

Debating Arctic security through a media lens – The case of NATO’s Trident Juncture operation

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This article’s purpose is to analyze media portrayals of Arctic security through an empirical analysis of the media coverage of NATO’s Trident Juncture (TJ) military exercise. News outlets are influential as they promote specific representations of reality and have the potential to alter people’s perceptions. For the purpose of this study, the media coverage of Trident Juncture, spanning 10 media sources and totalizing 31 journalistic articles, was analyzed to assess how NATO’s initiatives in the Arctic region were portrayed in the North American and Western European media. Overall, we found that NATO’s presence in the region was presented positively, downplaying the risks of accidents, miscalculations or escalation. Right-wing publications were typically more likely to present Russia as an existential threat while specialized news outlets provided more detailed coverage and in-depth reporting and analysis.

Introduction

The concept of security is in itself a contested one. Specific security initiatives could translate as reinforcing security and providing insurance to actors or as contributing to a security dilemma creating insecurity in neighbors and rivals.

Arctic security, of course, is not immune to these divergent evaluations. For example, the merits of greater involvement by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the Arctic is actively debated among security experts, presenting a plethora of opinions on threat assessments, strategies, and effects on regional stability. On one side of the debate are those who argue a revanchist Russia with growing regional military capabilities increasingly constitutes a legitimate threat to alliance members in the region, requiring a more robust and permanent NATO presence in and strategy for the Arctic (Gouré, 2017; Wither, 2018; Tamnes, 2018). China’s Arctic activities are also becoming more scrutinized within a security lens (‘NATO and security in the Arctic’, 2017). On the other side, there are assessments that position Russia’s military developments as largely

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defensive in nature. Thus, the Alliance should be mindful of and restrain from behaviours and strategies which undermine working relations with Russia, an indispensable Arctic power, to prevent jeopardizing regional stability (Byers, 2017; Flake, 2017). This diversity of views and opinions provokes reflections and debates in academic and policy-making circles. However, this article will not focus on this dimension and will not try to assess which security assessment is right and which one is wrong.

Rather, this paper will evaluate if NATO's involvement in the Arctic region was presented in news outlets as a positive or negative force for Arctic security. NATO's military exercise, Trident Juncture (TJ), organized in October/November 2018 in Norway, will serve as a case study to answer this question.

The media act as an intermediary for the population, informing its audience and representing events that people will not have a first-hand experience about. The manner in which they portray NATO and its actions in the Arctic region will have an impact on the perceptions people share about the utility of the organization in the circumpolar world.

The remainder of this article will be divided in 4 sections. First, we will draw the contours of the debate regarding an increased role of NATO in the Arctic region. Next, the purposes and functions served by military exercises in general will be discussed, particularly Trident Juncture (TJ). The article will then present the empirical findings and provide analytical insights as to what TJ's media coverage teaches us about interpreting Arctic security.

NATO in the Arctic debate

The Arctic was a central strategic concern for NATO throughout the Cold War. This was due to the role the region played with respect to: 1) the nuclear deterrence relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, being the shortest route for nuclear attack against each other; and 2) the deployment of Soviet naval forces, specifically submarines, from their Arctic bases to the North Atlantic, which threatened the maritime approaches to a number of member states, particularly through the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap (Ollivant, 1984; Østreng, 1987). NATO strategic interests in the Arctic, however, began to erode in the lead up to and conclusion of the Cold War.¹ This was punctuated by the demise of the Soviet Union and her allies, a diminished Russia left in her wake, and the United States as the world's sole remaining superpower.

In this new era, smaller Arctic States took the lead throughout the 1990s by creating a web of inclusive organizations and processes to address non-military issues, which included Russian participation. Despite arguments that the region's increasing accessibility would turn it into a competitive space between Russia and the Western Arctic States (all but two of whom are NATO members, with Finland and Sweden close defence partners), regional cooperation and low tensions continued leading to questions of whether NATO should play any role in this 'Zone of Peace' (Haftendorn, 2011). At a global level, American unipolarity, attempts to reset relations with Russia, and the rise of non-traditional security challenges (specifically the September 11th 2001 attacks and the subsequently declared 'War on Terror') reoriented the purpose and missions of NATO towards non-European security matters. Evidence of this can be found in the priorities listed in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept. Changes globally and in the Arctic, however, over the past decade have re-ignited debate about the future of the international and regional strategic landscapes and NATO's role within them.

