



## Norway-Russia disaster diplomacy for Svalbard

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### ABSTRACT

The Arctic is frequently framed as a region of disaster and conflict, as well as of opportunity and cooperation. Disaster diplomacy is one approach for examining how dealing with disasters might or might not affect conflict and cooperation, yet little work on Arctic disaster diplomacy has been completed, especially regarding specific bilateral relations. This paper contributes to filling in this gap by focusing on the post-USSR era to provide the first examination of the prospects and relevance of Norway-Russia disaster-related interaction for the Svalbard archipelago. As a discussion paper focusing on one case study, Norway-Russia disaster diplomacy is analysed in the context of Svalbard followed by potential prospects for Norway-Russia relations to be influenced by Svalbard's disaster-related activities. Possible meanings for Norway-Russia relations are then discussed. No indication is found that disaster-related activities for or around Svalbard are influencing or could influence Norway-Russia relations or that disaster-related activities are nudging or could push the diplomacy in new and lasting directions. As such, this Arctic case study supports the current disaster diplomacy conclusions that disaster-related activities are sometimes used to spur on existing processes, but have not yet shown to produce any different directions in conflict or cooperation.

### 1. Introduction

The Arctic is varyingly framed as a region of disaster, conflict, cooperation, and diplomacy (Jensen, 2016; Pincus and Ali, 2016; Sellheim et al., 2019; Wilson Rowe, 2018; Young, 1992). Rightly or wrongly, Russia is sometimes highlighted (e.g. Wither, 2018; Zimmerman, 2018) as the most challenging Arctic country with which to cooperate regarding safety, dangers, threats, conflicts, and disasters. Norway-Russia interaction is particularly poignant given that the countries' border represents the only Arctic land boundary between NATO (or 'the West') and Russia (see also Laruelle, 2014; Wilson Rowe, 2018). These two countries also share an internationally unique relationship regarding the archipelago of Svalbard. Svalbard is sovereign Norwegian territory, but is governed by the Svalbard Treaty (1920) which gives extensive living and working rights to citizens of signatory countries (originally 14 in 1920, rising to 46 currently). This situation means that the territory remains outside the Schengen Agreement and the European Economic Area, despite Norway's membership in both. The governance of Svalbard could potentially complicate disaster-

related activities for and around the archipelago, which has continually experienced numerous safety challenges.

This paper focuses on the post-USSR era to examine the prospects and relevance of Norway-Russia disaster-related interaction for Svalbard, providing a discussion paper focusing on one case study within a specific timeframe. As such, pre-1991 incidents are not covered, such as the crash of a Soviet military airplane in 1978 (Pedersen, 2009). The rest of this section describes the disaster diplomacy approach followed by Section 2 explaining the current state and future potential of Norway-Russia interaction for disaster-related activities in and around Svalbard. Section 3 analyses possible meanings for Norway-Russia relations, leading to the conclusion that starting from a top-down Oslo-Moscow perspective of Norway-Russia relations does not suffice for presenting the full story of Norway-Russia disaster diplomacy for Svalbard.

Disaster diplomacy is one approach for examining cross-border disaster-related activities. It examines one aspect of disaster-politics interactions: how disaster-related activities (meaning disaster risk reduction (DRR), disaster response, and disaster recovery) do and do not

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impact diplomatic collaboration (Kelman, 2012, 2016). Theoretical and empirical disaster diplomacy work so far has not substantiated the claim of new, lasting diplomacy based on disaster-related activities, even though short-term diplomatic interactions have sometimes been observed. Instead, pre- and post-disaster activities are frequently used as one excuse among many to pursue pre-desired diplomatic pathways, whether for rapprochement or for conflict, leading to short-term influence from disaster-related factors which is inevitably superseded by non-disaster related factors (Kelman, 2012, 2016).

