

Commentary

As War in Ukraine Upends a Quarter Century of Enduring Arctic Cooperation, the World Needs the Whole Arctic Council Now More Than Ever

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Abstract: The Arctic Council, formed in 1996, is a unique organization, with legitimacy that extends across the entirety of the Circumpolar World, representing a diverse mosaic of states and Indigenous Peoples united in their efforts to protect their fragile ecosystems, environments, and communities. The Council has nurtured an impressive and enduring consensus among its diverse ecosystem of asymmetrical actors for over a quarter century. But all that changed on March 3, 2022, when the Council’s seven democratic member states (the A7) announced an historic “pause” of their Council participation in protest of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This was not the first time tensions over Russian aggression in Ukraine strained the Council’s impressive track record for circumpolar unity; in 2014, after Russia’s first assault upon Ukraine, the United States and Canada jointly boycotted a Moscow-hosted meeting of the Council’s Task Force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane (TFBCM), but soon thereafter rejoined their fellow Council members in the spirit of Arctic cooperation. While Russia’s actions in Ukraine are reprehensible, boycotting the Council while Russia held its rotating chair closed off an important off-ramp to defuse rising international tensions between Russia and NATO. Indeed, Russia’s portion of the Arctic represents fully half the Circumpolar World, and the issues facing the Arctic—of which climate change is perhaps the most pressing for all stakeholders, small and large—cannot be paused. There are no half-way solutions to the future of the Arctic, whether it’s peacetime or wartime—the stakes are simply too high.

On March 3, 2022, seven of the eight Arctic Council member states, the A7—Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, United States—announced an historic, unanimous boycott of Council participation in protest of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, after just over twenty-five years of continuous operations since the Council’s inaugural meeting in Ottawa on September 19, 1996.

While this is the first time all seven democratic Arctic states agreed to suspend participation in all Arctic Council (AC) activities, back in April 2014, after Russia’s first assault upon Ukraine, the United States and Canada jointly boycotted a meeting of the AC’s Task Force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane (TFBCM) held in Moscow, but soon rejoined their fellow Council members. As Canadian Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq explained then, Ottawa (and Washington, as well) was taking a “principled stand” by not attending, marking the first time—but not the last—the conflict in Ukraine disrupted the long tradition of Arctic cooperation at the Council.

The March 3rd decision by the A7 was one of many similar decisions by countless organizations around the world, part of a quickly-achieved and near-global consensus to isolate Russia in protest of its naked and unprovoked aggression against its neighbour. However, the A7 decision caught several of the Arctic Council’s Permanent Participant organizations, representing the Indigenous Peoples in the region, by surprise as they were not consulted. This was a break with the spirit and long tradition of the Arctic Council, which stands first among the world’s many intergovernmental forums for its efforts to unite state and Indigenous interests, and for elevating state–Indigenous consultation to the highest of normative values.

While unequal in their institutional power, with the eight founding member states (the A8) holding all of the formal power, the Permanent Participants are essential partners in the formation of the consensus that defines Arctic Council governance, and they have played a vital and important role in both the formation of the Arctic Council in 1996, and in its operations in the quarter century since. Indeed, the stability of the Arctic region owes much to the spirit of collaborative governance that aligns Indigenous and state interests, as reflected in the Arctic Council’s structure as well as in other novel and innovative governing institutions across the Circumpolar Arctic.

While surprised, most of the Permanent Participants endorsed the decision made by the democratic Arctic states, but not all with the same level of enthusiasm, and most expressing concern for the future of Arctic cooperation. One of the Permanent Participants, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), viewed now by many as a mouthpiece for, and controlled by, Putin’s government in Moscow, came out in full and enthusiastic support of Moscow’s “peacemaking” effort in Ukraine. This outraged a network of

Indigenous leaders in involuntary exile from Russia who were formerly associated with RAIPON. They issued their own counter statement ten days later while also announcing the formation of their own parallel organization to fill the vacuum created by RAIPON’s lost legitimacy and what they believe is its outrageous support for Russia’s unjust assault on Ukraine.

The Boycott: A Temporary Pause in Quest of New Modalities or Permanent Collapse in Arctic Cooperation?

According to the March 3rd announcement, jointly released by officials in the seven democratic Arctic states: “Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States condemn Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and note the grave impediments to international cooperation, including in the Arctic, that Russia’s actions have caused.”¹ They reasserted their conviction

of the enduring value of the Arctic Council for circumpolar cooperation and reiterate our support for this institution and its work. We hold a responsibility to the people of the Arctic, including the Indigenous Peoples, who contribute to and benefit from the important work undertaken in the Council.²

Their brief statement concluded by explaining that the

core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, based on international law, have long underpinned the work of the Arctic Council, a forum which Russia currently chairs. In light of Russia’s flagrant violation of these principles, our representatives will not travel to Russia for meetings of the Arctic Council. Additionally, our states are temporarily pausing participation in all meetings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies, pending consideration of the necessary modalities that can allow us to continue the Council’s important work in view of the current circumstances.³

After Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2022 and unleashed chaos to the heart of Europe on a scale unseen since the Second World War (and exceeding the kinetic destruction of Yugoslavia’s collapse if not yet its scale of human atrocities), introducing unprecedented risk to the global order—on the question of how or even whether to engage with Russia most of the world has responded with an instinctive, passionate, and near-unanimous *nyet*. In the case of the boycott of the Arctic Council by the A7, presented as a temporary pause

but without a timeline for when a reset will again be conceivable, this *nyet* would optimally mean *not yet* rather than *never*, and the wording of the boycott and the quest for new modalities it mentioned indicates a future is in the realm of the finite and not the infinite or never-ending. But even a temporary *not yet* could be for an indeterminate period, which is by definition a period with no known end point, putting into question for the first time since 1996 the very future of the Arctic Council.