Most important of all, there is widespread acceptance in the West that great power competition has re-emerged as a central feature of international life. For example, NATO's 2016 Warsaw Declaration signals a shift in focus back towards state-based threats, specifically from Russia, noting the degradation in relations since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 which is presenting a renewed challenge to the Alliance in Europe (Giegerich, 2016; Foggo & Fritz, 2018). With respect to the Arctic, there are concerns that a great power competition is migrating into the region, presenting challenges to NATO regarding the deterrence of possible Russian (and to a lesser degree Chinese) revisionist predilections to unilaterally alter the status-quo to the detriment of her Arctic member states ('NATO and Security in the Arctic', 2017).

Russia

Moscow has undertaken a large-scale military build-up along its Arctic coastline with combat capable forces stationed within several refurbished installations. All Arctic states are augmenting their regional military forces, but Russian efforts are larger with significant warfighting capabilities (Coffey & Kochis, 2016; Tamnes, 2018). Such developments have generated debate about the intention and strategy underpinning them, specifically whether this is primarily a precautionary/defensive measure (Byers, 2017; Flake, 2017) or a more pre-emptive posturing which could be signalling greater Russian assertiveness (Gouré, 2017; Wither, 2018). This debate largely bifurcates on interpretations of how Russia will achieve its strategic objectives in the region, specifically by securing and developing natural resource endowments; increasing promotion of the Northern Sea Route as an international shipping route under its exclusive control; by preserving strategic power projection (production?) at a nuclear and conventional level; and by maintaining its status as a great power in general and an Arctic power in particular (Mehdiyeva, 2018).

Russia is currently abiding by international and regional rules and processes, which is unsurprising given that they benefit immensely from them with respect to economic ownership of resources within its maritime zones. Some warn, though, that the augmentation of Arctic forces could indicate a move towards a more abrasive style of behaviour in the years ahead, both to achieve specific regional aims as well as further its larger strategy of stressing and undermining NATO solidarity (Howard, 2010; Wither, 2018). According to this reasoning, NATO involvement in the Arctic is needed to deter any Russian attempt to employ force to carve out larger maritime zones under its exclusive control, denying freedom of navigation and possibly infringing on the maritime sovereignty and rights of NATO members who have competing continental shelf claims with Moscow. A more overt display of NATO power in the region, therefore, is an important stabilizing element in ensuring regional peace (Gouré, 2017). Another important Alliance priority is the re-investment in regional maritime forces, specifically anti-submarine defence along the GIUK Gap in order to detect and react to increasing Russian deployments into the North Atlantic and to shore up NATO's northern flank in Europe via increased presence and training operations there (Tamnes, 2018).

On the reverse side, there are arguments that Russian regional military developments are not offensive but rather defensive in orientation, through the re-establishment of its bastion strategy meant to protect its long northern coastline as well as its sea-based nuclear deterrent stationed in the Arctic (Flake, 2017; Parnemo, 2019). Russian interests heavily overlap those of the other Arctic states and there is no indication that Moscow is overly unhappy with the current regional state of affairs, which allows Russia to achieve many of its economic and strategic objectives in a relatively

benign environment. NATO, therefore, must be prudent that its deployments and activities in the Arctic do not undermine these mutual and overlapping interests, especially by furthering Russian perceptions that they are being contained by NATO and the West in order to inhibit its re-emergence as a great power. Such prudence requires a degree of understanding of the security vulnerabilities Moscow faces with an ever-exposed northern coastline that is vital for her economic and strategic security (Byers, 2017). Even if Russia becomes more assertive, some critics warn it would be unwise for NATO to try to catch up to their regional military capabilities but rather focus on leveraging other capabilities deployed in other regions to deter any Arctic revisionism (Regehr, 2018). Moscow's moves to consolidate control of waters closer to home, also, may not solely be directed militarily against NATO and the West but could be part of a bulwark against China which is increasingly becoming economically active and interested in the region (Sun, 2018).