Much disaster diplomacy research has focused on violent conflict or countries deemed to be ‘enemies’. Key examples are Greece-Turkey from the 1950s to the 2000s (Ker-Lindsay, 2007); Cuba-USA when Fidel Castro led Cuba (Glantz, 2000); climate change not likely influencing sub-Saharan wars (Buhag, 2010; Webersik, 2010); and the 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami supporting (but not creating) a peace deal in Aceh (Indonesia) and conflict escalation in Sri Lanka (Kelman, 2012). Disaster diplomacy has been less engaged with non-violent political disputes and disagreements. Holloway (2000), however, analysed how southern African countries collaborated from 1991 to 1993 to avoid a drought emergency from becoming a disaster at the same time as the regional wars and South African apartheid were ending. The few, detailed disaster diplomacy case studies not involving environmental hazards include poisoning from contaminated cooking oil in Morocco in 1959 (Segalla, 2012) and pollution-induced haze around Southeast Asia (Brauer and Hisham-Hashim, 1998; Islam et al., 2016). Meanwhile, disaster diplomacy work has dabbled in situations where non-sovereign territories officially conduct diplomatic interactions, known as para-diplomacy, proto-diplomacy, or micro-diplomacy (e.g. Bartmann, 2006; Duchacek et al., 1988).

The Arctic combines many of these issues. A growing body of literature on international cooperation on disaster-related activities for the Arctic (e.g. Kämpf and Haley, 2014; Sellheim et al., 2019; Sydnes et al., 2017) still leaves little research on Arctic disaster diplomacy. Kontar et al. (2018) examines Arctic disaster diplomacy through science, while Grydehøj (2014) looks at informal diplomacy for Svalbard with some application to disaster- and risk-related activities. Pincus and Ali (2016) explore many topics linked to aspects of disasters and cross-border interactions around the Arctic while Nikitina (2017) covers possibilities and challenges for Arctic regional cooperation and DRR. Few studies have picked specific bilateral relations for Arctic disaster diplomacy, as Kontar (2018) does for Russia and the USA, indicating the importance of the Norway-Russia case study selected here.

## 2. Disaster-related activities and Svalbard for Norway and Russia

### 2.1. Norway-Russia interests for Svalbard

Since the end of the Cold War, and with climate change effects manifesting, the Arctic has increasingly attracted the interest and concern of global parties (Jensen and Hønneland, 2015; Brady, 2017) including for Svalbard (Grydehøj, 2014). The region has always been subject to a gamut of hazards—such as storms, coastal and inland flooding, landslides and avalanches, earthquakes, meteorite strikes, and now climate change-related effects such as melting sea ice, sea-level rise, and melting permafrost—with expanding activities, traffic, people, and infrastructure are tending to increase disaster risks (Kämpf and Haley, 2014; AMAP, 2017). Within the changing Arctic environment and growing disaster risks, fears are expressed regarding disputes and conflicts as well as the emergence of opportunities for cooperation (Kontar et al., 2018; Mileski et al., 2018; Pincus and Ali, 2016).

These issues have gained particular prominence with respect to Norway-Russia relations (Grydehøj et al., 2012). The two countries have long stressed the significance of their Arctic regions with their official national and foreign policy discourses now intensifying the importance they attach to the Arctic (Government of Russia, 2008; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, 2017; Medby, 2014). Both

countries’ perceptions of the Arctic and of themselves as Arctic players; their historic and recent involvement in the Arctic; their interest in Svalbard; and their conglomerations of political, cultural, and economic interests, all feed into the complexities of Norway-Russia connections (Jensen and Skedsmo, 2010; Hønneland, 2016).

Against the background of continual Arctic environmental and social changes, some analysts express fears regarding possible hostile directions of Russia’s Arctic strategy and, thus, of the relationship between Russia (the only non-NATO littoral Arctic country) and Norway (Overland and Krivorotov, 2015). These concerns have been exacerbated by Russia’s unilateral actions, re-militarisation, and military activities in the Arctic, such as bomber flights along NATO’s Arctic coasts, which are perceived as gauging Western solidarity and response (Laruelle, 2014). Nevertheless, a long-term diplomatic freeze with Russia regarding the Arctic seems unlikely (Åtland and Pedersen, 2008; Young, 2019) especially given those who argue that Russia perceives that its own interests would be best served through bilateral and multilateral agreements, favouring cooperation over conflict and competition (Wilson Rowe and Blakkisrud, 2014; Nikitina, 2018). In fact, longstanding and largely successful bilateral Arctic cooperation between Norway and Russia covers fisheries, environmental management, search-and-rescue (SAR), and oil spill preparedness and response. Recent examples are the Barents Sea Treaty (2010) and Russia’s role in the Arctic Council’s legally binding agreements on SAR (Arctic Council, 2011), oil-spill response (Arctic Council, 2013), and scientific cooperation (Arctic Council, 2017). To paraphrase Staun (2017, 314), while Russia has been “breaking the rules of the game” in Ukraine, it has followed the “rules of the game” in the Arctic. Irrespective, tension remains, mostly due to balancing international cooperation and national sovereignty (Wilson Rowe and Blakkisrud, 2014, 66). Perceptions remain of ex-Soviet Russia contrasting with Norway being Western (e.g. Jensen, 2017), leading to differences on many Arctic issues including expected spheres of influence and navigational rights (Farré et al., 2014, Solski, 2013). Vast differences in viewpoints are assumed to exist given the different political backgrounds of Norway and Russia as well as different interpretations of balancing each one’s international and national concerns.