This was not the case in 2014 when the Canadian and US boycott was for a single meeting in Moscow. To ensure there is a second twenty-five years for the Arctic Council, it is imperative that the A7's *not yet* be as *brief* a period as is diplomatically and politically possible. Given a protracted war with Russia and the potential for it to draw in NATO, it seems likely that a resumption of face-to-face meetings among the whole of the A8 is unlikely again under Russia's two-year rotating chair, which concludes in 2023. All things considered, a year-long boycott need not mean the end of the Arctic Council or its mutual vision of a cooperative and peaceful Arctic with Russia's full and active participation, which only became possible at the end of the Cold War when tensions with Moscow declined. But any cessation of the Arctic Council's exemplary consensual alignment of interests and values among a diverse range of states and Indigenous organizations, and which includes an even wider array of Observers, both state and non-state entities, from around the world, is worrisome. If Russia remains a pariah beyond such a limited time frame, that could spell the end of a truly exceptional vision of Arctic collaboration and an innovative experiment in inclusive, multi-level, multilateral diplomacy. The Arctic Council was among the best of what the post-Cold War world achieved, and worth preserving.

Preserving A Peaceful Arctic in a World at War

This is not to diminish the gravity of events in Ukraine, the clear and present danger to NATO itself, or the spectre of total war that could result from a collapse of the post-Cold War order, let alone the human tragedy unfolding across Ukraine in the many months since Russia launched its invasion. But the Arctic Council is a unique organization, with legitimacy that extends across the entirety of the Circumpolar World—from the western tip of the Aleutian Islands all the way to the eastern tip of Siberia—spanning a diverse mosaic of states, Indigenous Peoples, remote environments, and fragile ecosystems undergoing an historic climatic transition. The Council brings together the eight founding Arctic states—of which Russia, with its eleven time zones, is the most vast and Iceland the smallest—and includes within its innovative governance structure the six aforementioned Indigenous Peoples' organizations, the Permanent Participants, providing them with much influence and a voice at the table, together with a

diverse range of Observers, both state and non-state. Observer status allows countries as far away as Singapore, and as consequential to the world economy as China, an opportunity to participate, regardless of their domestic governing structures or ideologies—and in the case of China, in spite of its track record of oppressing minority peoples (such as Xinjiang) or the lingering legacies of invasions past (Tibet), even if a cause of symbolic diplomatic boycotts such as the absence of top officials at the Beijing Olympics.

Moreover, the issues facing the Arctic, of which climate change is perhaps the most pressing for all stakeholders, small and large, cannot be paused. Nor should they be. And excluding Russia from any discussions, with the Russian Arctic representing some half the Arctic's geographical extent, would render the Council's efforts substantially reduced. There are no half-way solutions to the future of the Arctic, whether it's peacetime or wartime. Even during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council managed to meet virtually, finding like so many others that vast distances could be overcome through digital connections. Somehow the Arctic felt less vast, less isolated, at a moment when it was more cut off from the rest of the world than it had been for generations.

And while Russia's actions in Ukraine are reprehensible, putting at risk the post-Cold War order—of which the formation of the Arctic Council was an exemplary and illustrative moment—stopping the Council's operations now because Russia presently holds its rotating chair seems as illogical as shuttering the UN General Assembly or putting a pause on meetings of the Security Council. Intergovernmental bodies are the one space in world politics where rivals and opponents can meet face to face, even in times of war. Their business does not stop when hostilities commence; oftentimes, their responsibilities multiply manifold at such times. We need the Arctic Council no less today than we did before the Ukraine invasion and may indeed need it more than ever. Arctic Council members find unity in their diversity and approach their Arctic borders with a collaborative spirit seldom found along borders further south. The challenge, of course, is in minimizing tensions across Arctic borders, at a time when one of the Arctic states is at war with a neighbour that is on friendly terms with the other Arctic states. This is no easy feat. But it is not the first time there has been strategic dissension at the top of the world; indeed, with five of the eight Arctic Council members part of the NATO alliance (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and the United States), there can hardly be a day without strategic dissension in the Arctic even at the best of times. And yet, the Arctic has been one of the most stable regions of the world, despite the pre-existing condition of strategic competition.

Indeed, there was a time not long ago when the Arctic Council confronted a deep division in its ranks that threatened the very consensus that serves as the bedrock of its successful first quarter century. That member challenged the

accepted consensus among all the Council's other stakeholders (member states, Permanent Participants, and Observers alike). After two impressive decades of sustained consensus in good times and bad, that member state broke ranks with that unanimity—and in so doing, made it impossible for a joint declaration to emerge from a ministerial meeting for the very first time. That time was just three years ago: in 2019. The founding member state was not Russia, but the United States. And the issue that drove a wedge between the US and its fellow Arctic Council members and other stakeholders was a change in policy on climate change, long a unifying issue for all Arctic Council stakeholders and the most pressing and salient issue before the Council and, many believe, confronting humanity. Despite this collapse in consensus, the Council—with its meaningful and enduring bridges of communication and collaboration between a diverse array of Arctic stakeholders, from the village to the national to the tribal to the transnational level—survived, and only a few short years later, consensus was fully restored. The organization proved as resilient as the diverse collective of Arctic peoples, states, cultures, and organizations it represents.

Over a decade earlier, that same Arctic Council outlier, the United States, went to war half a world away from the Arctic, bringing along a coalition of partners in its quest to rid Iraq of a fictitious Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program and to depose its autocratic leader, sinking the Middle East region into chaos that would last a generation and which would see a stable, autocratic Iraq collapse into a failed state and become a breeding ground of terror, ultimately providing al-Qaeda with an opportunity it had not found before, and yielding the emergence of the Islamic State caliphate, which required a brutal air war to dismantle. Across Iraq and Syria, a generation has endured unprecedented bloodshed and destruction, all a direct result of America's own war of choice built on a foundation of lies. At the top of the world, however, the Arctic remained united and cooperative, and the US and Russia each contributed their part to the enduring Arctic peace, even as their proxies battled violently across the Middle East. America's wars may have been framed as wars of self-defence, much the way Moscow now frames its current war, and wars to pre-empt WMD programs (much as Moscow now echoes, seizing control of nuclear plants while cautioning against seemingly fictitious Ukrainian chemical weapons programs). It's as if we've seen this story before. But because it is Moscow on the offensive, and not the United States, the world is reacting differently to a similarly tragic and disingenuous masquerade.

