Arctic is one of the world's most stable regions, defined by the absence of military confrontation or conflict as well as an expanding institutionalized and inclusive network of organizations and processes focused on cooperation on common interests and challenges. The

return of great power competition as a central feature of international life (Brands, 2017), specifically between the United States, Russia and China, has led to renewed debates about the future of regional stability given all three powers are increasingly interested in and active there. Many Realist-based assessments believe great power competition will be a centrifugal force ultimately undermining the existing regional political order which is poorly equipped to handle such tensions, whereas more Institutionalist and Constructivist-based analyses argue Arctic stability is predicated on robust centripetal forces, specifically organized cooperation on common interests, tying these great powers into the current order despite increasing tensions amongst themselves elsewhere. Both accounts have strengths and weaknesses, but in general this debate creates the impression that Arctic stability is predicated on whether great power competition is/will become a major influence in regional politics (unstable situation) or not (stable situation).

Alternatively, this paper proposes that Arctic stability can remain even amongst augmenting levels of great power competition regionally. This is so for the Arctic strategic landscape as it is premised on a Latent Balance of Power – defined by the region’s geographic division of authority, strategic alignments, and state coherence – that has ensured territorial security, neutralized contests over hegemony, and facilitated the emergence of a decentralized but robust regional order. Such a constellation of factors well positions the region in absorbing and attenuating the most detrimental effects of great power competition. This does not, however, guarantee the maintenance of the status-quo for beyond the popular and binary portrayal of the region as either on the brink of intense rivalry or maintaining its ‘exceptionalism’ (Rowe, 2013). There is also a third possibility: sub-regionalization outwards toward continentally anchored configurations of power with great powers trying to assert their own, and deny each other, influence in specific areas of the Arctic. Determination of the region’s trajectory, however, is not solely the function of great powers’ relations but the ways in which regional states, the leaders in creating various Arctic specific organizations since the late 1980s, work through and adjust to great power competition.

Great Power Competition (GPC) and its migration North

Great Power Competition (GPC) is once again becoming an increasingly central feature in international life, principally defined by great powers attempting to gain relative advantage over one another in order to shape international environments via the accumulation and employment (and/or denial to others) of instruments of power and influence (Mazarr et al, 2018). Great powers, unlike other tiered powers, act to shape regional realities not just in and of themselves but in the service of influencing system-level dynamics. In the modern world, contemporary great powers are not pursuing revolutionary overthrow but rather attempting to carve greater degrees of freedom to reconstitute major components of it, specifically the distribution of power, ordering principles and norms, and status levels (Brands, 2017). Great powers, furthermore, are motivated to deny the influence of each other in their home regions but work to ensure their own access and influence into other regions. The Arctic is of growing importance to the three great powers explored in this paper – the United States, Russia and China – but the reasons why and the centrality the region has in their grand strategies varies.

Of all three powers, the Arctic is of most importance to Russia. Russia is a heavily armed regional power with limited global influence, but an important player given its dominant position within Eurasia (straddling Europe, the Arctic and Asia), and is actively promoting the establishment of multipolar continental arrangements, with themselves a key pole and the United States having

decreasing influence over the supercontinent (Trenin, 2019). The Arctic furthers this grand strategy in several ways. The promotion of the Northern Sea Route, which Russia does not formally claim as Internal Waters in its entirety but nonetheless seeks to fully regulate (Fahey, 2018), as an international shipping route connecting East Asia and Europe and developing of various natural resources within their northern territories (most prominently the Yamal LNG project) furthers economic benefits to Moscow as well as situates them as *de facto* partner with whoever wants to participate in/use these resources (Mehdiyeva, 2018). Russia, furthermore, has increasingly worked with China in the Arctic as part of a broadening relationship between the two (Rolland, 2019), specifically since the degradation of relations with the West since its annexation of Crimea, in developing these resources and trade routes. There is some speculation that Russia may host Chinese forces in their Arctic territories as part of exercises and possible joint operations (Scott 2018, Goldstein, 2019). Greater Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation is an area of increasing interest for Western security communities as Moscow seems to have withdrawn its reservations about greater Chinese (and non-Arctic states in general) presence there. This has led to sensational but vague accounts of the two teaming up to 'take over' the North Pole (Spohr, 2018) as well as an underreporting of the many issues within this relationship which question how coordinated and committed each side is to the others' Arctic goals (Sørensen & Klimenko, 2017; Sun, 2018). Moving forward, the Arctic will increase in importance as an economically and strategically vital region, particularly for Russia as it is hoping to capitalize on increasing resource development, being an economic hub connecting the two sides of Eurasia, and furthering its standing and status as an Arctic great power to both domestic and international audiences (Rotnem, 2018).

Most concerning to Western security communities, however, is Russia's continuing largescale and widespread military developments along its Arctic coastline (Tamnes, 2018). These may be a defensive, precautionary measure, developing a defence in depth posture in reconstituting its bastion strategy to protect its nuclear and naval forces (which are primarily based in the Arctic) as well as unquestioned control over the use of the Northern Sea Route, particularly as the United States believes the waterway to be an International Strait subject to Transit Rights which Moscow rejects (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2014; Parnemo 2019). The development of theatre warfare capabilities, though, has led to speculation that these efforts are not simply defensive but potentially more pre-emptive in nature, either in projecting power further into the Arctic Ocean and/or threatening NATO states, specifically Norway (Gouré, 2017; Wither, 2018). To be clear, Russia remains a cooperative member in regional forums, has not sought to change the institutional status-quo and has not used its military power there aggressively, but the rationale for stationing combat forces in a region with very little military threat posed by the other Arctic states remains uncertain. The degradation of relations with the West, though, has had an impact on security relations in the Arctic, specifically the eviction of Russia from the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, and Moscow has augmented the declaratory importance of the Arctic as a defence security interest with NATO, and its expansion, listed as the greatest threat to the Federation (Mehdiyeva, 2018).

China, a long-time promoter of a more multi-polar, less Western dominated world, has employed primarily economic and diplomatic instruments of power (though its military power continues to augment as well but largely within a regional context), specifically via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to reconfigure trade and investment networks throughout Eurasia and beyond, conferring economic and strategic benefit to Beijing (Dobbins, Shatz & Wyne, 2018). Whether China, however, sees a multi-polar world as an end-state (as Russia does) or a transitional phase towards

something more hierarchical with itself as the top remains unclear (Pieper, 2018; Rolland, 2019). Nevertheless, China is becoming more active and engaged throughout the world, and not only through existing, Western based institutions but also in parallel within its BRI network based on bilateralism wherein China can wield disproportionate influence over its smaller partners, altering economic, political and possibly strategic realities towards its advantage (Thorne & Spevack, 2018). The Arctic is of increasing importance to China as it continues to expand its reach globally, but the region remains of second-tier importance to others closer to home.

China, a self-proclaimed 'Near Arctic state', emphasises its right to be involved in the region, possesses declaratory interests, positions and polar activities (captured within their 2018 Arctic policy) that are broadly supportive and reflective of the regional status-quo. China, furthermore, promotes itself as a beneficial partner for the region, particularly with respect to economic development, scientific research and efforts to address climate change (Hong, 2014). The willingness to develop Polar Silk Roads and extensive resources investments - with some estimates that China has invested over one trillion dollars into Arctic states' economies over the past decade (Rosen & Thuringer, 2017) - signals rhetorical and practical steps towards incorporating the Arctic into its own BRI project. China, furthermore, is increasingly emphasizing its managerial role in the Arctic, specifically as a great power sitting on the UN Security Council, constructing a narrative that it has a role to play in maintaining regional stability (Bennett, 2015; Lanteigne 2017). China continues to operate within and abide by the rules and relations underpinning the current Arctic regional order, but some have voiced concern that the targeting of smaller Arctic states, like Greenland and Iceland, may turn them into strategic vassals through debt-trap diplomacy and building domestic allies, pressuring governments to develop ever more favorable relations with Beijing (Robinson, 2013, T.C. Wright, 2013, Berbick & Pincus 2018). The Arctic, as well, may become a growing military interest as part of a growing maritime force with an ever-expanding global reach, with implications for North American and European continental security (Brady, 2017; Rodman, 2018; Huebert, 2019). These issues, furthermore, are increasingly being openly discussed within mainstream (but still unofficial) Chinese media and academic circles. The issues being discussed are about the Arctic becoming a more contested space where China must be prepared to be involved (D.C. Wright, 2018). Finally, though not formal allies, the bilateral strategic partnership between China and Russia continues to deepen, including significant investment in resource projects, though the worry of their desire to challenge or undermine existing regional structures and processes is unsubstantiated at this juncture (Lackenbauer et al., 2018).