China

China is increasingly becoming a player in the Arctic, specifically in terms of scientific research and economic investment. While China continues to abide by and operate within existing regional regimes and networks, there are concerns regarding Beijing's ultimate strategic goals with respect to the Arctic. These include Chinese efforts to gain greater influence over the economic future of the region, tethering it within its expanded Belt and Road Initiative via the development of Polar Silk Roads, and possibly augmenting military interest in projecting power in the region via its growing blue-water navy (Brady, 2017; Wright, 2018). Furthermore, concerns are growing about closer relations between China and Russia in the Arctic, possibly in order to challenge and obstruct existing Arctic networks and processes. NATO does not have a history of focusing on China, though there is growing notice of Beijing's actions in the Arctic as well as American pressure on the Alliance to look at their relationship with the emerging great power, specifically with respect to cyber, investments and emerging technologies ('NATO and Security in the Arctic', 2017: 8; Gramer, 2019). Concerns of China in the Arctic at this juncture are largely geo-economical, specifically regarding investments in infrastructure and resource development which may turn smaller Arctic entities such as Greenland and Iceland into strategic vassals, both of which are NATO members.² It is unclear, however, if counter-balancing against China-Russia cooperation in the Arctic is required and/or desired for any NATO presence directed against either or both in the region as it could simply motivate them to work closer together than would normally be the case (Sørensen & Klimenko, 2017).

Despite heightened interests and discussions, there remains no NATO Arctic policy. This absence is most likely due to ongoing debates within the Alliance (specifically its Arctic members) about whether the Arctic is a growing arena of military tension (rather than being a launchpad into other regions), and if so how the Alliance should position itself and act to protect its members there (Østhagen et al., 2019). Recently, however, there does appear to be an emerging consensus that NATO should be involved in the Arctic in some capacity. This is most evident in the policy language shift of Canada, the NATO state most wary of the organization becoming more active in the Arctic, within its current defence policy highlighting greater information sharing with and exercises of NATO forces in the region ('Strong, Secure, Engaged', 2017: 79-80). As well, the United States, which has seen the region as a low security priority since the end of the Cold War,³ is increasingly articulating a vision of the Arctic as a contested geopolitical domain. In particular, the Trump Administration has accused Russia and China of threatening the regional 'rules-based'

order, requiring greater Western coordination to oppose (Washington Post, 2019). What the best way forward for NATO is remains unclear, with a host of possibilities available. An overarching NATO strategy and capability to become more present in the region could emerge, similar to those in other waters around Europe via Standing NATO Maritime Groups (Tamnes, 2018). Alternatively, there could be the construction of alternative security venues to maintain regional relations by avoiding a NATO vs Russia binary forming, with the aim of reopening military channels with Moscow that have been dormant since 2014 (Flake, 2018).

Any moves towards a more overt and regular presence of NATO does risk eroding cooperative relations with Russia in the Arctic, which despite tensions elsewhere in the world have remained largely intact. The uncertainty, however, around how Russia will employ its growing Arctic-based military forces in the region leads to arguments that measures to defend against any worst-case scenario must be taken, including a conventional attack on a member state (Wither, 2018). It is a careful balancing act, however, to signal the Alliance's resolve to defend itself while reassuring Russia that such efforts are defensive in support of the status quo and are not meant to threaten Moscow's current position and power. Failure to convince Moscow (and others) of such intentions, amidst continued augmentations and training of NATO forces in the Arctic, risks turning the region into a security dilemma with mistrust and uncertainty fuelling greater antagonisms and reciprocal military buildups (Åtland, 2014). In achieving this balance, military exercises in general and in the Arctic, play a vital role.

Military exercises and Trident Juncture

Inter-operability (both between services of a single state and/or within multilateral contexts), logistics, command and control and coordination are some of the most commonly cited reasons for conducting military exercises (Hughes, 2019). Tactical and operational efficiency and effectiveness are important goals, but all too often the political effects of military exercises are underexplored and undervalued (Heuser & Simpson, 2017). Specifically, military exercises can serve as a deterrent against another party, demonstrating not just the capability but resolve of a state or alliance to defend itself. These processes further socialize a common identity amongst participating members and a collective view of the major state and non-state threats facing them (Frazier & Hutto, 2017). Such signalling, however, can cause confusion and misinterpretation within their intended recipient state(s), which may see exercises as threatening and possibly a prelude to attack (Clem, 2018).