With Russia on the war path, a path Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin describes as a “noble cause,” having launched what much of the rest of the world—what many observers describe as a re-emergent “Free World,” as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has described it⁴—sees as an undeniable,

unjustifiable, unprovoked war of aggression, that once again challenges the consensus that has so long united the Arctic world, we are back to this very same precipice of a collapsing Arctic consensus like we saw just three years earlier when America unilaterally quit the global coalition against climate change. The brutal conflict presently unfolding is different in nearly every way from that previous disagreement at the Arctic Council's 2019 ministerial meeting in Rovaniemi, Finland, but the stakes are perhaps comparable, if imperfectly so—the future of humanity is once again at stake, and consensus on unifying values is once again eluding a single yet essential member of the circumpolar family. And while this comparison will not be greeted with equal receptiveness amidst the current crisis unfolding across Ukraine at the hand of Russian aggression, the moral scale of both global challenges (Ukraine and climate change) has an equivalency of risk even if not the same palpable sense of immediacy.

The Arctic Council: A Quarter Century of Arctic Cooperation

The Ottawa Declaration, formally titled the “Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council,” was promulgated by the eight Arctic states—Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America—in 1996, in which they affirmed the following:

- commitment to the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic, including special recognition of the special relationship and unique contributions to the Arctic of indigenous people and their communities;
- commitment to sustainable development in the Arctic region, including economic and social development, improved health conditions and cultural well-being;
- commitment to the protection of the Arctic environment, including the health of Arctic ecosystems, maintenance of biodiversity in the Arctic region and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

And recognized:

- the contributions of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy to these commitments;
- the traditional knowledge of the Indigenous people of the Arctic and their communities and taking note of its importance and that of Arctic science and research to the collective understanding of the circumpolar Arctic; and
- the valuable contribution and support of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Saami Council, and the Association of the Indigenous Minorities of the North, Siberia, and the Far East

of the Russian Federation in the development of the Arctic Council.⁵

The Arctic states also expressed their mutual desire “to provide a means for promoting cooperative activities to address Arctic issues requiring circumpolar cooperation, and to ensure full consultation with and the involvement of Indigenous people and their communities and other inhabitants of the Arctic in such activities;” and “to provide for regular intergovernmental consideration of and consultation on Arctic issues.”⁶

They thereby declared the establishment of the Arctic Council as a high level forum to:

provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic; oversee and coordinate the programs established under the AEPS on the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP); Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); and Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR); adopt terms of reference for, and oversee and coordinate a sustainable development program; [and] disseminate information, encourage education and promote interest in Arctic related issues.⁷

In addition to the eight member states, the Ottawa Declaration also designated in paragraph 2 that the “Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council and the Association of Indigenous Minorities of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation are Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council” and that “[p]ermanent participation equally is open to other Arctic organizations of indigenous peoples with majority Arctic indigenous constituency, representing: a single indigenous people resident in more than one Arctic State; or more than one Arctic indigenous people resident in a single Arctic state.”⁸ This inclusive definition made possible the variation in ethnic composition of the Permanent Participant organizations as well as the variation in scale, from representing as few as several thousand constituents like the Aleut International Association (AIA) and the Gwich’in Council International (GCI) from a single Indigenous People, to over a quarter million constituents from over forty Indigenous Peoples like RAIPON. Once the Council determines “that such an organization

has met this criterion,” the Ottawa Declaration capped the total number of PP groups to “at any time be less than the number of members.” And since the Arctic states number eight, there can be no more than seven PPs, one more than the present six.⁹ While Permanent Participants lack the agency of member states to implement Arctic policies, many PPs or components thereof have achieved formal governing powers within their home states owing to an impressive variety of institutional powers, whether constitutional, legislative, or co-managerial. Indeed, at the local and regional levels, their powers often are represented by a local or regional level of governance or greatly overlap therewith. This further fulfills the aspiration of the Ottawa Declaration that the “category of Permanent Participant is created to provide for active participation and full consultation with the Arctic Indigenous representatives within the Arctic Council.”¹⁰ In addition to the Arctic states and the PPs, the Ottawa Declaration also recognized three categories of Observers that include “non-Arctic states; inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, global and regional; and non-governmental organizations that the Council determines can contribute to its work.”¹¹

The Arctic Council at 25: Lessons for the Next 25 Years

If the Arctic Council can survive the collapse of the climate consensus that was forged at its inclusive and consensual table during its first quarter century, and which came to define it in its expansive circumpolar agenda from 1996 to 2021, there is no reason it can’t do the same again. Indeed, it must do so and soon. Russia is the largest of the Arctic states, with the largest Arctic population and most diverse Arctic economy and mosaic of cultures. Its portion of the Arctic represents fully half the Circumpolar World.

It took the collapse of the Soviet Union to allow for the close collaboration that the Arctic Council nurtured, with its new model of inclusive diplomacy bridging the state–Indigenous interface. But the foundations of the Arctic Council took root well before the Cold War ended, and its founding vision was articulated eloquently by the last Soviet premier, Mikhail Gorbachev, in his famed Murmansk speech in 1987. The boundary line separating the US from the USSR (and now Russia), which was negotiated by the last Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, with his American counterpart, George Shultz, has been respected by both post-Cold War United States and Russia since 1990, laying a stable foundation on what could otherwise be a volatile border. The current shipping lane through the Bering Strait was jointly negotiated by the United States and Russia, reflecting the ongoing stability on this Arctic frontier, with the US Coast Guard and the Border Guard Service of Russia developing a laudable bilateral relationship that contrasts with so many of Russia’s other borders. This says something about the

fundamental importance of Arctic collaboration to world order, regardless of which party or individual sits atop either country's government.