The United States is a declining yet still powerful superpower with global reach, listing both China and Russia as revisionist powers that they are determined to counterbalance to maintain favourable balances of power in core regions (specifically in Europe and the Indo-Pacific regions) that are seen as vital in retaining their hegemonic position (National Security Strategy, 2017). Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has remained a low defence and foreign policy priority (except for nuclear deterrence and missile defence) but the last decade has seen augmenting interest and priority there. Specifically, the last year has seen a growing narrative from the Trump Administration that while the Arctic remains peaceful, it may become an increasingly contested geopolitical space requiring a greater military presence there, particularly to balance against Russian Arctic military developments and Chinese economic activities (DOD, 2019). There are growing American assertions, as well, that Freedom of Navigation is threatened in the region which necessitates the reintroduction of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) there. This could

cause tensions with Russia (and Canada) over disagreements pertaining to certain water space designations along their shores (Pincus, 2019). The economic investments of China are also raising concerns in American national security circles of altering the strategic landscape, particularly in Greenland which is a key area for continental defence and the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine (Sengupta, 2019). Such forewarnings of Beijing's growing footprint in the Arctic is reminiscent of the framing of Chinese economic and investment activities in Central and South America as part of a larger threat to American supremacy (Gramer & Johnson, 2018). The most recent Arctic defence policy characterizes the Arctic as a 'strategic corridor' connecting Europe and the Indo-Pacific region, the two main foreign defence foci of Washington, in which the growing power projection and influence by Russia and China must be balanced against to uphold the 'rules-based order' in conjunction with its Arctic allies, including within the confines of NATO (DOD, 2019: 5).

The foundations of Arctic stability

The near universal consensus of the *description* of the Arctic as stable since the end of the Cold War is marked by disagreement over the *explanation* for such a condition and whether it will continue moving forward. Stability here is conceived as having both a thin level – the absence of violence, military confrontation, coercion or intense rivalry – and a thick level – the existence of an institutional network of organizations, relations, and norms enhancing inclusion and coordination on numerous issue areas between and within Arctic states and others active in the region. The exact ways in which these two levels interact, and the forces which act upon them, remains debated and heavily influences interpretations of what accounts for Arctic stability and its future.

Many Realist-based/informed assessments of the Arctic argue stability has largely been the product of the region being strategically unimportant since the termination of the superpower rivalry with the end of the Cold War, especially given Russia's diminished power following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the United States being focused elsewhere globally as the sole remaining superpower (Blunden, 2009). The region's continued opening economic and strategic potential, however, combined with the resurgence of Russian power, is and will continue to renew interest and involvement there by these powers (Howard, 2010), as well as for extra-regional ones with China top of mind (Huebert, 2019). They are expected to compete with one another within this increasingly accessible maritime realm. This is a situation the region is poorly equipped to handle given the lack of such strategic pressures influencing the construction of the current regional order, which has avoided dealing with traditional security issues (Gupta, 2007; Huebert, 2010). The region's shipping and resource potential, unresolved maritime boundaries, and strategic importance (connecting three continents) are commonly cited as drivers of the competition between great powers (Blunden, 2009; Spohr, 2018). The process is accelerated by a warming climate and changing technologies that are enabling greater access into the region as well as further connecting it into the larger international realm.

As a result, the *realpolitik* of a new 'great game' is becoming the dominant thinking amongst major powers (in the context of their global relations becoming more competitive in general) with smaller regional states having to cope with greater rivalry and tensions there (Borgerson, 2008). While many of these analyses do not argue war is inevitable, or likely, the main point is that competing for relative advantage between great powers, who are increasingly motivated to act in ways which further their own power and influence but by also denying it to others, will undermine many of the

inclusive and cooperative mechanisms currently defining Arctic governance. Military build-ups, specifically by Russia (Wezeman, 2016), are commonly referenced as evidence of this more contested Arctic environment (Holmes, 2019; Wallace, 2019), though greater attention is also being paid to economic developments (specifically by China) as a process to influence regional dynamics and possibly introduce new ordering principles (Robinson, 2013; Berbick & Pincus 2018). Arctic stability since the end of the Cold War, thus, is largely a product of the absence of centrifugal forces. Forces which are increasingly becoming present and driving great powers to compete over regional influence, position and power with connections to and impact on the wider international landscape increasingly defined by GPC.

Alternatively, there are a growing number of Institutional and Constructivist analyses which argue Arctic stability is a function of and furthered by durable common interests, identities and relations which have produced an institutionalized network of organizations and processes unique to the region and not beholden to geopolitical tensions elsewhere amongst its membership. A process led by the smaller Arctic states, during a period of strategic opportunity with the easing of tensions in the region following Gorbachev's 1987 Murmansk Speech, moved towards constructing forums to promote joint research on the altering region. Over the past decade it began establishing decision-making agreements at both a regional (such as for Search and Rescue and pollution control) and global (such as the Polar Code within the International Maritime Organization) level by creating regimes in order to produce an organized domain governing the ever-accessible region (Young, 2005; Bailes, 2011; Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, Nilson & Koivurova, 2016). In explaining this level of cooperation, the Arctic is argued to be a site of 'complex interdependence' defined by the inability to employ military force to achieve one's objectives, growing contacts and connections between people beyond a strictly government level, and a host of common interests which require a cooperative approach to manage and resolve (Byers, 2017). Along with functionalist pressures to work together, some argue the Arctic is an International Society, as defined by the English School (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2015), wherein its members are united behind common norms, rules and institutions to govern their relations, specifically environment and ocean management issues connecting regional members together (Exner-Pirot, 2013). Many of these assessments do not deny the existence of geopolitical tensions, but argue these are attenuated by the unique characteristics of the region. These include not only material factors but ideational and relational ones as well, which account for not only the continuation of Arctic stability but its enhancement and expansion over the years to tackle a growing assortment of common interests within inclusive structures (including with non-state actors and external states) by sustaining the region's cooperative and peaceful nature. Arctic stability, therefore, is a product of the existence and furthering of a host of mutually reinforcing centripetal forces, and not simply the absence of centrifugal ones as many Realist-based analyses assert.

Both accounts have strengths and weaknesses with respect to explaining Arctic stability. Realist-based assessments are correct in highlighting the influence of strategic matters on great power thinking, but have been unable to account for the maintenance of Arctic stability over the past number of decades which have been populated by a number of periods of heightened tensions that did not result in the overall degradation of the regional order. Critics, as well, are justified in pointing out the inability of many Realist assessments to explain exactly what conflict and contestation will look like in the Arctic (Exner-Pirot, 2015; Bartelet & Dubois, 2018). Much of these analyses, furthermore, are futurist about the expected nature of relations between great

powers and its impact on the Arctic, thus leaving underexplored and analyzed the apparent robustness of Arctic stability despite its often portrayal as being underpinned by weak foundations. Furthermore, there needs to be more differentiation between detrimental impacts to the Arctic region in particular via specific behaviours and strategies employed there which are motivated by GPC and the grand strategic ramifications at a global level of great powers securing greater position and influence in the Arctic, which may not be detrimental to regional stability.