Svalbard epitomises this situation. Norway through its sovereignty and Russia through the Svalbard Treaty (1920) are the only states to maintain a continuous, historic presence on the archipelago. Russia acts partially through a proxy, the coal mining company Trust Arktikugol, with a presence in three locations: Barentsburg with limited mining, Grumant, and Pyramiden, with the latter two no longer involving active mining. Trust Arktikugol was established in 1931 and then changed from a coal mining enterprise into a state monopoly and the main managing company coordinating Russia’s Svalbard activities. It plays the largest role in supporting social infrastructure and logistics for Barentsburg, Pyramiden, and Grumant. All Russian federal budget subsidies for supporting Svalbard activities are consolidated through Trust Arktikugol, including federal budget allocations for the latest Russian research program on Svalbard (Government of Russia, 2017). Russia’s intention in maintaining Barentsburg, Pyramiden, and Grumant is assumed to be for rights and access to (potential) resources, and, ultimately, its use of the Arctic as an important outpost projecting its national prestige and position as a world power (Overland and Krivorotov, 2015; Wither, 2018; Zimmerman, 2018). Similarly, Svalbard features high on Norway’s Arctic agenda with Oslo seeking to reinforce the archipelago’s strategic and geopolitical importance (Government of Norway, 2015-2016; Grydehøj, 2014). Thus, Svalbard remains subject to carefully crafted political dialogue and calculations between Norway and Russia, with potential influences on disaster-related activities.

**Table 1**  
Examples of Norway-Russia disaster-related interactions around or near Svalbard.

Event	Date	Place	Casualties	Sources
Airplane crash on land	27/03/1991	Mimerbukta, Pyramiden	2 killed 1 injured	AIBN (1991)
Airplane crash into a mountain	29/08/1996	Operafjellet	141 killed	Olaisen et al. (1997)
Mine explosion	18/09/1997	Barentsburg	23 killed	Miljøverndepartementet (1999)
Submarine sinking ( <i>Kursk</i> )	12/08/2000	Barents Sea	118 killed	Amundsen et al. (1999)
Helicopter crash	30/03/2008	Heerodden, Barentsburg	3 killed 6 injured	AIBN (2013)
Tourists in dinghies hit by ice	21/08/2012	Ymerbukten Bay, Isfjord	1 killed 1 injured	AIBN (2014)
Ship crewmember fell overboard	26/11/2015	Sentralbanken	1 killed	AIBN (2017)
Tourist snowmobilers broke through the ice	27/04/2017	Tempelfjorden	1 killed 7 injured	Governor of Svalbard (2019)
Injured ship crewmember evacuated by helicopter and died	12/07/2017	Barents Sea	1 killed	AIBN (2018a)
Helicopter crash	26/10/2017	Isfjord near Barentsburg	8 killed	AIBN (2018b)
Moving a floating nuclear power plant ( <i>Akademik Lomonosov</i> )	04/2018	The entire Norwegian coast	None	Lenton (2018)
Ship crashed into the dock ( <i>Aurora Explorer</i> )	15/07/2018	Barentsburg	dozens of injuries	AIBN (2019)
Pollution	Ongoing	Svalbard	Not known	Banks et al. (2002) and Pouch et al. (2017)