As bad as things are now, and as bad as they might become in the current war, now is not the time to shutter the Arctic Council's operations altogether, nor to stop meeting with all of the Arctic Council's diverse and important stakeholders, whether states, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, or NGOs. Framing the A7's suspension as a pause in quest of new modalities does seem to create a window of hope that the Council will find its way toward a resumption of its important business. As shocking as Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent threat to fellow Arctic Council member states Finland and Sweden on their consideration of NATO membership; as worrisome as the recent Russian military exercise in the Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zone (including the launch of a hypersonic missile near the midpoint between Norway's mainland and Svalbard, with what Moscow may next portray as a "vulnerable" Russian population requiring its "protection"); as foreboding as was the ultimate destination for Russia's northern fleet during that self-same exercise, positioning a Russian flotilla just offshore the vast and vulnerable island colony of Greenland—it is imperative that the Arctic Council find its way back together, and for meetings between its diverse stakeholders inclusive of Russia to continue, even in the absence of a unifying consensus as they once enjoyed.

Among some potential modalities to consider for resuming Arctic Council meetings under Russia's term as Chair are the following:

- boycotting in-person meetings until peace is restored in Ukraine, and until then maintaining a virtual connection among all Council stakeholders;
- deploying junior proxies in place of senior officials as a more subtle, but no less obvious, rebuke to Russia under its Chair than a complete cessation of meetings, modelled on the White House policy regarding China's hosting of the 2022 Olympics where top officials were notably absent in protest of Beijing's long occupation and mistreatment of the Uighur homeland while athletes were free to compete; and
- adoption of symbolic yellow and blue attire by attendees of such meetings to echo the world's embrace of Ukraine's flag and its spirit of independence and resilience, values embraced across the Arctic.

Additionally, if Moscow succeeds in extinguishing Ukraine's sovereignty by forcibly absorbing it (or part of it) into an expanded Russian state, Ukrainians, in their occupation and subjugation, will share an historic experience with Indigenous Peoples, particularly as experienced by the Aleuts under Russian colonization and later Japanese occupation. Indeed, common across the Circumpolar Arctic

is a shared history of state expansion and consequent partition of Indigenous homelands, as experienced by all of the Council's Permanent Participants. The de facto partitioning of Ukraine by Russia, under way since 2014 and greatly accelerated since its 2022 invasion, is thus a familiar experience across the Arctic, even in regions where state expansion and the partitioning of Indigenous homelands was achieved without war.

Additionally, the A7, united in its opposition to Russia's aggression, could assist Ukraine with an application to become an Arctic Council Observer—a move that Russia would surely oppose but the point would be made. Additionally, if Moscow succeeds in extinguishing Ukraine's sovereignty by forcibly absorbing it into an expanded Russian state, Ukrainians, in their occupation and subjugation, will share an historic experience with Indigenous Peoples, as acutely experienced by the Aleuts under Russian colonization and Japanese occupation, the Sami under state formation and expansion, and the Athabaskans and Inuit under the economic domination of the fur monopolies, which colonized so much of Arctic North America.

The Council's six Permanent Participants may thus be in a helpful position side by side with the Arctic states (inclusive of Russia). The Arctic Council can thus leverage its rich mosaic of perspectives and perhaps help the world find a way toward a multilateral solution to the current crisis. Additionally, while Russia is at war in the heart of Europe, all the world hopes and prays the war does not horizontally escalate and draw in NATO members—which could precipitate the next world war. One potential tool to leverage is the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), which like the Arctic Council is under Russia's current rotation as Chair and which, together, works to ensure the rules-based order is maintained in polar waters. The ACGF could, if permitted by its member states, continue to collaborate on so many important issues ranging from search and rescue missions, to oil spill cleanup and environmental protection, to implementing the International Maritime Organization's International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code), to preventing illegal and unreported fishing. How to continue this important collaboration in a time of war will, of course, require diplomatic agility and ingenuity, but it's not beyond the capabilities of those who have managed the world's response to the present crisis, and is worth consideration.

Indeed, if meeting in Russia remains a non-starter, the ACGF could meet in the coal-mining community of Barentsburg on Svalbard, formally part of Norway and whose populace, owing to Soviet history, is in near equal parts Russian and Ukrainian, offering additional symbolic resonance; or in an Aleutian island community in western Alaska, once a part of the Russian Empire, and rich in Russian heritage; or even in a northern, non-member state, such as in Hokkaido in northern Japan, which maintains a constructive diplomatic relationship with

Russia even as its northernmost islands in the Kuril chain just offshore remain under Russian occupation, as they have since the Second World War—though under new strain due to Japan’s unity with the West on Russia sanctions. Any of these would be a powerful metaphor for the ACGF, or even the Arctic Council itself should it choose to end its boycott, in such an historic venue where the history of strategic competition with Russia is still palpable.

Indigenous Responses to the Arctic Council Boycott Decision

While the unprecedented inter-state unity and protracted nature of the A7’s boycott of the Council made headlines, the exclusion of Indigenous stakeholders in their deliberations prior to the boycott could indicate that a tectonic shift in Arctic governance is under way, as conceptions of Arctic security shift back from “soft” power to “hard” in the wake of Russia’s assault on Ukraine, and with this militarization of Arctic security, Arctic international relations reverts to a more “Westphalian” conception of statecraft after the quarter century of post-Cold War multi-level multilateralism epitomized by the Arctic Council. The response to and exclusion of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic in the decision by the A7 to boycott the Council has been noted, with regret and disappointment, by both the Arctic Athabaskan Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Council, but for the most part, the Permanent Participants, with the exception of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), which has fallen increasingly under Moscow’s influence in recent years, have sided with the A7 and voiced opposition to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.¹²

Ten days before the Ukraine invasion began, the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC) called upon world leaders to remember their commitments to Indigenous Peoples, noting in particular that Crimean Tatars “comprise the largest population of Indigenous Peoples in Ukraine” as “officially recognized by the Government of Ukraine and the European Parliament as Indigenous Peoples in February 2016.”¹² With the winds of war blowing, AAC explained that it was:

urging global leaders in Canada, United States, Russia, and Ukraine not to forget commitments they have made to Indigenous Peoples. Specifically, AAC wants to remind state leaders that Canada, United States and Ukraine are all party to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), originally adopted in 2007.¹⁴

Chief Gary Harrison, AAC’s International Chair, pointed out the vital importance of the work of the Arctic Council, and the potential risk to the hard-earned diplomatic alignment of Arctic states and Indigenous Peoples,

strengthened by their unity of effort and purpose in combating Arctic climate change at the Arctic Council table:

We have warming taking place in the Arctic at three times the speed of other global jurisdictions. This reality and the future threat to Arctic water systems, marine life, wildlife, and our fragile ecosystems will affect us here in the Arctic, and globally, for generations to come. The work now at the Arctic Council table is already at a critical stage. Our relationship with the Russian Federation, as with all our regional partners, is one of diplomatic cooperation that took years to build. We fear this could be greatly disrupted if the resistance to finding a solution over the conflict in Ukraine continues.¹⁵

And Chief Bill Erasmus, the AAC’s Canadian Chair, added that: “We want to remind all governments that the Arctic Council is the world’s only forum where we, as Indigenous People have inclusion at a global level. As concerns over the Russian–Ukraine crisis are increasing, we feel the need to speak out.”¹⁶

A Diverse Range of Indigenous Perspectives on the Arctic Council Pause

The Arctic Athabaskan Council’s effort to directly reach out—not only to the leaders of the Arctic states but the global community of nations—to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples from the ravages of war reflects the powerful diplomatic innovation of the Arctic Council, the inclusive diversity inherent in the Council structure, and the novelty of its effort to align the formal sovereign powers of the Council’s state actors with the informal influence of its Indigenous actors in the formation of Arctic policies.

While all the Permanent Participants with the exception of RAIPON would ultimately endorse the Arctic Council boycott after it was announced, like AAC they did so while expressing their concern for the future of Arctic cooperation, knowing full well how great Indigenous gains have been since the Council’s formation, and how much Arctic Indigenous Peoples have to lose in a world without an Arctic Council.

The Russian section of the Saami Council issued its own statement on February 27, 2022, among the first of the Permanent Participants to do so, commenting they “cannot ignore the current situation in the country or remain silent about it” and “that there is no justification for military action. In any case, all this touches us, so the Section on the Russian side considers it necessary to comment on this topic.”¹⁷ They note that,

the citizens of the Russian Federation, including the Saami people in Russia, are in a situation where no one knows what awaits us in the future. We cannot plan anything and we find ourselves in a very unstable situation. Sanctions already introduced by different countries, and possible future sanctions, will primarily hit, not businessmen and owners of mega-corporations and banks, but ordinary residents of the country.¹⁸

Such impacts were immediately felt by the Sami:

Already, prices on the electronics market have increased by 30% in one day, and we expect the prices to increase even more, not only for electronics, but also, for food and essential goods. The sanctions and the measures introduced do not separate the citizens of the Russian Federation by area of work or nationality, so the Saami people in Russia find themselves in an extremely unstable, one might say, dangerous, situation. None of us can predict how the aggravated situation will end, but already now we must be prepared for additional difficulties affecting international work.¹⁹

The Sami discuss the effect of sanctions on Russian banks, including Sberbank, “which means that transactions to Russia will be difficult. This involves both projects and salaries and makes cooperation more difficult. Sberbank has conducted transactions in Norwegian kroner through a US bank, transactions in euros through a German bank, and both of these countries imposed sanctions on working with Sberbank and many other banks.”²⁰ Further impacts were felt in the everyday from a “partial blocking of Facebook” to the consequences of suspensions “from membership in the Council of Europe, the Committee of Foreign Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Council for Human Rights, many sporting events” and even “from participating in Eurovision.” And amidst this dizzying cascade of suspensions, “the fact remains that international cooperation for Russian citizens, in any direction, is now as difficult as possible” and “the possibility of sanctions that will annul existing visas for Russian citizens” was identified as a concern of the Sami: “In many documents, the Saami Council states that the Sami are one people who live regardless of state borders. Now, this is high on the agenda, to make sure that the Sami people from the Russian side can continue to participate in international meetings and conferences, including visiting other countries.”²¹ Indeed, “Now, more than ever, the Sami people in Russia need international support to continue cooperation between the Sami of the four countries. We hope that this difficult situation will soon be resolved in the least painful way.”²²

Gwich'in Council International (GCI), representing the Gwich'in communities in the northernmost forests of Alaska, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories, announced in its March 3, 2022 response to the joint statement by the A7 on “Arctic Council Cooperation following Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” that it “welcomes the collective pause of activities of the Arctic Council as we explore new modalities for pursuing peace and cooperation in the north.” GCI reiterated that it “remains committed to engage in productive dialogues that advance the collective aim and responsibility of stewarding a peaceful Arctic region built on cooperation and our shared value of mutual respect.”²³

Four days later, the Inuit Circumpolar Council released its “Statement from the Inuit Circumpolar Council Concerning the Arctic Council,” noting that four of the six Permanent Participants have Russian constituents while recalling its proud heritage “as a unifying voice for Inuit across our collective homeland” from the Cold War to the present, expressing concern for “the future of the Arctic Council which is based on peaceful cooperation and mutual respect.”²⁴

Just one of the Permanent Participants came out in support of Russia, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), a group that many observers have described as no longer authentically representing the voice of Russia’s Indigenous Peoples.²⁵

On March 11th, a new organization called the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia put out its own statement rebutting RAIPON, signed by seven Indigenous leaders “living outside of Russia against our will” who “are outraged by the war President Putin has unleashed against Ukraine” and who “express solidarity with the people of Ukraine in their struggle for freedom and are extremely concerned about ensuring the rights of Indigenous peoples during the war on Ukrainian territory, including the Crimean Peninsula that remains illegally occupied by Russia,” and who “are outraged by statements of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) on March 1, 2022 in support of the decisions of President Putin.”²⁶ In closing, they both announce their own withdrawal “from all Russia-based organizations and networks of Indigenous peoples of Russia in which we were previously members,” and “announce the creation of a new, independent organization—the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia.”²⁷

The Russians were, to no one’s surprise, disappointed by the decision of the other Arctic states, and for their obvious exclusion from deliberations regarding the Council boycott. As Gloria Dickie reported in *Saltwire.com*,

Russian Arctic officials questioned on Friday the decision of their peers on the Arctic Council to boycott future talks held in Russia, calling their actions ‘regrettable.’ ... Nikolay Korchunov,