Such concerns were prevalent between the West and the Soviet bloc throughout the history of the Cold War, leading to the construction of a number of Confidence Security Building Measures (CSBMs) in order to introduce a certain degree of transparency about each others' military exercises, creating a common understanding of the purpose, location and scope of them (Clem, 2018). Two key components were 1) prior notice before exercises commenced and 2) observation of them by the other actor, should exercises cross a mutually agreed upon size based on the number of participating soldiers (Hughes, 2019). With both NATO and Russian military exercises increasing in frequency and scale over the past number of years, these two components – prior notification and observation – were reconfirmed in the 2011 Vienna Document between the two parties, with the exercise size threshold requiring observation set at 13,000 soldiers (Overview of Vienna Document, 2011). Recently it appears Russia has violated key CSBMs, specifically underreporting the size of participating troops to deny NATO observation during Exercise Zapad

17 (Zapad 2017 and Euro-Atlantic Security 2017) and alleged GPS jamming in Finland during Trident Juncture 18 (O'Dwyer, 2018). Despite these infractions, there are arguments that NATO should continue to abide by CSBMs to ensure such actions by Moscow are not seen as acceptable. Given the augmenting size and location of NATO exercises over the past few years, as well, it remains critical to be unambiguous on their purpose (Hughes, 2019).

Given the deterioration of relations between the West and Russia, over the past half-decade NATO has conducted a number of large-scale military exercises on the European continent, specifically Trident Juncture 15 and Trident Juncture 18. Trident Juncture 15 involved over 36,000 soldiers throughout Spain, Portugal and Italy. While the planning for the exercise began well before Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the exercise scenario was based on a hypothetical state which had invaded a neighbouring state and was threatening to attack another with global ramifications to energy security and freedom of navigation. It is interesting, as well, to note that the official rationales for the exercise were to train NATO to adapt and respond to perceived emerging security challenges to the east and south of Europe ('Exercise Trident Juncture 2015: Fact Sheet', 2015).

Three years later NATO conducted Trident Juncture 18, the largest training exercise since the end of the Cold War, involving 50,000 troops from all 29 NATO members plus Finland and Sweden, 250 aircraft and 60 naval vessels operating throughout Norway ('Exercise Trident Juncture 2018: Fact Sheet', 2018). Besides its size, the exercise was significant for two important reasons. First, unlike Trident Juncture 15 this exercise was specifically designed to demonstrate NATO capability and resolve to defend a member state against foreign attack. Second, the exercise took place in Norway, which of all the Arctic NATO states has been the most vocal of an increased role and presence of the Alliance in the region. Taking place in the European Arctic, also, was far closer to Russia than Trident Juncture 15, though the exercise areas were not in the high Norwegian Arctic near the Russian border. Nevertheless, the significant logistical, coordination and operational challenges associated with working in northern latitudes demonstrates a high degree of commitment by NATO to defend Arctic member states. Whether such large-scale exercises will continue in other parts of the Arctic, however, remain uncertain.

Media coverage – NATO in the Arctic region

The media coverage under scrutiny originates from different news outlets, both in terms of geographical locations and editorial lines. The media outlets were first selected to offer a diversity of viewpoints and national origins. In total, ten media sources were selected and the timeline was extended from three weeks before the start of the operation to three weeks after the end of Trident Juncture, covering from October 4 to November 28, 2018. Then, we searched these 10 sources with the keyword "Trident Juncture"⁴. In total, 31 journalistic articles focused on the TJ operation.⁵

Out of these ten sources, eight were generalist outlets while two were specialized media focusing solely on the Arctic region (Eye on the Arctic and Independent Barents Observer). Out of the eight generalist outlets, four had a more rightist editorial line (Washington Post, National Post, The Daily Telegraph and Le Figaro) while four others were more left-wing or closer to the center of the ideological spectrum (New York Times, Globe and Mail, The Guardian, Le Monde).