## 2.2. Norway-Russia disaster-related cooperation and interactions for Svalbard

Svalbard must deal with a range of risks, vulnerabilities, and potential hazards, covering DRR, disaster response, and disaster recovery. Some incidents and activities are not necessarily directly linked to Russia or Russians, such as the avalanches on 19 December 2015 (Longyearbyen) and 19 May 2019 (Kamkrona) which each killed two people. Many others are directly about activities involving Norwegian as well as Russian citizens, authorities, and first responders on and around Svalbard (Table 1). For example, the 2017 snowmobile incident in which a Russian guide was killed involved the Russian tour company Grumant Arctic Travel operated by Trust Arktikugol, but Norwegian authorities dealt with the incident including fining the company under Norwegian law (Governor of Svalbard, 2019). The *Kursk* sinking and *Akademik Lomonosov* transport are Table 1's instances which are most distant from Svalbard, illustrating how Barents Sea waters are used, meaning that Svalbard must consider the potential for similar, nearer events.

Table 1 illustrates the variety and complexity of disaster-related activities linking Norway and Russia for and around Svalbard. Other experiences and examples range from individual considerations such as snowmobile safety (Mehus et al., 2011) and polar bear encounters (Gjertz et al., 1993) through to community-wide ones such as tsunamis (Berndt et al., 2009) and chemical contamination (Banks et al., 2002). Increasing industrial and recreational activities on Svalbard (Governor of Svalbard, 2018) are expected to increase risks while climate change is rapidly altering some hazards (Hanssen-Bauer et al., 2019). Given this diversity, the archipelago's self-reliance is essential. The next point of assistance, i.e. receiving emergency resources from mainland Norway (or even Russia or Greenland), is often too far away to be of immediate use, particularly given that weather and sea conditions can render external assistance infeasible for days. This situation highlights the need for local cooperation and pooling of resources.

Norway-Russia disaster-related cooperation on Svalbard-relevant matters such as SAR and oil spill response has existed for decades (e.g. Sydnes and Sydnes, 2013). Respective examples are the 1995 Norwegian-Russian SAR regime (Sydnes et al., 2017) and the 1994 oil spill bilateral regime (Sydnes and Sydnes, 2019). Such agreements are acted upon through joint training and exercises, involving, among others, Russian and Norwegian emergency management agencies, rescue centres, and coast guards. Meanwhile, cooperative DRR is indicated through both countries signing the Polar Code for shipping (IMO, 2017) which seeks to ensure safe and productive sea routes despite the social and environmental changes around the region (Hildebrand et al., 2018). Along these lines, Svalbard's population—including Russians and Norwegians—has become increasingly involved in disaster-related efforts across sectors, such as science, tourism, and pollution management.

In 2016 with support from Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) based in Longyearbyen set up the Arctic Safety Centre for teaching, research, and application of safety measures around the Arctic to improve disaster-related activities. Staff include Norwegians, Russians, and other nationalities. The mandate is focused on science and training for everyone, rather than science diplomacy or safety diplomacy per se, but research topics range from ice, ocean, and atmospheric physics to the tourism industry and pollution monitoring. The same holds for the research town of Ny-Ålesund, an international research station operated by Kings Bay AS, a company owned by the Government of Norway. Scientists collaborate across nationalities, including some disaster-related research, but little suggestion of science diplomacy exists beyond conducting research.

Meanwhile, the tourism boom continues for Svalbard, both in the number of visitors and the number of operators (Holmgaard et al., 2019). This growth has led to a greater variety of tour operators and tourists, both in terms of nationality (e.g. the Russian company Grumant Arctic Travel, established in 2014), their Arctic experience, and the products and services they provide or seek. All operators are subject to Norwegian law regardless of nationality and several of them run trips to or near the Russian settlements. They have become acutely aware of the hazards to which their tours are subject, such as rock slides, avalanches, storms, ice conditions, and polar bears. Operators communicate among themselves both informally (e.g. through local Facebook groups and specialised WhatsApp groups) and through meetings facilitated by the Governor of Svalbard to discuss new regulations, changing risks, measures to be taken, and experiences. There is a sense that tour operators will assist each other when needed, irrespective of nationality, yet information exchange and coordination has tended to be more frequent among the longer-established Norwegian-run tour operators, due to their vast experience of Svalbard and already existing connections.