Assessments of the robustness of Arctic stability, on the other hand, are correct in referring to the vast empirical record which shows the growing coordination and institutionalization of many aspects of Arctic relations, despite tensions between its members elsewhere and the further inclusion and activities of a host of external actors. Within this literature, however, there sometimes is the false impression that the region is fully buffeted against external shocks which can impact Arctic relations, including detrimentally, such as Russia's removal from the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable in 2014 (the only hard security forum) and its increasing reliance on China for Arctic economic development. The focus, as well, on norms and institutions sometimes blurs the unique geographical setting of the Arctic which could also be a factor accounting for the stability of the region. Arctic stability, finally, should not be solely an investigation of whether GPC will impact the region, but rather an examination of how great powers pursue their strategic interests there, which is dependent on regional characteristics that Institutional and Constructivist assessments emphasize.

Instead, this paper proposes that regional stability can remain even amongst augmenting levels of GPC as the current regional order is based on a Latent Balance of Power (BOP) that remains relatively undisturbed despite significant changes to the region, and the larger international system, over the past three decades. The Latent BOP is comprised of three components: 1) the division of sovereign authority; 2) strategic alignments; and 3) the internal coherence of regional states. Such a configuration has been vital in maintaining stability since the end of the Cold War, ensuring Arctic states' territorial security in the region without the need for overt military balancing against one another there or hegemonic rivalries for regional supremacy to secure great powers' strategic interests. From this foundation, and with the extinguishing of superpower competition governing regional relations with the United States and Russia acting as detached powers afterwards (Pyr, 2010), several smaller regional powers in the late 1980s and 1990s took the lead in constructing several regional organizations and processes creating additional institutional layers to capture region-wide involvement and support into these established arrangements versus a series of more exclusive localized collectives. The result has been a co-operative non-hierarchical order, comprised of a web of institutions supporting inclusive collaboration on areas of common interests while guaranteeing large degrees of autonomy for regional actors in other more contentious realms including economic development and traditional security (Nolte, 2016).

The components comprising the Latent BOP have formed the foundation underpinning the development of a well-organized region which is forward looking on pragmatic, largely non-traditional security issues stemming from the region's increasing accessibility caused by climate change. Throughout this development the Latent BOP has remained a durable but background factor, ensuring little intense rivalry despite the region possessing the material and structural antecedents (according to many Realists) conducive towards intense, perhaps antagonistic competition and possibly military conflict. The characteristics of and effect on regional stability of each component is as follows:

- 1) *Division of Authority* – The geographic distribution of authority in the Arctic is stable and almost universally accepted. There are no historical tensions over territories and besides Hans Island, no territorial disputes to speak of. Maritime boundary issues are with respect to categorization affecting the balance of sovereign rights of coastal states versus user states' rights, not over sovereign control (Byers, 2009). Economic, specifically shipping and resource, prospects, as well, are almost all within recognized Arctic states' jurisdictions (Claes & Moe, 2014). The implementation of rules and institutions formalizing these divisions (such as those located within UNCLOS) have been important, strengthening elements but the a priori political geographic setting of the region has made it an ideal candidate for such rules to take effect and be recognized and respected without much contestation and intense competition.
- 2) *Strategic Alignments* – The Arctic is defined by an exclusive binary strategic alignment between Russia and the other Arctic coastal states being NATO allies while Finland and Sweden are close western partners. Such a division, with both sides possessing nuclear weapons, seriously undermines any efforts to militarily attack one another. These alignments are stable as there are no swing states to compete over. While NATO members do train and operate in the Arctic, this is limited and there are no large-scale NATO balancing missions there against Russia as opposed to other, more contested regions comprised of non-aligned states such as Eastern Europe. Greenland, however, may become a strategic swing state as it is in the process of becoming independent from Denmark.
- 3) *State Coherence* – All Arctic states, as well, are stable, well-functioning entities with sovereign control over their territories. There is an absence of civil wars, societal unrest or violent independence movements which could be taken advantage of by others. This does not mean each Arctic state has the same level of constabulary and military control over their northern territories, but there is no dispute over sovereign ownership.

The Latent BOP's erosion is not a foregone conclusion due to the increasing accessibility of the region as its tripartite configuration is hard to overturn, along with a non-hierarchical regional order offering portals of access and influence for great powers to further their interests. Arctic stability, furthermore, is not dependent on the absence of and complete harmony of strategic interests within and between regional states and great powers. In many ways the current regional arrangement suits all three major powers' strategic interests. For Russia, a stable Arctic with a relatively benign strategic environment allows and enables Moscow to secure its military and economic interests in the region. Concerns of Russia trying to carve greater degrees and areas of control in the maritime realm (Holmes, 2019), largely based on its military build-up and increasing domestic control over the Northern Sea Route, are speculative at best, and usually neglect the fact that any such move would likely unite not only all Arctic states, including the US, but external actors, especially China, against them and severely undermine their own extensive legal maritime interests. For China, the Arctic is an ideal region as a stable, non-hegemonic space to expand into as there exist many international and regional legalized means and rights of entry and involvement in terms of investments (in an area searching for more capital) and expanding its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCS) without directly competing with a regional hegemon or alliance of hostile regional powers. While it is entirely reasonable to assume Chinese warships and submarines one day will sail throughout the Arctic, along with other non-Arctic navies, China is a promoter of user rights at sea in the region and thus is not expected to behave as it is in waters in its home region where they are promoting exaggerated rights as a coastal state. As for the US, with the Arctic

populated largely by longstanding and close allies who have taken the lead in structuring the organizational make-up of the region, they have been able to focus elsewhere in the world in reconsolidating their power, such as the 2011 Rebalance Strategy to the Asia-Pacific region.

The Latent BOP has facilitated the persistence of non-exclusive alignments within and between great powers and regional states across various issues such as: user right emphasis at sea (China and the US) versus coastal state emphasis (Russia and Canada); Arctic states pre-eminence (Canada and Russia) versus growing role for external actors in regional affairs (China, Nordic Arctic states); those supporting (Nordic Arctic states) and weary/opposing (Canada, Russia) a permanent presence for NATO in the Arctic (though in Canada there appears to be growing declaratory comfortability of NATO interest there (Charron, 2017)). Rather than being an unstable and volatile arrangement, such divisions have inhibited the bifurcation of the region along exclusive strategic lines between the Western Arctic states and Russia and China and the creation of a more bipolar environment which would erode region-wide engagements.

In modern times, the Arctic has always been influenced and affected by larger international events and changing balances of power amongst great powers. Such a relationship is deepening and becoming more multi-vectored given the increasing connections and linkages at various levels to the international environment and the growing types and number of actors interested and involved in the ever-more accessible region. Amongst such changes the Latent BOP is assessed to be a durable condition, but one whose existence and continuation is dependent in part on global factors – such as the maintenance of the NATO alliance, respect for sovereign boundaries, and abiding by UNCLOS – any of whose violation, undermining, and/or termination would have far reaching consequences beyond just the Arctic. GPC in the Arctic will most likely be geo-economic rather than geopolitical: it will be about who is employing economic instruments and influencing the structures and processes governing rules and regulations for development of the region, more so than aggressive attempts to militarily alter the political environment. GPC poses challenges to regional states, but there is a risk of reducing them to purely or primarily military matters. The Latent BOP is a robust but not deterministic condition, and thus ensuring GPC does not derail efforts in addressing emerging governance issues by eroding the coherence of the region requires the smaller regional states to continue to support and facilitate region-wide engagements.

Navigating within an increasingly GPC influenced Arctic

Rather than completely eroding the Arctic regional order, the more realistic possibility is that GPC may fracture regional coherence into more sub-regionalized localities based on economic and strategic developments which are tethered into and oriented towards larger continental networks of power (Bennett, 2014). Such an outcome is a third possibility – more overt spheres of influence within the Arctic based on major powers attempting to exclude each other from specific areas, not just militarily but economically and possibly politically as well – besides the popular binary portrayal of the future of region as either remaining a zone of peace or transforming into a zone of contestation (Rowe, 2013). This does not imply that regional coherence cannot exist amidst overlapping layers of regional organizations and processes, but rather exclusionary logics may become more pronounced, as great powers try to deny one another influence and power in certain areas of and forums in the Arctic which could result in alternative structures being constructed that exclude one another.