The generalist media outlets' attention devoted to NATO's involvement in the Arctic region before TJ was rather slim. Global geopolitical developments have brought the issue to the fore,

especially the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea. Specific military exercises have drawn considerable media attention while others did not. For example, the 2016 Norwegian exercise, Cold Response in Northern Norway, only generated two news reports from our sample of generalist media outlets, even though numerous NATO member countries participated in the 2016 exercise.

On the other hand, large-scale military exercises led by great powers in recent years have contributed to a sustained interest in this policy issue. The Russian war games codenamed Zapad (September 14-20, 2017) in the Western part of the country and Vostok (September 11-18, 2018) in the Eastern part both drew significant media coverage in the news outlets under scrutiny. The same could be said about Operation Trident Juncture, organized by NATO members in Norway from October 25 to November 7, 2018.

In all three cases, more interest towards these events was expressed by media sources with a right-wing editorial line. In total, journalistic reports published by these three media sources accounted for 65% of articles published on these military exercises in our overall generalist sample. This proportion increased to 70% for the TJ operation (see table 1).⁶

News outlets	Zapad 2017 (Russia)	Vostok 2018 (Russia)	Trident Juncture 2018 (NATO)	Total
Washington Post	12	3	2	17
Le Figaro	7	6	2	15
National Post	2	1	7	10
The Daily Telegraph	4	2	4	10
The Guardian	7	2	1	10
Le Monde	1	5	3	9
New York Times	5	1	1	7
The Globe and Mail	1	1	1	3
Total	39	21	21	78

Table 1: number of articles on the Zapad, Vostok and Trident Juncture military exercises published by eight generalist news outlets.

Hence, specific news outlets focused more intensely on military exercises led by great powers, according to the substantial coverage of these developments. The Zapad operation drew more attention as it marked a precedent, being the first large-scale exercise deploying near the territory of significant European powers.