Regarding pollution as a disaster (e.g. Aitsi-Selmi et al., 2015), mutual assistance efforts have been driven by a team developing 'Project Isfjorden' (Miljødirektoratet et al., 2018), now in its third year, which has collected and removed several tons of plastic waste from Svalbard's shores. 'Voluntourism' initiatives by some ship tourism operators, such as 'Clean Up Svalbard' (AECO, 2014) which is now in effect, combine tours with cleaning up trash around Svalbard. Cooperation, joint training, and exchange to prevent and deal with pollution from research stations around Svalbard also occurs (Tummon and Schneider, 2019). These initiatives are specifically to counter pollution, rather than being for diplomacy, and anyone can be involved regardless of nationality or origin, provided they can get to Svalbard. In fact, Russia's initial concerns about the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act (Government of Norway, 2001) and subsequent acceptance of it (Åtland and Pedersen, 2008) displayed no lasting impact on Norway-Russia diplomacy.

Despite this wide variety of disaster-related activities and the

Norwegian-Russian cooperation in many instances at different levels, none of the reports, citations, or documents indicate impact on Norway-Russia relations. Instead, the links are confined principally to on-the-ground, typically operational disaster-related activities without indications that disaster diplomacy is occurring.

### 2.3. Potential Norway-Russia disaster diplomacy for Svalbard

Many possibilities remain for Norway-Russia disaster-related cooperation for and around Svalbard which provide potential for disaster diplomacy, even though little seems to be happening thus far. Concerns about terrorism or sabotage are expressed, though the risk is considered to be very low (Governor of Svalbard, 2016), while war and violent conflict would not currently be expected between Norway and Russia, despite threats at times (Åtland and Pedersen, 2008). Weapons-related violence in Svalbard is very rare even with the proliferation of guns and knives. The first and so far only armed bank robbery in Longyearbyen's history was by a Russian citizen on 21 December 2018 who was quickly apprehended, tried, and sentenced by Norwegian authorities with limited Russian involvement.

As a non-violent example, in April and May 2019, the pilots of one of the commercial airline companies serving Svalbard went on strike for one week, severely curtailing the movement of people and goods, including bringing food to the archipelago. In a longer strike, what would have been the prospects for Moscow to offer to fly in supplies, irrespective of the Government of Norway's response? Similarly, with power outages or water supply disruptions, plans exist for evacuating the population (Longyearbyen Local Government, 2017), leading to questions about the possible response from Moscow, especially for the Russian settlements but presumably in collaboration with the Government of Norway.

Svalbard also had to manage reduced air travel when the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull erupted, stopping much air travel across Europe from 15 to 22 April 2010 and for shorter periods in May 2010. Continuing in the realm of environmental hazards, avalanches and other snow hazards (Eckerstorfer and Christiansen, 2011), rockslides and other slides (Hartvich et al., 2017), tsunamis (Berndt et al., 2009), the Haakon Mosby Mud Volcano (Vogt et al., 1997), meteorite strikes (Gudlaugsson, 1993), and solar flares (i.e. space weather; Simmons and Henriksen, 1988) yield possibilities for cooperation. Until now, the pattern has been for local actions to dominate, as it should for all disaster-related activities when feasible (Lewis, 1999; Wisner et al., 2004), which means local Norwegian authorities leading, followed by escalation to Norwegian authorities beyond Svalbard when local actions do not suffice. That is, Svalbard being a part of Norway prioritises Norwegian responses, with limited scope for other governments to assist. In the Russian settlements, anyone local is prioritised for disaster-related action, but within the context of oversight and support from the local Norwegian authorities—which is how the Svalbard Treaty (1920) is meant to operate. For instance, irrespective of Russian laws on DRR and disaster response (Government of Russia, 1994), all settlements on Barentsburg must adhere to Norwegian laws (Government of Norway, 1925, 2001).