The Latent BOP acts a bulwark against major power aggression in the region but in and of itself cannot maintain the region-wide momentum of working together. This requires the smaller regional states to think innovatively in ensuring GPC does not erode such processes, finding pathways for continued engagement and cooperation while also understanding the need to further prepare for a more strategically important region. The Arctic does not require a radically reordering in order to adjust to GPC, but rather needs to be proactive in constructing structures and processes dealing with issues the region has largely avoided in a collective setting with the smaller Arctic States retaining their roles as important political actors. Two issues in particular that require a more institutionalized setting to address in order to avoid excessive great power unilateralism within them are Freedom of Navigation and regional economic development.

For the Western Arctic States, there are legitimate concerns pertaining to the ultimate intentions behind Russian military and Chinese economic developments in the Arctic, but these must be balanced with and placed within the context of the larger global phenomenon of GPC, wherein the position and actions of the United States may exacerbate such tensions in the Arctic as well. Furthermore, there is, and will continue to be increased, military presence in the region by the smaller Arctic states, both individually and within the context of NATO. These are legitimate moves both for national and alliance interests, but in so doing the deployments and posturing of such forces should consider the possible negative effects of unnecessarily creating security dilemma dynamics, specifically with Russia (Åtland, 2014). Strategically, as well, American moves may bring China and Russia further into alignment, both within the region and beyond, mitigating their mutual suspicions and allowing for a more coordinated approach to working together in an embedded and deep way to push back against American and Western power (Korollev & Portyakov, 2019). Furthermore, moves towards an overt balance of power based on military forces risks undermining and obscuring efforts in addressing emerging governance challenges which require inclusive engagement and a 'regional' approach of inclusive membership within multi-lateral contexts. One area where there is a dearth of such regional forums and organizations is traditional security matters, specifically issues pertaining to Freedom of Navigation (especially with respect to military vessels and aircraft) within the increasingly accessible Arctic maritime realm. While a difficult issue-area, especially for Canada (MacDonald, 2019), this is an area where the smaller Arctic states should be coordinating to create forums and processes of exchange to engage with such issues early and often before they become more present and possibly intractable between the great powers. In this vein, there should be the reconstitution of a regional wide traditional security forum including Russian participation as they are a vital partner in the region, and avoiding Arctic specific organization which does not include all eight Arctic states (Flake, 2017).

There is the possibility, as well, of the region becoming fragmented politically, especially as these smaller Arctic states are feeling pressure to more overtly align with the US in all respects against China and Russia. It is clear which side the western Arctic states are militarily and politically, but as US-China tensions augment, epitomized by the trade dispute, there may be increased pressure by Washington for its allies to limit Chinese investments, specifically in industries seen as vital to national security such as emerging technologies and transportation infrastructure (Gramer, 2019). Such pressures are already evident in Chinese investment desires in Greenland where Washington and Copenhagen intervened to deny infrastructure contracts being awarded to Chinese companies (Hinshaw & Page, 2019). While there are legitimate concerns about smaller Arctic states potentially becoming overly dependent on Chinese investment, the fact of the matter is that there is a distinct

lack of sources of long-term capital required to develop the Arctic. Therefore, the Arctic states should be working with the US, Russia and China in creating regional development funds which would allow for the inclusion of external actors but protect Arctic states by having them be key figures in the structuring of these organizations (Rosen & Thuringer, 2017). Such a process would help diversify investment partners and avoid entirely characterising Asian/Chinese involvement as solely and perhaps increasingly an unacceptable security threat. The reaction to China's 'vision' for the Arctic as an extension of the BRI, producing 'win-win' results for all should not be dismissal, blind acceptance or outright rejection. Instead, it should be spurring discussion about regional economic development, at all levels, and how to achieve these in an increasingly interconnected region within itself and with the larger international landscape.

GPC will increasingly become part of the landscape in the Arctic but given the Latent BOP which exists, the region may be one of the best positioned in absorbing and attenuating its most detrimental effects. It is important, as well, to emphasize that working with these great powers is an inescapable part of global and increasingly Arctic life, and thus any moves to block one another's involvement from the North would not only be futile but dangerous. They are necessary partners with legitimate rights and interests there, and in the case of China and other external actors eager to invest and be active there, possibly being beneficial and cooperative partners in ensuring Arctic states' development interests. The Arctic states, as well, have been successful in being a forward-thinking region in constructing forums, rules and processes to manage and adapt to a warming and more accessible region including in the areas of search and rescue, pollution response, fisheries management and shipping regulations, usually working within international contexts involving external actors. Such efforts should be emphasized and continued, maintaining the coherence of the region to socialize, specifically amongst all the Arctic States themselves, engage and act collectively. Such efforts will be difficult and challenging within this new era of global GPC, but not doing so will result in abdication of the smaller Arctic states position of regional leadership and most likely be replaced by a more contested and exclusionary politics led by the great powers.

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Autonomy and military bases: USAF Thule Base in Greenland as the study case

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In this paper, in order to shed light on some of the factors behind the change in the security environment in the Arctic region, we examine the history and the points of dispute concerning military bases, by taking up the US military base in Greenland (Thule Air Base) as the case study. We incorporate as explanatory variables the politics of the host country, i.e., the relationship between the local political actor of Greenland and the Danish central government, and the politics of the base provider (the United States) and Russia, which is intensifying its military activities in the Arctic region. Concretely, we first clarify the scope of the paper by pointing to the bargaining between central governments and local political actors about military bases - to the elements that constitute the vulnerability of central governments (the substitutability, urgency and specificity of bases), the form of bargaining that brings it under control (integration, institutionalization, distribution), and its balance with the effect of hold-up by local political actors wishing to reverse the asymmetrical power relationship. We then examine the validity of that approach through an actual case: the bargaining regarding the inclusion of Thule Air Base into the US missile defense shield.

Foreword

The objective of this paper is to make visible the quality of the influence of local political actors (or sub-state actors: here the term refers to local political entities encompassed by a sovereign state) on *national* security and identify its extent. Movements in which local political subjects are trying, with certain intentions, to get involved in international relations as a whole have been explained in the past in terms of paradiplomacy and second-track diplomacy (Heininen, 2014). However, from these past discussions it is impossible to deduce, particularly in the field of national

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security, to what extent local political entities are able to independently regulate their own behavior and express their intentions through concrete actions. This has to do with the fact that local political actors have been regarded as entities that have a secondary role, that is, that do not participate in international negotiations between states (governments) but only ask questions about the level at which agreements concluded through international negotiations should (or should not) be accepted (Putnam, 1988). In particular, the sphere of national security has been perceived as an exclusive prerogative of the state, and a tendency has existed to reduce issues regarding the exercising of influence on that sphere to the logic focusing on state leadership, in which the master-servant relationship between the centre and periphery easily emerges and local actors are subordinated to the internal code of the state.

For example, the case of the tripartite council for talks between Okinawa, Tokyo and Washington about US bases on the island of Okinawa, which was held periodically during the term of the governor of Okinawa Prefecture Masahide Ota in the 1990s, illustrates this point clearly. Okinawa, which is a Japanese local political entity, hoped to have its voice heard at these tripartite talks and to use the venue as a political leverage for having that voice incorporated in Japanese diplomatic policy. However, in practice, the venue could only function as a *receptacle* of the Special Action Committee with Okinawa (SACO), which was established by the Japanese and American governments in 1995 with the purpose of discussing various issues concerning the US military installations and zones in Okinawa.

What the case of Okinawa shows is that the influence of the local political subject was perceived as having the nature of something that should be exercised within the state, and that the internal constituent was not expected to influence (while maintaining its own position) the domain of interstate relations as a negotiator. At least not at the level of actual international negotiations, that is, in what belongs to the sphere of external autonomy. This is in line with the common interpretation, according to which the local political actor's power of influence in an assumed situation in which it is wielded outside of the state, would resemble the right to self-determination in foreign affairs (i.e., the right to independence). This is because in the study of international relations there has been a silent premise that when a certain phenomenon is being discussed, the questions asked are first and foremost about the problem of the state.