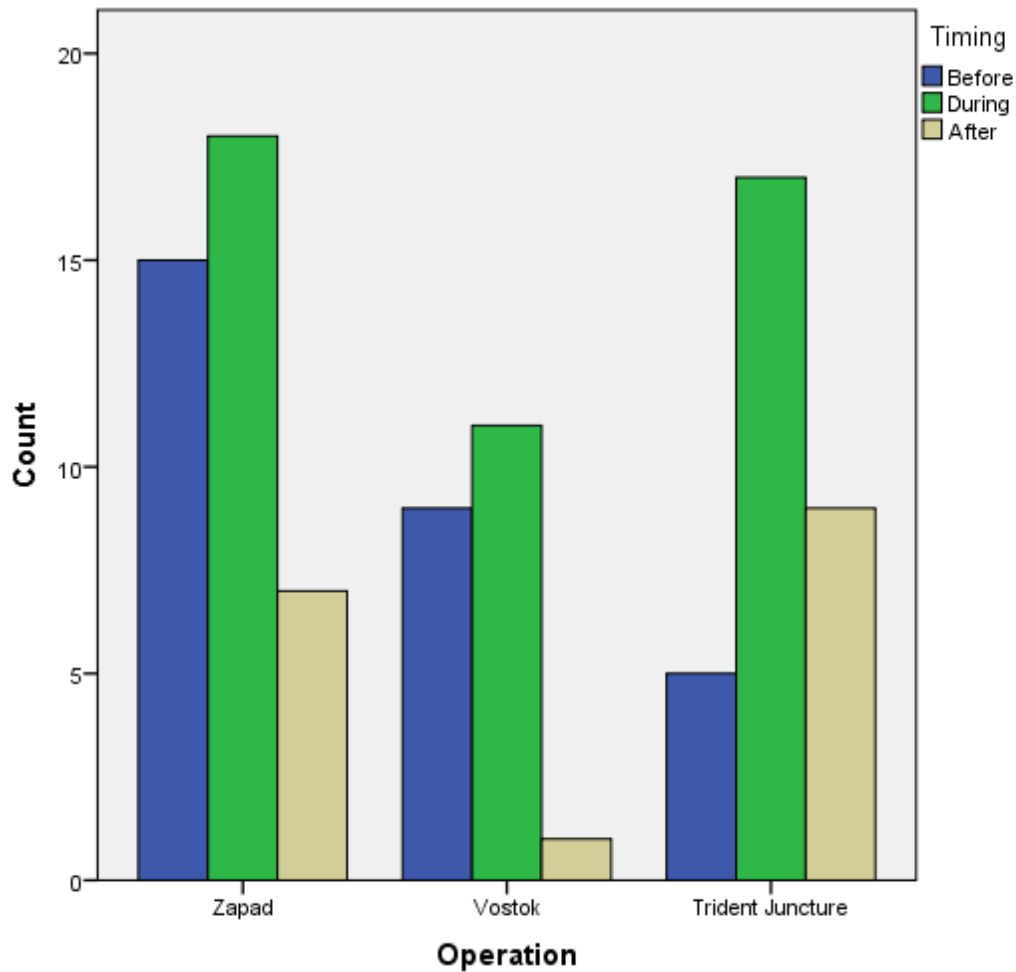


Figure 1: number of articles published in the generalist news outlets studied at different times in relation with three military exercises.

The Trident Juncture exercise attracted more attention in the aftermath, as analyses were published to weigh in on the consequences of the military drill. On the other hand, the Zapad operation received little post-operation attention while the media coverage was more substantial in anticipation of the actual deployment.

NATO in the Arctic: security or insecurity contribution?

Other than the timing of these articles, our main question centered on how NATO's involvement was described or portrayed in the media. As was previously presented, an increased Arctic presence for the organization was encouraged and framed positively as a security pledge by some commentators and experts; others, however, emphasized the risk of creating an Arctic security dilemma and contributing to an escalation with Russia. Were both sides equally represented in journalistic articles?

Overall, Trident Juncture was very positively represented as very little space was dedicated to pointing out the risk of escalation of such deployment. For the most part, military and governmental officials managed to get their voices heard in these news outlets (see table 2).

	Number of individuals quoted or paraphrased	Number of words
National government officials	31	2113
National military officials	22	1495
Regional organizations officials (NATO)	9	1144
Others (experts, academics, companies representatives, etc.)	9	606

Table 2: presence of different types of external contributors quoted or paraphrased in journalistic articles.

While privates were interviewed to give a human touch to the operation and explain the concrete reality of soldiers partaking in the exercise, political representatives (mostly ministers or their spokespersons) were relied upon to provide a more general understanding of the functions fulfilled by Trident Juncture. As such, Nordic defence and diplomacy ministers as well as NATO's secretary general occupied a central role in the media framing of these exercises. Reporters quoted these officials to explain the purposes behind the operation and provide official accounts of events that transpired during TJ. These officials framed TJ as fulfilling a defensive purpose and acting as a deterrent to offensive military actions by other states. This explains why 14 out of 31 articles (45% of all articles) explicitly stated the perceived defensive nature of TJ. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's secretary general, played a central role, casting TJ as a preventive action rather than a provocation and as an exercise to defend allies rather than a confrontation.

This framing also came to color the reporter's description of the purposes behind Trident Juncture. While the pragmatic reasons for TJ were frequently mentioned (military training, interoperability in 15 articles), the operation was also portrayed as fulfilling political goals. For example, the military exercise was presented as "demonstrating solidarity" (Sevunts, October 25 2018), "sending a clear message to allies" (Le Figaro, October 25 2018), "delivering a powerful political message" (Guibert, November 2018: 4), "serving a political purpose" (National Post, November 22 2018) or "ensuring the continued freedom and liberty" of allies (Cooper, November 1 2018: A6).

The other often-repeated political purpose was to act as a deterrent vis-à-vis Russia. Here, the lexicon used conveyed images of strength rather than cooperation and unity: "display of muscle", "strongest deterrent", "display of capability" (Le Figaro, October 25 2018; Cooper, November 1 2018; National Post, November 12 2018). In total, political purposes were mentioned in 13 articles, very close to the 15 mentions of military purposes.

In both cases, TJ is presented in a positive fashion as contributing to Arctic security by strengthening the Western alliance, and expressing solidarity while acting as a display of force to discourage Russia of offensive actions in the European Arctic. NATO contributed to Arctic security by reassuring allies that the Alliance was able to operate in a Northern environment.