Russia is manoeuvring to make use of the Northeast Passage (or Northern Sea Route) as a shipping route through its waters between the Atlantic and Pacific, despite viability challenges including shallowness and lack of ports (Farré et al., 2014). Asserting sovereignty over these waters is not new to Russia or the USSR (Pharand, 1968). Not all such routes necessarily hug the Norwegian shoreline and skirt Murmansk. Depending on ice, storms, and waves around the Arctic Ocean, routes might go north by Greenland and pass by Svalbard (see also Nyman et al., 2020). Joint Norwegian-Russian monitoring of vessels would help for DRR and overlapping responses might be necessary in case of problems. Such a cooperative monitoring approach is already in force for parts of the Barents Sea near the coast from Lofoten to Murmansk (IMO, 2012), although is not truly joint since Norway is responsible for the

Norwegian coastline and Russia is responsible for the Russian coastline. Norway has been developing a vision of establishing Svalbard as a regional servicing and SAR hub which would then be available to ships using Svalbard as a conduit to and from parts of the Northeast Passage or elsewhere. As an analogue, on 18 December 2007, as part of mutual aid along the Russia-Norway land border, a Norwegian rescue helicopter crossed into Russia to save twelve crew from the *Viktor Koryakin* which had foundered on the Rybachiy Peninsula (Marchenko et al., 2015).

In parallel, a longstanding discussion exists about establishing a Russian SAR base at Barentsburg, which the October 2017 helicopter crash (Table 1) brought to the forefront through Russian and Norwegian authorities publicly expressing their disagreement on the matter (Staalesen 2017). Logistically, ensuring emergency access of Russian SAR vessels to Svalbard territorial waters is not straightforward, as it would require permission from Norway, which would be done according to the existing bilateral and Arctic Council SAR agreements (Sydnes et al., 2017). Time could be lost in doing so, without some form of pre-approval, which Norway is unlikely to support given that Norway tends to prefer retaining control of Svalbard's SAR activities. Instead, dialogue has been moving towards cooperative responses and joint SAR actions. For example, Trust Arktikugol's SAR team consists of seventeen professionals contracted and permanently based in Barentsburg who have already been involved in training exercises and emergency actions jointly with Norwegian emergency services (Shepelev, 2015). Norway could consider more use of Trust Arktikugol's SAR team along with existing resources and technical capacity in Barentsburg (Chernakova, 2019).

Russia continues to use nuclear vessels in the Barents Sea and wider area, as shown by *Kursk* and *Akademik Lomonosov* (Table 1). Even if they remain officially outside of Svalbard's territorial waters, unofficial incursions would always be a possibility (and similarly with nuclear vessels from NATO and other countries) while any broken nuclear vessel could drift towards Svalbard. The need for and activities covering Norway-Russia cooperation on radiation incidents is openly discussed in the media (Nilsen, 2019), further highlighting how non-Russian nuclear vessels are part of the Svalbard disaster equation (see also Heininen and Segerstahl, 2002).

Nuclear or radiation disasters could link to health diplomacy and medical diplomacy for disasters, as could epidemics and pandemics. Quarantine in a small settlement such as Longyearbyen or Barentsburg has the advantages of the town being isolated with air and sea transportation easily controlled, but has the disadvantage of 100% of the population potentially being rapidly exposed to a pollutant or pathogen. Cruise ships are known venues for outbreaks (Fisher et al., 2018) and some of them carry more passengers than the population of Longyearbyen and Barentsburg combined. If a large cruise ship with an epidemic on board seeks to dock at Svalbard for supplies and treatment, the settlements would not likely be able to cope without outside assistance, so an option exists for Russia or other Svalbard Treaty signatories to offer aid to Norway. Solid foundations of research for health diplomacy and medical diplomacy exist (e.g. Aginam, 2003, Iglehart, 2004) including directly related to disaster diplomacy (e.g. Whittaker et al., 2018), providing a baseline for planning.

### 3. Discussion: Meanings for Norway-Russia relations

Section 2, and wider disaster diplomacy theory (Kelman, 2012, 2016), explains how disaster-related cooperation emerges in various forms. For disaster-related Norway-Russia relations around Svalbard, formal interactions can be multilateral (e.g. the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council) and bilateral (e.g. the Norwegian-Russian Nuclear Commission, the Joint Norwegian-Russian Environment Commission, the Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission, and the Norwegian-Russian Energy Dialogue). As well, government officials interact at the local level, such as in May 2019 when Norwegian health

authority members visited a newly equipped Barentsburg hospital to strengthen direct contacts between Barentsburg and Longyearbyen's health centres, including undertaking joint responses in case of emergencies. The Governor of Svalbard has bimonthly contact meetings with Russia's Consulate General in Barentsburg while the Governor's office is represented one day per month in Barentsburg, to offer contact with the local population (Governor of Svalbard, 2018). With the Governor of Svalbard, Grumant Arctic Travel was involved in the joint Norwegian-Russian emergency and safety training in 2018.