However, as can be seen from the discussions on the relative decrease in the supremacy of the state in relation to global financial systems, in problems concerning the Earth's environment and the failure of humanism (the global increase of inequality) (Brown, 2003), and as shown in the way that the perception of a decrease in the substance of the supremacy of the state is being shared as a self-evident fact, the assessment that the state has the capability to solve a shared problem solely on its own is sub-optimal. Within such developments, it is appropriate that the role carried out by *actors other than the state* should be taken up as the subject of theoretical and empirical discussions of *state* security. However, as is the case with past arguments regarding paradiplomacy, debates have often been limited to the level of, so to speak, "soft paradiplomacy equals low politics", which is why it cannot be said that arguments with sufficient theoretical and empirical grounds have been made. In contrast with such past tendencies to sharply separate areas of policy, in this paper, while examining the power of influence of local political actors in high politics, we would like to, as a case study, focus on US military bases deployed abroad, especially on the politics surrounding the US air base in Greenland. We will also attempt to present arguments that are in

opposition with previous theories by building a bridge between the inductive and deductive approaches.

First, we will theoretically extrapolate how the policy choice of local political actors can influence their negotiations with central governments. While doing so, we will endeavor to shed light on the environment which generates the differences between those local political actors who have influence on the government and those who do not, and through that, try to assess the extent of the local political actors' influence. Second, we will examine the validity of the explanatory framework of this paper developed through the above procedure against the case of the United States military (air force) base in Thule, in Denmark's territory of Greenland, which is treated as the main case study of this paper. The reason we chose Thule is that it is, strategically, an extremely important US military base that has a multifaceted role, not only as a radar post in the American missile defense shield, but also as a part of the air force network for satellite control, as a scientific outpost and a part of the infrastructure for the US space program. At the same time, the local political actor, Greenland, is an entity which has the power to express its stance regarding the operation of the base on the international stage on an equal footing with Denmark. Moreover, we will include as explanatory variables the national security strategies of the United States, the provider of the base, and Russia, which has been intensifying its military activities in the Arctic region, and also examine the preconditions that make possible the formation of the above analytical perspective.

The explanatory framework

Transactions regarding military bases come into existence thanks to bilateral agreements between the governments of the country establishing the base and the country hosting it. But what sets bargaining regarding military bases apart from other political fields is that they are not confined only to those two sides. Rather, they are open for a trilateral relationship that may potentially include relations between the country establishing the base (in this case the US) and the local political actor belonging to the sub-national level who is actually hosting the base. Of course, the way in which a transaction is "opened" will especially depend on the relationship between the country establishing the base, the US (the highest-ranking entity), and the local political actor hosting the base (the lowest-ranking entity). The important thing here is whether a direct communication exists between the two. In case there are direct contacts between the two, in comparison with the situation in which there are not, the possibility that the influence of the lowest-ranking entity will become more effective, especially on the mid-ranking entity (the central government of the host country), will increase. This is because fluctuations in the power relations between actors occur more easily in trilateral than in bilateral relationships.

How can the security environment that creates the difference between local political actors that have influence on the state, and those that cannot, be identified, and how does it inform the ability of local political actors to influence national security? As representative past studies dealing with this problem, we may bring up the work of Alexander Cooley (2008) and Kent E. Calder (2007). They address these questions by focusing on the influence of the political system of the host country on the stability of military bases and, in particular, on the affinity between bases and democracy. Cooley advocates the idea that if the host country is a mature democracy, then the credibility of the base contract will be high, and the base will be politically stable. In contrast, Calder argues that it is exactly because of democracy that a plurality of voices can be heard, and

the base will on every occasion be affected by different internal factors and prone to instability. These two hypotheses, while mutually conflicting, are rich in suggestions. Nonetheless, the former does not allow us to differentiate between Japan and South Korea, which have both adopted the democratic system and rely on the US for their national security. On the other hand, the latter does not clearly specify when and under what conditions the internal factors Calder brings up as independent variables influence the stability of bases. Moreover, as with Robert Putnam's two-level game, the greatest insufficiency of both of those arguments can be found in that they depict local political actors simply as (level 2) entities which question at what level agreements concluded in international negotiations (level 1) should be accepted or not accepted.

Therefore, in this paper, with the above problems in previous studies in mind, we examine the conditions in which a local political actor can exert influence on the central government in base politics conducted in times of peace in democratic countries. What is important is that in the bargaining regarding military bases, at least three political factors participate including the country using the base, the amount of political resources which the three sides possess constitutes the dynamics of base politics, and the host country's government needs to obtain the consent of the local political entity regarding the existence of the base both in form and substance. Of course, it does not necessarily mean that the voice of such a local political actor will be effective in the context of base politics. For example, even if a local entity wishes to remove a military base, achieving that with its political resources alone is not easy. Particularly in countries where the consensus within the government regarding the security relationship with the US is strong, it is difficult for the words and actions of local political actors to influence the government's decisions. However, even if it does not have a direct influence (i.e. does not participate in the actual negotiations about the base as one of the players), such a local actor can send negative signals to the US by obstructing the functioning of the base and by opting for various forms of political nonfeasance. In such conditions, the central government (the mid-ranking entity) may be forced to address its relationship with the local political actor (the low-ranking entity) with more care than before so as not to offend the US.

The concept of vulnerability may be useful for understanding such a relationship between the host country government and the local political actor. What is referred to as "vulnerability" here is the cost suffered for effectively adapting to the changing environment. Below are the three elements that affect the measure of vulnerability of the host country's government in relation to military bases. The three are not mutually exclusive and should be understood as variables that influence each other.

- **Substitutability:** whether or not a possibility exists for the central government to, in case the bargaining regarding a military base has been discontinued, procure as a replacement another military base of equal value elsewhere in the country.
- **Urgency:** is the base in question regarded as indispensable for the survival and prosperity of the host country and is it highly valued for its strategic importance by the country which establishes it?
- **Specificity:** is the base a specific asset with a distinctive character, whereby its value becomes extremely high in a particular situation or due to a certain relationship, or not?

For example, this means that the higher the cost that actor B must sustain in order to adapt to the

newly created environment after actor A has taken a certain action, the higher the vulnerability of actor B to actor A. If there is a difference in the relative size of vulnerability between two actors, that means that between them exists an asymmetric relationship. In that sense, in essence, the question is not about whether it is the central government or the local political actor who is weaker, but, rather, who is the side with the greater vulnerability, since that side is in a weaker position. If we assume the existence of a military base with low substitutability and high urgency and specificity, then the local political subject hosting it becomes actor A, and consequently, the vulnerability of the central government, actor B, becomes overall high. And, if the local political actor taking part in the politics regarding the base is a rational subject trying to secure better benefits than it had in the past through the acceptance of the base, then the central government will find itself in a relationship with the local political actor that correlates with the size of the risk of hold-up (the risk that the local actor may reverse its asymmetrical relationship with the central government).

But what is the hold-up we just mentioned? The term denotes the situation in which the side with lesser vulnerability is demanding the change of the conditions of the initial contract for the purpose of increasing own gains. For example, if a host country is given security guarantees by the US in return for offering a base, and if it cannot ensure its own security without the US, then the host country is dependent not only on the US, but also on the local political entity that has accepted the base. In such a case, the local political actor has a higher potential for holding up the central government in various situations during the internal political process concerning the base. In other words, the vulnerability of the government in a democracy is informed by the asymmetry in the degree of dependence that stems from the process of bargaining with local political actors about military bases.

Of course, the central government can predict such opportunistic behaviour by the local political actor. Thus, it can come up with forms of bargaining regarding the base that make the control of such behaviour possible - that is, it can conduct an integration of transactions, institutionalization, or take measures for distribution in order to limit its vulnerability. Here is what we mean by these terms:

- Integration is a means for reducing (the government's) own vulnerability by stripping the other side (the local political actor) of its residual control rights.
- Institutionalization means building with a local political actor a recurring exchange relationship that brings mutual benefit. Grants and subsidies given to the local actor, the establishment of special economic zones, preferential tax treatment, etc., all fall into this category.
- Distribution refers to the option that the government has in case the internal bargaining regarding a military base has broken off to transfer the bargaining onto some other local government.