The other side of the debate was not awarded equal amount of attention. While the risk of miscalculations or misperceptions had been mentioned four times during the Zapad exercise, the possibility was not raised once in the media articles covering TJ. The difficult balancing act required

from NATO was rarely explained; only a few reporters dared to allude to the delicate balance required. Reporter Nathalie Guibert in the newspaper *Le Monde* represented such an exception: “The question is to know if the message is well calibrated, between a defensive NATO posture and a credible affirmation of strength”⁷ (Guibert, November 3 2018: 4). The journalist referred again to the “difficult balancing act to which NATO is confronted to” and the dilemma of reinsuring allies while avoiding provoking Russia.⁸ The article was also one of only three (out of 31, 10% of the sample) which relied on academics or experts not tied to a national military or government.

Instead, the counter-narrative was offered by Russian officials, whether from the Defence or Foreign Affairs ministries, or the Kremlin. Russian officials were alternatively quoted portraying Trident Juncture as “saber-rattling”, “irresponsible actions” (National Post, October 25 2018), creating a “real risk of a deterioration in the regional situation” (Staalesen, October 26 2018) and preparing “for a large-scale armed conflict in regions bordering with the Russian Federation” (Cooper, November 1 2018: A6). This type of description typically used more extreme language and contrasted sharply with the reassuring and balanced tone displayed by Western leaders. The views of Russian officials did not occupy a significant portion of the texts analyzed, constituting only 5% of the overall text under scrutiny. By contrast, Western officials totaled 25% of the overall text, with passages quoting or paraphrasing NATO’s secretary general alone amounting to 7% of the overall text.

The idea that TJ might contribute to a militarization of the Arctic region was not portrayed as problematic. Hence, the NATO military exercise was framed as “returning the favor” (National Post, October 25 2018; Noack, October 25 2018), and issuing a “warning for Putin” (Luhn, October 26 2018: 16) as NATO was “forced to respond” (National Post, November 22 2018).⁹ TJ was then portrayed as a reaction to prior Russian aggressiveness.

TJ was inserted in the global West-Russia struggle rather than in an Arctic context. This is illustrated by the fact that articles pointing out Russian military drills usually focused on the most recent exercises rather than the ones specific to the region at hand.¹⁰ For example, the Zapad operation, deployed in Russia’s Northwest and hence closer to TJ’s theater of operation, was only acknowledged by three reporters while the Vostok exercise was brought up by nine journalists, even though the Vostok drill was concentrated in Russia’s Far East.

More importantly, Russian actions to disrupt TJ were not widely reported in the sampled publications. Russia test-launched rockets near the Norwegian coast in the last days of TJ while Russian bombers flew over the Barents and Norwegian Seas (Nilsen, November 1 2018). Reporting on such incidents would have highlighted the possible consequences linked to these military exercises, with inherent risks of escalation and miscalculations. Less than one out of four articles reported on such development; such poor coverage limited the public’s understanding about the tit-for-tat logic at play in West-Russia confrontation in the Arctic region.

Specialized news outlets managed to bring a more refined and detailed picture of these regional dynamics and this, on two fronts. First, specialized media such as *The Independent Barents Observer* provided thorough reporting of Russian disruptive actions during TJ, including the rocket test-launch, the bomber reconnaissance mission and the GPS jamming. In terms of the latter, the *Observer* first reported on the matter, publishing three lengthy articles while generalist publications largely ignored the incident or published brief articles on it.

Specialized news outlets also offered quality analysis and on the ground reporting to readers. Although outside of our sampled timeline,¹¹ *Eye on the Arctic* reporter Levon Sevunts published a series of in-depth articles, mixing participants' testimonies, interviews with local stakeholders and analysis. These media sources complement the same type of reporting performed by generalist outlets. Such in-depth journalism was only performed once in three generalist news outlets in our sample: *Le Monde*, *The New York Times* and the *National Post*. Hence, specialized publications complement quality journalism performed by world-level publications.