These formal and official connections are important for improved disaster-related activities, but are not leading to other forms of Norwegian-Russian diplomacy. The narrative of a hostile Russia versus NATO in the Arctic (e.g. Wither, 2018; Zimmerman, 2018) does not assist in creating these connections or breeding trust. Yet it could be that Russia, Norway, or both do not especially want such connections or trust. In April 2016, Norway and Russia tussled over using Longyearbyen airport to transport Russian military personnel and equipment to and from Barneo, a private Russian camp near the North Pole. Then, NATO held a meeting in Longyearbyen in May 2017, raising Russia's hackles.

Other factors inhibiting Norway-Russia relations for disaster-related activities on Svalbard are the distances, terrain, and limited transportation between the settlements, so special effort is needed to continually organise and participate in joint events and interactions. Keeping in mind the increasing prevalence of electronic meetings and media, other disaster diplomacy case studies have analysed this propinquity factor. They show that propinquity has little impact on formal disaster diplomacy (Kelman, 2012), but it can influence individuals at all levels who use neighbourliness to push their own disaster diplomacy agenda (s) (e.g. Ker-Lindsay, 2007 for Greece-Turkey).

Consequently, barriers to propinquity can impede informal contacts which would develop one-on-one trust and individual-to-individual exchange. Residents from all nationalities on Svalbard and across the settlements often try to connect via specifically established social media groups, cultural and sporting events, and in-person meetings. Over time, they typically lead to information and skills exchange regarding disasters, such as snow conditions, equipment availability, and SAR. Individuals connect on behalf of their businesses, to help each other, to provide ideas, and especially within the tourism industry, to ensure that safety needs are fulfilled. Scepticism remains regarding the compatibility of Norwegian and Russian risk perceptions, safety standards, resources, training, and procedures. Another inhibiting factor in informal connections is the personnel turnover. In both the Norwegian and Russian settlements, most of the population is employed on fixed-term contracts lasting 2–4 years. In Longyearbyen, the average length of stay for residents is about four years, complicating informal diplomacy, since developing and maintaining mutual trust takes time and is typically about specific individuals. Those who remain longer typically have stronger informal links.

Among all these inhibitors, one form of formal and informal interaction is scientists from Norway, Russia, and other countries continually collaborating on disaster research and its application for Svalbard. It is rarely expressed as science diplomacy (cf. Kontar et al., 2018), instead being to produce the best possible science (e.g. Marchenko et al., 2015; Sydnes and Sydnes, 2013, 2019). Collaborating scientists do not even represent their countries or nationalities, instead tending to represent themselves and their institutions. That is, a Russian scientist living and working in Norway at a Norwegian institution (or elsewhere) would not necessarily have any authority, interest, or credibility in representing Russia or the Government of Russia—in the same way that a Norwegian scientist living and working in Norway at a Norwegian institution (or elsewhere) would not necessarily have any authority, interest, or credibility in representing Norway or the Government of Norway. Consequently, Russians and Norwegians collaboratively researching cannot be assumed inevitably to be science diplomacy, let alone disaster diplomacy.

Nonetheless, no matter how much interpersonal interaction occurs between individuals in and interested in Svalbard, closer and more formal interactions on disaster-related activities could be inhibited by Norway and Russia each fearing infringement on sovereignty in and access to Svalbard (as shown by the discussions over establishing a Russian SAR base at Barentsburg). With more countries being actively involved in Svalbard, the concerns of Norway and Russia also extend beyond each other. Protecting their own national interests in the context of all Norway-Russia relations seems to impede official disaster diplomacy efforts. Each country implies hesitancy in accepting Svalbard as an international space for cooperation (for instance, such as Antarctica) beyond what is stated explicitly in the Svalbard Treaty (1920). This common interest of avoiding Svalbard as too much of an international space does not bring Norway and Russia closer together. Norway effectively adopts the stance that Russia and other countries should not aim for disaster diplomacy, because Norway as the archipelago's governing state must lead and control any disaster-related work, especially disaster response. One example of this point is the set-up of Norway's two Joint Rescue Coordination Centres (JRCC), with the JRCC of Northern Norway based in Bodø and stating its responsibility as being from 65°N to the North Pole including Svalbard (Hovedredningssentralen, 2019). Roberts and Paglia (2016) and Misund (2017) describe a similar point for science on Svalbard, scuttling thoughts of science diplomacy (e.g. Kontar et al., 2018), because science is used to keep Svalbard within the Norwegian fold.