Russia's senior Arctic officials chair and an ambassador-at-large of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, warned that a temporary freeze on council activity would 'inevitably lead to the accumulation of the risks and challenges to soft security in the region.'²⁸

As Dickie reports, Korchunov further "stressed the council's strong history of depoliticized dialogue in high latitudes. 'The Arctic should remain as a territory of peace ... and thus, this unique format should not be subject to the spill-over effect of any extraregional events.'"²⁹ With Russia representing "roughly a third of the entire Arctic region" and "nearly 70% of economic activity in high latitudes," Korchunov explained that, "For us there is no alternative to uninterrupted sustainable development of our Arctic territories," and that Russia would "refocus" its "Chairmanship toward addressing our domestic needs in the region," with Korchunov adding "It is of utmost importance to safeguard the project activities of the Arctic Council in order to be able to pick up where we paused and step up cooperation."³⁰

Restoring Circumpolarity: Ending the Pause Before Russia Ends its War

As mentioned above, this is not the first time that world politics has intruded into the otherwise calm spirit of Arctic cooperation. Aidan Chamandy, in *iPolitics.ca*, recounts that Council "faced a similar problem after Russia invaded Crimea in 2014," when both "Canada and the U.S. boycotted an April 2014 council meeting in Moscow, but Canada was keen 'to support the important work of the Arctic Council' in future, according to a statement that year by former Environment minister Leona Aglukkaq. The 2014 boycott was the only one, however," until now.³¹ Chamandy cites "Nicole Covey, a fellow with the North American Arctic Defence and Security Network," who explained the limited 2014 boycott by Washington and Ottawa contributed to the widely held "belief that the Arctic Council could withstand a lot of international tensions. So what happened with the pause is very substantial" with its "unified response. ... The fact that they're only pausing, and that they haven't ended the Arctic Council, is important, because that shows they're hoping things might resolve in some way."³² Indeed, as Covey further explains, "If Russia is no longer involved in the Arctic Council, you no longer get that circumpolar, holistic approach."³³ Such a view is shared by Inuit Circumpolar Chair (ICC) Dalee Sambo Dorough, who is also cited by Chamandy as explaining, "Everything (in the Arctic) is interconnected ... It (could) be difficult for seven other Arctic states ... to be effective and move forward in a constructive fashion," and the Arctic Council "wouldn't be the same if one of our clear and genuine members is absent."³⁴

Russia holds the rotating Arctic Council Chair until 2023, when it will pass to the next Arctic Council state (Norway), and thus far there has been much continuity with the rotation, testament to the endurance of consensus among its diverse stakeholders. To completely boycott the Council under Russia's Chair only undermines the very spirit of collaboration that gave form to the Arctic Council during more optimistic times. The agenda for the Arctic Council, even under Russia's Chair, shows much continuity with the previous Chair (Iceland), and this continuity alone could become an important, symbolic bridge to a restoration of that founding cooperative spirit in the future.

And because consensus is the lifeblood and governing paradigm for the Council, there is nothing Russia can achieve as Chair without the full consensus of the other Council members. Each biannual Ministerial meeting, each semi-annual Senior Arctic Officials meeting, each Working Group session, will provide an opportunity to rebuke Russia and deny it consensus on any issue that deviates from the collective will of the Arctic Council as a whole; and, on issues where consensus is preserved, it will demonstrate that Russia, even at the worst of times, remains committed to the values and principles of the Arctic Council. Looking forward, this channel of ongoing diplomatic interaction could serve as a bridge to the future, and the restoration of a world where Russia is a responsible member of the world community.

Ironically, even as Russia embarks on the path of expansionist war to its south, it remains committed, for the most part, to cooperation to its north. Consider the words, and life experience, of Russia's Senior Arctic Official Nikolay Korchunov, who presently holds the rotating chair of the Arctic Council (Russia's second tenure at chair since the AC was formed). The Arctic Council website describes Korchunov as a "a career diplomat who has served as the Ambassador at Large for the Arctic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Russia and the Senior Arctic Official of the Russian Federation to the Arctic Council since December 2018,"³⁵ with prior service at Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) headquarters, and in overseas postings to "embassies of the Russian Federation to Sweden and Finland," and as "Head of Russia's delegation to the Council's Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation and the Task Force on Improved Connectivity in the Arctic from 2015 until 2018." In these past positions we see a depth of knowledge, experience, and commitment to the Arctic, and to its cooperative legacy, and as he assumed the Chair of the AC, he was "especially interested in matters related to sustainable development, in finding the right balance between environmental protection and socio-economic development,"³⁶ positioning him in the very sweet-spot at the intersection of Arctic globalization and the preservation of the sublime, undisturbed Arctic free from the manifold impacts of modernization. In an interview on the Arctic Council website, he

observed, “I have visited many places in the Arctic and gotten acquainted with many people and issues. I can see now that most issues, questions and challenges in the Arctic are interconnected. So there is an obvious need for an integrated, cross-sectoral, and inclusive approach to development in the Arctic.”³⁷ A year ahead of assuming the rotating chairmanship of the AC in 2021, he noted,

We are in the early stages of the preparations for the forthcoming Arctic Council Chairmanship. There will be a number of priorities on the agenda of our Chairmanship, among them of course environmental protection and sustainable development, as well as new technologies for safeguarding the Arctic environment. The human dimension, the Arctic inhabitants including Indigenous peoples, will of course be stressed and underlined throughout our forthcoming Chairmanship.³⁸

Korchunov noted the Russian term for the Arctic Council is “Арктический советорганизация, которая должна обеспечить умное управление Арктикой. И это то, чем мы занимаемся,” which translates into English as: “The Arctic Council is the organization, which is supposed to provide the conditions for and contribute to responsible governance in the Arctic. That is what we are doing here.”³⁹ Indeed, this continues the Council’s mission to ‘provide the conditions for and contribute to responsible governance in the Arctic’ that started in 1996 (predating it with the formation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy five years earlier) and was carried forward by each of the Arctic states during their periods of service as AC chair—a tradition Russia had pledged to uphold.