Greenland and US military bases

So, to what extent can the perspective that looks at the mutual relationship between vulnerability and hold up explain the actual politics of a host country? In this section we would like to trace back the process of internal negotiations between Denmark and Greenland regarding the American military base in Greenland (Thule Air Force Base), while looking at political and military

trends in the United States.

First, we need to note that Greenland's security for a long time correlated with the degree of United States' interest in the island. The origins of this interest can be found in the American policy of non-interference in other countries' internal political affairs from the first half of the 19th century as represented by the Monroe doctrine, when, based on it, Greenland was only placed within the sphere of American influence. However, when it comes to direct intervention in Greenland by the US, the first occasion for that was the Second World War, when American bases and meteorological stations were built throughout the island. At that time Greenland was a Danish colony (The island had that status from 1721 to 1953). Denmark, which chose to build a security relationship with the US, (or more precisely, the Danish Plenipotentiary Ambassador to the US Henrik Kauffman) concluded the "Agreement relating to the Defense of Greenland / Agreement between the Secretary of State, acting on behalf of the Government of the United States of America, and the Danish Minister, Henrik de Kauffmann, acting on behalf of His Majesty the King of Denmark in his capacity as sovereign of Greenland (9 April 1941)". The political atmosphere was such that the premise of the agreement was the defense of Greenland, so military bases were constructed in a way that did not involve the capability for attack. From around 1950 in Thule, which until then only had a meteorological station, the construction of the largest air force base in the Arctic region took place. For the purpose of building (maintaining and continuing) a base for the NATO military, on 27 April 1951, "Defense of Greenland: Agreement Between the United States and the Kingdom of Denmark" was signed (which came into effect on 8 June of the same year), and from that point the construction work began in full swing (the construction of the air base had actually started in March of 1951, before the agreement was concluded).

From the second half of the 1950s, the Distant Early Warning Line (DEW Line) was established with the intention of securing early detection of bombers flying from the Soviet Union, and the Ballistic Early Warning System (BMEWS) was introduced to counter the strengthening of the Soviet ICBM force. These two have been an important part of the military value of the Thule base until the present (Petersen, 2011). Thule today, as already mentioned, is a very strategically important base with multiple roles since it functions as a US missile defense shield hub, as part of the air force network for operating satellites, as infrastructure for the US space program, and also for scientific research (The White House, 2010; Department of Defense, 2011).

Now we wish to, in line with the focus of this paper, turn attention to the fact that around the end of the Cold War, thanks to journalistic reporting and the disclosure of secret documents, various incidents and accidents that had occurred during the Cold War era in the vicinity of Thule Air Base were brought to light. For details, we would like to refer the reader to Takahashi (2019), but to summarize the events that came to light - from the forced resettlement of local inhabitants due to the base construction in 1953, the 1957 Danish non-nuclear policy and the deployment of nuclear weapons in violation of it during the 1950s and 60s, to the crash of an American military aircraft carrying hydrogen bombs in 1968, the aggravation of the plutonium contamination (that has not necessarily been admitted on the state and international levels) and the problem of the exposure to radiation of the workers sent to do the clean-up in the aftermath of the accident (Project Crested Ice) - have all influenced Greenland to a significant extent. It was in particular in the 1980s, when studies by researchers and journalists made headway, and in the 1990s, when the

disclosure of secret documents gained momentum, that the above chain of events became known under the overall term “the Thule problem” (or “Thule-sagen”), and became a critical issue in the internal politics of Denmark. Therein emerged the tendency to focus on the subordination of Greenland, shaped by the trilateral power relationship between the US, Denmark and the island.

On the other hand, after the Cold War, the Thule Air Base became an important element in the new US defense concept when in 1998-99 the application of the National Missile Defense (NMD) plan was laid out during the Clinton administration. In Greenland at that time, in light of the aforementioned Thule problem and with an eye on the then course of events, possible ways in which Greenlanders could influence the sphere of security was discussed in its parliament and elsewhere. For example, on 18 November 1999 a proposal was put forward in the Greenlandic parliament to approach Denmark and ask that Greenland be given an opportunity to directly participate in the negotiations if the US request for the inclusion of Thule in the missile defense shield was accepted by Copenhagen (Inatsisartut, 2002, 2003). The official request by the US regarding the inclusion of the base in the missile defense shield was made in December 2002, and from that point onwards, debates were conducted in the Greenlandic parliament and elsewhere on how the island should deal with the request and in what way it should be involved in the missile defense.

What is of interest to us is the 2003 joint declaration of the Danish government and the Home-Rule Government of Greenland regarding the participation of Greenland in the fields of diplomacy and national security, known widely as the Itilleq Declaration. That document was the result of a series of debates and sought to guarantee anew (reaffirm), *de jure*, the commitment of Greenland to Danish national security. We say, “guarantee anew”, because Greenland had already had the experience of involvement in matters of national security (Udenrigsministeriet, 2000). Namely, opinions have been put forth that Greenland at the beginning of the 1990s managed to exercise influence on the decision processes regarding the agreements for the use of the Sondrestrom Aviation Facility (Søndre Strømfjords Luftfartsanlæg) and Kulusuk airfield (Kulusuk flyveplads) that concluded on 3 March 1991.

The 2003 declaration is seen as a precondition for the negotiations regarding the inclusion of Thule in the missile defense shield. In the declaration, Greenland is referred to as an actor that can “demand international negotiations” “regarding issues of special importance to it” and can “participate” in them, and “influence” them “on an equal footing” (Folketinget, 2004). This meant that it became possible for Greenland to exercise a certain influence on the international negotiations regarding the Thule military base.

Of course, Greenland is an autonomous territory of the Danish state, and as such, according to Article 19 of the Danish constitution, does not have the right to make decisions concerning foreign affairs. Thus, we have to bear in mind that whether Greenland can actually exercise the rights mentioned in the above declaration depends on the political situation and Denmark’s judgement. On the other hand, based on the assumption that the declaration was formulated with a view to negotiations about the inclusion into the missile defense shield, the influence Greenland acquired was judged relatively positively (Folketinget, 2003a). That being said, in light of the example of SACO and the trilateral talks mentioned in the opening section of the paper, it is necessary to examine whether that influence can actually be realized in practice. Nonetheless, even if it cannot be involved in the outcome, it is possible to think that the very existence of the option to influence

the political process has given Greenland an increased possibility to get involved in national security, a domain that is a prerogative of the state, as a subject who has its own will and can express it through concrete action and not just as a constituent of the state that simply repeatedly accepts or rejects its decisions. In fact, in August of the following year (2004), Greenland managed to conclude a complex agreement known as the “Igaliku Agreement” with the US and Denmark.

An inductive understanding of substitutability, urgency and specificity

So, why was the autonomous territory of Greenland, which was acquiring a certain amount of influence in the sphere of national security, able to occupy a position from which it can influence it? In this paper, while attempting to understand the Itilleq Declaration and the Igaliku Agreement, with a focus on the dynamics of base politics, we will examine their nature from the aforementioned perspective, which looks at the mutual relationship between vulnerability and hold-up.

For a start, we want to assess the extent of Denmark’s vulnerability by grasping the basic character of Thule Air Base. First, if we follow the provisions of the 1951 defense agreement that guaranteed the existence of US military bases in Greenland from the time the base was established, as well as its successor the Igaliku Agreement of 2004 (officially: “The Agreement to Amend and Supplement the 1951 Agreement on the Defense of Greenland”, Article 1: “Defense Areas”), we can see that the areas of the Danish state in which deal making regarding US military bases is possible are limited to Greenland. In other words, under the present framework, there is no option for transferring deal making regarding military bases to Denmark. In that sense we may say that the substitutability of military bases in the Danish state is low, as they can be established only in Greenland (strictly speaking, under the current framework, the possibility that a base can be transferred to Denmark in the future is zero).

Regarding this, in the case of American bases in Okinawa substitutability was, in theory, secured. In the case of Okinawa, in the status agreement with the US (in its Article 3), no limits are specified regarding the geographical scope of base areas, so in terms of the legal system, an option exists that other bases of equal value may be acquired elsewhere in Japan as replacements if the current transactions regarding the bases in Okinawa are discontinued. Of course, what becomes clear when one consults the case of Okinawa is that, when the distinctive character of the base in question, that is, its quality as a specific asset is taken into account, the existence of the option of procuring other bases of the same value and the degree of the possibility that the transactions regarding the base will be transferred onto other actors cannot be automatically connected.