Meanwhile, Russia feels just as entitled, seeking to exercise its treaty rights as much as possible. In 2012, the new national strategy of the Russian presence on Svalbard was introduced (Government of Russia, 2012) and the road map for its realisation had been enacted in 2015, shifting strategic foci (see Government of Russia, 2016). Although Russia still conducts limited coal mining around Barentsburg, the main national interest and priority is research, since Svalbard is regarded by Russia as a unique site for advancing Arctic science. In 2014, Russia's science centre and permanent Arctic expedition was established with research facilities in Barentsburg and Pyramiden and with a detailed conceptual and research programme (Government of Russia, 2014), some of which relates to DRR such as on climate change and tourism risk management. Coordinated by the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute in St. Petersburg, the work covers multiple disciplines from glaciology to history, but, as with Norway (Misund, 2017), the science is used to legitimise Russia's presence (Roberts and Paglia, 2016).

Overall, disaster-related activities for Svalbard display few deep meanings for Norway-Russia relations, apart from using disaster-related activities as one approach among many for asserting each country's pre-conceived rights to the archipelago. Cooperative research, education, training, and action continue, but without indications that it substantively influences diplomacy, such as pushing it in new or lasting directions. As such, this case study supports the current disaster diplomacy conclusions (Kelman, 2012, 2016) that disaster-related activities are sometimes used to spur on existing processes and support short-term diplomacy, but tend not to produce different directions in international relations.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper contributes to filling in the literature's gap of examining bilateral disaster diplomacy in the Arctic by examining the prospects and relevance for Norway-Russia disaster-related interaction for and around Svalbard during the post-USSR time period. Operational examples were presented along with discussion of how Norway and Russia are interacting for Svalbard's disaster-related activities, yet without apparent influence on their relations. Overall, no indications could be found that disaster-related activities for or around Svalbard are definitely influencing or could fundamentally influence Norway-Russia diplomacy.

These conclusions need to be considered within this paper's

limitations. First, the paper started out and focused on formal and official instances of disaster-related activities for Svalbard, emulating how much disaster diplomacy work (e.g. Kelman, 2012, 2016) has proceeded. As emerged from the material and discussion, plenty is happening beyond official diplomacy—including beyond para-diplomacy, proto-diplomacy, and micro-diplomacy—at the individual, organisational, and local levels, whereby people use their own skills, networks, contacts, and interests to work with people whom they wish to. Sometimes, these activities involve government workers in their official capacities, such as civil servants or scientists, but not always. A deeper understanding of these informal, usually person-to-person, interactions for disaster-related activities would add depth and breadth to disaster diplomacy. Similarly, the analysis here lacks historical depth. 1991 is an understandable starting point to analyse the present day, due to the step change which occurred with the USSR's collapse. Nevertheless, many current Svalbard-relevant structures, institutions, and attitudes emerged from the Cold War and might even lead farther back in time. Could the main beginning for Svalbard disaster diplomacy be the ramping up of polar exploration and rescues in the late nineteenth century or even the archipelago's use as a hunting base starting in the seventeenth century?

Irrespective, the material and interpretation so far for Norway-Russia and Svalbard reaffirm prior disaster diplomacy conclusions that disaster-related activities do not create new or lasting diplomacy. In line with all previous disaster diplomacy case studies, non-disaster factors—namely baseline politics and multi-scalar geopolitics—seem to be more important than disaster-related activities. The lack of apparent disaster diplomacy, however, does not directly inhibit cooperative DRR, disaster response, or disaster recovery operationally. Indirect effects, such as information or resources withheld from Svalbard by Oslo or Moscow alongside possible distrust among specific players, require further investigation, along with the possibilities for continuing to improve collaboration, especially for pre-disaster activities.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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