Debating Arctic security: empirical observations from Trident Juncture

As observed through the empirical analysis, there was not much debating about Arctic security in the media coverage of Trident Juncture. Reporters relied mostly on official accounts and statements, leaving little place for analysis or a presentation of both sides of the NATO in the Arctic debate. Such observation connects with other analysis studying the early 2000s period (Landriault, 2019). Military exercises have a cloak of secrecy around them, with operational and technical details known to military authorities but partially hidden to the general public.

NATO's role as a deterrence force was the dominant frame employed by journalists to describe the event. NATO's increased involvement in the Arctic was thus presented as positive for allies and benign for adversaries or rivals. On the other hand, the risk of provoking Russia and leading to a further Russian military buildup in the region was rarely evoked. Throughout the description of TJ, emphasis was put on presenting the exercise as a reactive measure that took precaution to not further antagonize Russia.

Further, Trident Juncture was framed as part of the global West-Russia confrontation rather than a separate exercise with regional implications. Regional governance and cooperation between Russia and other Arctic states have not been widespread in reporting on TJ. Only one article mentioned the strong cooperative ties between Arctic states in issues of common interests at the Arctic Council and the Barents Council. This comment was made by NATO's secretary general, and although the secretary general was quoted in seven articles, this specific comment about Arctic cooperation was only included in one publication (*Eye on the Arctic*). TJ was perceived by media outlets as another occurrence of the global West-Russia antagonism. The Arctic frame, on the other hand, would have required a more complex description of the regional security and multilateral landscape. Such coverage would also entail presenting Arctic institutions (the Arctic Council for example) that were not directly related to the exercise. With limited space and a predisposition to see Arctic geopolitics in terms of competition and race between powers (Landriault, 2019), journalists were not keen on tackling the Arctic cooperation narrative.

Furthermore, recent Russian foreign interventions, especially in the 2016 U.S. elections and in the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the United Kingdom, have probably significantly altered Western perceptions of Russia. Russian antagonism towards Western countries is taken as a given and Russia has been on the offensive even when facing little direct provocation from the West. In this context, the risk of further provoking Russia in the Arctic appears as a vein enterprise. Trident Juncture was also deployed after massive Russian military exercises, one of which was carried out in close proximity to Nordic countries, which suggests that Western countries reacted to Russian activism rather than provoking it.

However, there is a case to be made about casting military exercises in the Arctic region in their proper regional context rather than in a global outlook. West-Russia interactions in the circumpolar region do not match their interactions in other regions or on other files; the Arctic is not Syria, Venezuela or Ukraine. Media coverage must adjust to seize more accurately the complexity of regional interactions.

Notes

1. The reduction of strategic tensions in the Arctic were not solely the function of the demise of the Soviet Union but also efforts by Mikhail Gorbachev, outlined in his 1987 Murmansk Speech, to reset relations with the West by turning the Arctic into a 'Zone of Peace' via the focusing on issues of mutual interest regionally.
2. Greenland, while under self-rule, does not control its foreign and defence affairs which remain the purview of Denmark, a NATO member.
3. The Arctic, however, has always remained a strategic priority in terms of nuclear deterrence and missile-defence with many assets residing within the region, but with an extra-regional mission set. The Arctic in and of itself as a contested domain is a new development in official American positions about regional security.
4. This keyword proved to be the most reliable as it generated very few false positives. The keyword was also used in both English and French newspapers.
5. These news outlets include: The New York Times, Washington Post, Globe and Mail, National Post, Le Figaro, Le Monde, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Eyes on the Arctic and Independent Barents Observer. Articles included in the printed version and online platforms of generalist outlets were considered, with duplicates counted as one document.
6. The same timeline was used for all three exercises, limiting our analysis to three weeks before the exercise to three weeks after the operation.
7. Translations from French sources were done by Landriault.
8. Eyes on the Arctic reporter Levon Sevunts was the only one to also present this dilemma through a series of reports. However, his reports were published online after our sampled timeline, on December 3 2018.
9. Such logic of force was more prevalent in right-wing dailies such as the Washington Post and National Post than in more centrist counterparts.
10. It is also worthwhile observing that no mention was made of previous Russian military exercises in 45% of the articles.
11. The series was put online on December 3 and is accessible at the following:
<http://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic-special-reports/norway-nato-trident-juncture-exercise-arctic-kirkenes-russia-military-defence-tensions/>

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