That Russia could nurture a collaborative Arctic even as it engaged in regional conflicts as far afield as Syria, Libya, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine (with only that one brief interruption when in 2014 the US and Canadian AC representatives boycotted the Moscow meeting) was the accepted view by and large for nearly the entirety of the AC from its 1996 formation to its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2021, when Russia assumed the rotating chair for its second time. While it is universally acknowledged that Russia’s full invasion of Ukraine is a game changer, and a systemic risk to global security, and while threats to Finland and Sweden on Russia’s far northwestern frontier and to Japan on its far northeastern frontier indicate a notable shift in diplomatic tone, one cannot readily forget the “If you’re not with us, you are against us” philosophy undergirding US President George W. Bush’s “Bush Doctrine” that shaped and guided the “Long War” or “Global War on Terror” that the United States waged after the 9/11 attacks.⁴⁰

While the United States did not threaten the existence of those who did not join it, it did position opponents to the American war as “against us,” which of itself was coercive diplomatically—and the regional wars that embroiled the US armed forces for a generation did not impede the enduring cooperation among the Arctic states, regardless of where they stood on America’s wars. While Russia has threatened supporters of Ukraine’s defence more forcefully, including Finland and Sweden for their considering joining NATO it must still be noted that Arctic cooperation has endured many disagreements among the Arctic states on various matters of policy, whether related to foreign wars or not (as seen in the Trump Administration’s break with fellow AC members on climate change, which under Barack Obama was conceptualized as an all-of-government war against nature-out-of-balance).

The A7 decision to boycott the AC entirely, as part of the global isolation of Russia, does risk the opportunity presented by Korchunov under his watch as AC chair, and creates a gap in multilateral cooperation that could endure for many years. Can the Arctic afford such a gap? Was the exclusion of the Permanent Participants from the discussion and decision to impose an AC boycott breaching the spirit of state-Indigenous collaboration for which the AC rightfully takes much pride for its inclusivity, likewise a gap within the gap, putting the Indigenous organizations in the uncomfortable position that President Bush put American allies and friends in during the run-up to war after 9/11? Has the A7 response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine created its own risk to Arctic unity that continued operation of the AC during wartime, with various alternative ways of expressing profound disagreement with Russia, might have avoided?

According to *Newsweek*, “Russia’s Arctic envoy has told *Newsweek* that international tensions over the war in Ukraine should not spill into the northern region that also borders the United States. But recent diplomatic and military moves by Washington and its allies show the usually serene frontier has already become a frontline in the crisis.”⁴¹

Nikolay Korchunov, who serves as Russia’s ambassador-at-large to the Arctic Council, told *Newsweek* that Moscow found this decision ‘regrettable,’ arguing that it ran contrary to the apolitical nature of the intergovernmental forum founded more than 25 years ago. ‘The Council’s mandate explicitly excludes matters related to military security,’ Korchunov said. ‘It is enshrined in all its founding and strategic documents that the Arctic should remain as the territory of peace, stability and constructive cooperation. Therefore, this unique format should not be subject to the spillover effect of any extra-regional events.’⁴²

Newsweek noted with “cooperation at a standstill due to the deadly war raging in Ukraine, the future of multilateral efforts remains deeply uncertain,” and that

Korchunov said his country ‘reiterates its commitment to close and constructive engagement with all Arctic Council member-states, permanent participants, observers and other interested non-regional partners. We are open for long-term partnerships in the region with any nation ... be it the Arctic Council member state or any other country, in the interest of its sustainable development and well-being of its inhabitants, including Indigenous Peoples.’⁴³

Even in this time of war, Korchunov reiterated that

“Russia is convinced that ‘the spirit of cooperation’ inherent in the Arctic Council will help to strengthen trust and mutual understanding ... and the Council should remain a solid framework for peaceful mutually beneficial collaboration despite geopolitical tensions elsewhere in the interest of a sustainable and prosperous future of the entire Arctic region.’”⁴⁴

But for the A7, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine shattered this hitherto enduring “spirit of cooperation,” precipitating the abandonment by Nordic states Finland and Sweden of their long traditions of neutrality and decisions to join the NATO alliance, as military concerns displaced prior cooperative instincts. Faith in Arctic cooperation, as the war in Ukraine approaches the end of its first year with peace nowhere in sight, is at an all-time low. And without the continued, full participation of all Arctic Council stakeholders, inclusive of Russia, the world has lost an important forum where the “trust and mutual understanding” Korchunov described can be rekindled. With this distinctive forum for multi-level multilateralism, where the inherent asymmetry of actors and diversity of their perspectives was welcome for so long, it’s hard to imagine a way back from this impasse, and to overcome the new distrust felt across the Circumpolar Arctic. But if the risks, dangers, and enmity of the Cold War era could so quickly give way to a new cooperative spirit as witnessed in 1996 with the Arctic Council’s formation, it can happen again. But for this to happen, dialogue must resume between all Arctic stakeholders—and this restoration cannot happen too soon. The stakes are just too high, for the Arctic, and for the world at large.

There is thus much opportunity from participating in, and in so doing thwart Russia’s ambitions, with the power of consensus that undergirds the Arctic

Council. Even while Europe is aflame, the Arctic continues to melt. The challenge of climate change does not go away, nor do the many pressing challenges across the remote and isolated communities of the Arctic region. And, with tensions high in Europe, Moscow may choose to ship more of its petroleum products through the Northern Sea Route to Asian markets rather than to European ports—and if it does, its economy will come to increasingly rely on the stable border with the United States it worked so hard to create and to sustain since the final days of the Soviet Union. When Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867, it did so for a good reason: it was the best neighbour to have, in good times and bad. This remained true during the Second World War when that border provided a lend-lease lifeline to the Eastern Front, and it remained true during the Cold War even when tensions were high. And despite the uncertainty and chaos unleashed with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, it remains true even today.

There is every reason to isolate Russia as the war in Ukraine continues, to maintain sanctions, and to remind Putin that he has become a pariah that threatens global stability. But no matter how things unfold in Europe, Russia still remains half of the Circumpolar World. Governing the Arctic effectively, and peacefully, still requires Russia’s participation and consent. The Arctic climate will continue its inexorable thaw; its still pristine ecosystems remain as fragile and sublime now as they did before Russia invaded Ukraine. Arctic Indigenous Peoples continue to offer the world their wisdom and Traditional Knowledge, and require our continued, good-faith efforts to overcome past economic marginalization and political exclusion.