Second, for Denmark, which sees itself as a “small country”, the maintenance and strengthening of the relationship with the United States, which guarantees Denmark’s security in a stable manner, has been a political choice of extremely high priority consistently from the Cold War era until today. Denmark’s understanding has been that using Thule as a bargaining piece with the US, and by extension Greenland, as a diplomatic card, contributes to the stabilization of security for the entire Danish state. It can be even said that Greenland is perceived as indispensable for the survival and prosperity of the host country’s government, i.e., Denmark itself. In that sense, we may evaluate the urgency of the base in Thule as high.

Third, since the base in Thule is literally just that, a military base, it possesses specificity as a facility. However, at the same time, with the changes in the environment brought about by the melting of

ice sheet in Greenland in recent years, the possibilities for the exploitation of resources and the commercial use of sea lanes in the Arctic are growing. Because of that, it is expected that various facilities capable of dealing with extreme cold which exist in and around the Thule base, such as the port, tanks and oil storage facilities, factories, hospitals and accommodation facilities, could serve as a hub or a platform for intensifying economic cooperation in the region (Udenrigsministeriet et al, 2011: 53). After the end of the Cold War, due to climate change, the specificity of Thule Air Base has become subject to variability. That is, the incentives to limit the role of the base only to military purposes are weakening and at the same time its value is diversifying, so its specificity is fluctuating, although at high levels. This is also clearly stated in the Danish national strategy towards the Arctic formulated in 2011.

Thus, the security of *the Danish Realm* cannot be discussed without referring to the presence of Thule, i.e., Greenland. To go even further, for Denmark, Thule is almost the only asset that it can offer to the US or NATO (an *asset*² that can be exchanged for membership in NATO). If we look back at the past in which Denmark obtained qualifications for an early membership in NATO in exchange for providing Thule (Duke, 1989), we can even say that Denmark, in terms of national security, depends on Greenland. This does sound paradoxical if we assume a clear power relationship between the ruler (the central government) and the subordinate (local political actor), where the former receives much larger benefits than the latter (and is exploiting it). But what it means is that a dependence of the ruler on the subordinate has been created and that the phenomenon of power reversal may occur between Denmark and Greenland. Denmark's vulnerability towards Greenland is overall high, and that, at least from a theoretical viewpoint, points to Greenland as an entity that holds up (or can hold up) Denmark in various situations. This perspective which looks at the correlation between vulnerability and hold-up, we believe, is a highly effective explanatory framework also in the sense that it does not just provide a snapshot of Thule, but through a historical observation sheds light on the motivation of both sides concerning the stable operation of the base and also makes possible a quantitative operationalization of the base's value.

An inductive understanding of integration, institutionalization and distribution

Well, how can Denmark counter the hold-up risk by Greenland, generated as described above? A choice that would be effective for the Danish government, which is trying to achieve a stable functioning of the base, would be to limit the relationship with Greenland to a certain scope, so as to, in advance, avoid getting held up. In the present paper, such rational behavior by the host country will be explained in terms of integration, institutionalization and distribution. This means that from hereon we will be thinking about the actions of the mid-ranking actor (Denmark), who is, in the context of base politics latently premised on a trilateral relationship, trying to control the low-ranking actor while at the same time being conscious of the high-ranking actor.

As stated above, Denmark's vulnerability towards Greenland is high. This means that the extent to which it can be held up by Greenland is comparatively high. That is why Denmark needs to design the transactions regarding Thule Air Base in such a way that it can limit the instability to a certain scope (i.e., reduce the room for opportunistic behavior of the local political actor). We may conclude that that is why, after World War II, at the time the base construction was being expanded and the base was starting to operate, Denmark integrated Greenland into its territory and conferred on it limited autonomy rights. That is, from our theoretical viewpoint, we may offer the

interpretation that Denmark integrated Greenland, which had until then been a colony, to limit as much as possible its own vulnerability with regard to the military base problem, i.e., to limit the cost it had to pay for effectively adapting to the change in the political environment. In a package with that went the grants and subsidies donated by Denmark to Greenland, as well as the implementation of side payments and positive sanctions, such as financial support by the government, including block grants. It may be said that carrying out integration in package with such measures of institutionalization is, as a policy for invalidating the voice of a local political actor, even more effective. When we look back at events like that from a deductive point of view, it seems that a framework for limiting the extent of Denmark's vulnerability and for restricting Greenland's opportunistic behavior has been established and that it works.

However, when we endeavor to understand the bargaining between Denmark (mid-rank actor) and Greenland (low-rank actor) *inductively*, we encounter the significant possibility that the outcomes suggested by the three variables that serve to curb the vulnerability of a government (integration, institutionalization and distribution) may be in discord with the above theoretical prediction. For example, *theoretically* (or *deductively*), an interpretation is possible that Denmark, in order to limit or deprive Greenland of the residual control rights regarding the base, simultaneously with the conclusion of defense agreements with the US during and after the war, institutionalized side payment measures such as block grants, and thus dealt with its vulnerability. However, if we address the negotiation process *inductively*, we can see that Denmark, in the circumstances where it had the option of integration and institutionalization, chose the options of flexibility, compromise, consideration and talks, and from the 1970s onwards, granting autonomy rights (Folketinget, 2003b; Broholt, n.d.). Not only did it not deprive Greenland of its residual control rights, but it worked out a plan for their substantial enhancement, which is why it is clear that one-sided integration and institutionalization were not Denmark's political choice.

Just what logic was behind such a choice? A part of the explanation can be found, as the project "Democracy and Power" (Winther, 2003) demonstrated, in Denmark's "culture of democracy", developed through the trial and error regarding what strategy to take within a strained relationship between the ideal and reality. Of course, this was not simply a revival of an old perception, of the old layer of democratic culture in Scandinavia, which went from value nihilism to an understanding that transcends ideology. Rather, we should take the view that bargaining regarding the military base in Thule functioned as the venue for rebuilding and expressing Denmark's culture of democracy. That culture emerged as a consequence of a plurality of democracies: political democracy by political parties (the consensus type of democracy), social democracy as the foundation of the society, and civil democracy in the relationship between the state and civil society.

Of course, the above inductive understanding does not suggest that the deductively derived explanatory framework of the paper is invalid. The problem is that we cannot pinpoint in advance the scope of actors' interests and the character of the judgement criteria necessary for the construction of a framework for explaining the politics of military bases. That, however, does not mean that constructing a deductive theory is inappropriate for these types of issues. It is exactly because we have a theory as a base with elements which seem irregular, such as the culture of democracy, the consideration for the other side and compromise, stand out. Needless to point out, if we are to empirically examine the subtleties of the dynamics of internal politics of Denmark, then we need to include as variables the points of argument peculiar to the host state (the

government) and the host region (the local political actor), as well as the local idiosyncrasies and political variations. That the presence of a political culture unique to the area, which cannot be grasped sufficiently using only a rationalist approach, is an important element constituting the dynamics of the politics of military bases, has already been pointed out by researchers who are trying to understand the security environment in Denmark and Greenland from within. That is why in the “Project for Comparative Analysis of US Military Bases”, which has already started as the successor of this paper (and the book which is its parent body), we, for the purpose of shedding light on the mechanism of politics surrounding US overseas bases, aim to grasp the developmental path of each individual base, their relationships with the US, as well as the distinctive features of the cultural and religious background in which they were established.

The US and Russian factors relating to Thule

Incidentally, if we are to shed light on the substance of the negotiations between the host country’s government and the local political actor using the explanatory framework of vulnerability and hold-up, we cannot holistically elucidate the political dynamics if we limit our investigation only to the bargaining regarding the base between Denmark and Greenland. This is because there would have been no bargaining between the host country government and the local entity at all if the US, the country which established the base, had not continued to see certain value in Greenland (and Thule Air Base). For, if we assume that the base has effectively functioned as a bargaining asset within the hold-up structure, the prerequisite for that had to be a continued interest for it and Greenland by the side that established it - the US. It is this broader view that includes the US that is, as we have noted in the introductory part, the very precondition that makes possible the explanatory framework of this paper.