By keeping today’s pause on Arctic Council participation as brief as possible and resuming meetings among its stakeholders virtually and in symbolic protest, while trying to restore consensus with Russia on the many important issues that still unite the whole of the Circumpolar World, the Arctic Council can become part of the answer to, and resolution of, the current conflict. It can offer the very same bridge to a collaborative future that it has promised since 1996 and show that its second quarter century can be as successful as its first. The Arctic Council survived the collapse of consensus once before on an issue of great import—the climate change challenge that requires our collective unity to overcome. The Council can—and must—survive the current collapse in consensus that has accompanied the conflict over Ukraine and keep this important bridge to a more peaceful and united future open for the time when Moscow is ready to reset its policies and rejoin the consensus it once embraced.

Notes

1. Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, "Media Note: Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," March 3, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-arctic-council-cooperation-following-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>
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3. Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement." Just one day before, both the Finnish and Swedish ambassadors to Canada announced they would again be attending an upcoming session on "The Arctic Council at 25: Looking at the Next 25 Years," at the Arctic360 Arctic Infrastructure Investment Conference in Toronto, after Russia's planned participation was reversed. The Finnish and Swedish ambassadors had initially withdrawn in protest soon after the war began.
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5. "Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council: Joint Communique of the Governments of the Arctic Countries on the Establishment of the Arctic Council," Ottawa, Canada, September 19, 1996 (hereafter referred to as Ottawa Declaration, 1996), Preamble.
6. Preamble, Ottawa Declaration, 1996
7. Paragraph 1, Ottawa Declaration, 1996.
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10. Paragraph 2, Ottawa Declaration, 1996.
11. Paragraph 3, Ottawa Declaration, 1996.
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13. Arctic Athabaskan Council, "Press Release"
14. Arctic Athabaskan Council, "Press Release"
15. Arctic Athabaskan Council, "Press Release"
16. Arctic Athabaskan Council, "Press Release"
17. Russian Section of the Saami Council, "The Russian section of the Saami Council has issued a statement regarding the current situation in Russia (27.02.2022)," February 27, 2022.
18. Russian Section of the Saami Council, 2022.
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23. Gwich'in Council International, "Response to Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," March 3, 2022. <https://gwichincouncil.com/news>
24. Inuit Circumpolar Council, "Statement from the Inuit Circumpolar Council Concerning the Arctic Council," March 7, 2022.
25. Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, Document No. 64, March 1, 2022.
26. Statement of the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia, March 11, 2022, <https://polarconnection.org/international-committee-of-Indigenous-peoples-of-russia/>
27. Statement of the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia, 2022.
28. Gloria Dickie, "Russian Officials call Arctic Council Boycott 'Regrettable,'" *Saltwire.com*, March 4, 2002, <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/russian-officials-call-arctic-council-boycott-regrettable-100701993/>
29. Dickie, "Russian Officials."
30. Dickie, "Russian Officials."
31. Aidan Chamandy, "Russian Invasion Puts Arctic Council's Future on Ice," *iPolitics.ca*, March 4, 2002, <https://ipolitics.ca/2022/03/04/russian-invasion-puts-arctic-councils-future-on-ice/>
32. Chamandy, "Russian Invasion."
33. Chamandy, "Russian Invasion."
34. Chamandy, "Russian Invasion."
35. Arctic Council, "Interview with Nikolay Korchunov, Russia's Senior Arctic Official," 30 March 2020, <https://arctic-council.org/news/interview-with-nikolay-korchunov-russias-senior-arctic-official/>.
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40. This brought wars of regime change not only to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, where planning of the attacks took place, but to countries like Iraq that had nothing to do with the initial conflict, and with a fluctuating "coalition of the willing" in alignment with America at war (often to their eventual regret, such as the United Kingdom, which came to regret its support for the war in Iraq framed on a false pretext of WMD pre-emption.

41. Tom O'Connor, "Russia Says Ukraine Crisis Must Not Reach Arctic, NATO Says It Already Has," *Newsweek*, March 31, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-says-ukraine-crisis-must-not-reach-arctic-nato-says-it-already-has-1693940>.
42. O'Connor, "Russia Says."
43. O'Connor, "Russia Says."
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Book Review

Nested Federalism and Inuit Governance in the Canadian Arctic. By Gary N. Wilson, Christopher Alcantara, and Thierry Rodon. UBC Press, 2020. 207 pp.

Reviewed by Aaron John Spitzer

Ever since Indigenous Peoples in Canada mobilized against the federal government's 1969 White Paper on "Indian policy," a vast literature has emerged on the subsequent turn toward self-determination, especially addressing the moral, legal, and political grounds for, and difficulties of, achieving land-claim and self-government settlements, or "modern treaties." Much less scholarship, however, has described the Indigenous institutions and processes enacted by the modern treaties, and almost none has sought to assess and explain their efficacy. Into this gap step Wilson, Alcantara, and Rodon, with this efficient, descriptively rich, analytically probing contribution.

In their introduction, the authors pose two research questions: What explains differences in form and function of Indigenous modern-treaty institutions in Canada, and do these institutions achieve powers and policies Indigenous groups otherwise lack? The authors focus on a trio of cases—Nunavik in Quebec, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, and Nunatsiavut in Newfoundland and Labrador. These regions differ from other modern-treaty cases as they involve not First Nations or Métis but Inuit, who were never subject to Canada's Indian Act or historic treaties. Yet these three cases are representative of other modern treaties, and likely all future such treaties, as they are embedded in the governance architecture of existing provinces and territories. (Hence the authors exclude from the book Canada's other, most familiar Inuit settlement region, Nunavut, which uniquely comprises a purpose-built federal subunit.)

The authors study their cases through three analytical lenses, each discussed in Chapter One. The first lens, nested federalism, imported from Wilson's work on matryoshka federalism in Russia, focuses on the aforementioned embeddedness of Inuit modern treaties—to what degree are they constrained by, and pose