Thule was expected to serve not only as a post in the missile defense shield but also as a scientific hub in the polar region. Also worth noting is that Thule was suffering from restrictions imposed by the times. For example, during the Cold War era, Thule was caught in the interstice at the frontline, where the nuclear strategies of the US and Soviet Union interlocked. As different from that, after the end of the Cold War when the Soviet threat receded, the base found itself in a situation where the US financial strain was strongly felt, and where the withdrawal of the US military from Thule was discussed in the US Arctic Research Commission in the context of the rationalization of base operations (U.S. Arctic Research Commission, 1990: 10). However, since the mid-1990s, as the common perception of the concerned countries such as North Korea and Iran regarding missile development became clearer and the construction of the missile defense shield became a determined policy line through research development and legislature, the importance of the base increased again, although in a different way from the Cold War era. Namely, according to the 2011 Pentagon report to Congress, Thule Air Base, aside from the role in the missile defense shield, has also come to play a part in the Air Force Satellite Control Network and bears an important role in space missions (Department of Defense, 2011).

However, it should be noted that the US is not the only one that determines the value of Greenland and Thule. Russia has repeatedly protested against the American missile defense shield and has especially strongly criticized US activities concerning it in Europe. Official explanations of the deployment of the missile defense shield refer to possible attacks from the Middle East, but in the committee report by the US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, which was one of the factors that accelerated the deployment, the threat by missiles launched from Russia was clearly mentioned

(United States Congress, 1998). Whatever America's intent, the deployment of the missile defense shield, from the standpoint of capability, to say the least, may have a large impact on Russia's strategy, so Russia's negative response is not without reason. Within the US too there are voices that, in consideration of Russia's reaction, are emphasizing the importance of transparency and predictability of the missile defense shield. The friction between the US and Russia brought about by the missile defense shield may affect the political position of Greenland, which is caught between them, so constant attention should be paid to Russia's activities as one of the environmental factors.

In fact, in mid-2000s Russia defined the Arctic region as a key area in terms of strategic resources and has since discovered national interests in the strengthening of its presence in it (The Russian Government, 2009). This led to a rise in Russia's perception of the threat concerning the Arctic. Of course, the threat is not limited to the sphere of security but stretches to various other fields, such as access to the natural resources market or the control over important transport routes. Factors shaping Russia's threat perception in this period were NATO and the US. The inclusion of Thule into the US missile defense shield was one of the factors stimulating Russia's wariness. In a simulation by the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, ballistic missiles fired from central Russia are first detected by US missile warning satellites and then also tracked by early warning radars deployed in the North Atlantic and Greenland's Thule (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2012). Russia continues to maintain a critical stance on the operational functioning of the base in Thule, including its inclusion in the missile defense shield.

Furthermore, in the waters of the Arctic Ocean in recent years, military activities, such as the dispatch and deployment of submarines and the establishment of naval bases by Russia, are intensifying. In what seems as a response to that, reshuffling and increases in the US military budget have also been observed. That is, the budget intended for guaranteeing Europe's security (the European Reassurance Initiative/European Deterrence Initiative) has been reorganized and expanded (Department of Defense, 2018), and activities aimed at strengthening the cooperation between the United States and Europe, i.e., the unity of the North Atlantic alliance, are visible. Of course, it is hard to think that such activities by Russia and the U.S. will instantly lead to an armed conflict. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that in the Arctic waters of today, due to the fears of militarization, a "security dilemma" can be seen, embodied in the race by the two sides to strengthen their military assets and defense capabilities. This security environment developing right before our eyes, it seems, has a Cold War like appearance. Such a reality not only generates tensions, such as the aforementioned security dilemma, but, as the locals become increasingly aware of it, also functions to problematize the security in the Arctic, or in other words, leads to securitization.

The United States continues to recognize a certain value in Thule. However, at the same time, in the inclusion of Thule in the American missile defense shield there is an element that functions as a driving factor that exacerbates activities such as the boosting of military preparedness and defense capability by the US and Russia. That is also something we should take note of.

Closing words

The purpose of this paper was to make visible the substance of the influence of local political actors on national security and, upon demonstrating the mutual relationship between vulnerability and hold-up, which informs the politics of military bases in democratic states, to theoretically and

empirically examine the validity of that explanatory framework using the case of Thule Air Base.

American military bases in Greenland, and in particular the Thule Air Base, consistently had a high strategic value throughout the Cold War era. The base was almost the only security asset that the Danish government could offer to the US and NATO. This was an important factor that increased Denmark's vulnerability to Greenland. This is because Denmark practically earned the qualifications for early membership in NATO in exchange for offering the base. Denmark has since then depended on Greenland for its security. In addition, the fact that the relationship between Greenland and Denmark has changed, from Greenland's being a colony (up to 1953) and an administrative region (from 1953 to 1979), to its being a territory with broad autonomy rights (from 1979 onwards and from 2009 onwards), has, theoretically, increased Greenland's residual rights. Needless to say, that expansion of Greenland's rights was also a choice that increased the risk of hold up for the Danish government. Furthermore, in terms of the legal system, Denmark did not have at its disposal the option to turn over transactions regarding military bases to local political actors other than Greenland. In other words, the defense agreements of 1951 and 2004 made the control of Denmark's vulnerability difficult since they allowed for the deployment of bases only within designated areas in Greenland. While attention should be paid to the usefulness of the institutionalization (measures for financial support given by the government of Denmark to the government of Greenland, such as block grants), used alone, without a combination with integration and distribution, it was bound to have a limited effect.

On the other hand, through the mutual relationship between vulnerability and hold-up, although this is paradoxical, it has become clear that understanding the developmental path and the relationship with the US of each military base, as well as the cultural idiosyncrasies lying in the background of the establishment of bases, is important. That is, thanks to implementing an inductive approach, we have seen that it is necessary to grasp micro problems in each country or region, that is, achieve an understanding of the local base issues, by, for example, paying attention to regions' distinctive characteristics and the political variation. Individual factors accumulated through the inductive approach need to be understood parallel with power politics, the speciality of the conventional theory of national security. That is, they need to be digested through a discipline of thought that is not limited solely to the theory of state.

The very motive for writing this paper lies in the author's slight uneasiness with the discipline of thought in the field of international relations which could not free itself from thinking about the state and local political actors in terms of a *vertical* relationship, despite the fact that we were already beginning to witness a situation in which activities known as *paradiplomacy* were much talked about. Paradiplomacy has been understood as international activities of local political actors that unfold parallel with diplomacy but are not visible from the viewpoint of diplomacy, which strongly tends to be confined to mutual relationships between states. On the other hand, such activities by local political actors have been often interpreted as a result of the policy attitude of the state, which strives to, by creating an atmosphere of cooperation with sub-state entities, lower the political costs and achieve a soft landing in longstanding problems. In opposition to such a state-centric view, in this paper we have not taken for granted the landscape painted by the center, but have cut into it and, relying on the explanatory framework of the mutual relationship between vulnerability and hold-up, prepared, as a first step, the grounds for shedding light from the level of national security, not on the bargaining between states, but on the policy choices of local

political actors.

Of course, that does not necessarily imply a preferential treatment for local political actors. What we have been trying to elucidate in this paper is not a zero-sum world in which perceiving a local political actor as superior means that the state (central government) is viewed as inferior. Rather, the significance of our endeavor was in exploring a new discipline of thought in which both entities exist parallel as subjects of equal value. Therefore, the meaning of our effort lies in pointing to a mutual relationship between the local political actor and the state that is not based on the old logic of inclusion and exclusion in which the state is the nucleus.

Notes

1. This paper is based on discussions in the chapters of Takahashi (2019) and has been composed by rearranging the discussions into a single, new paper. For a more detailed argument, please consult the book.
2. “Asset” here means property and does not refer to human resources.

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