

Predictability of the quasi-biennial oscillation and its northern winter teleconnection on seasonal to decadal timescales

Scaife et al. 2014, *Geophys. Res. Lett.*

Preliminaries

- QBO** → downward propagating shift in mean zonal winds in the equatorial stratosphere, from westerly to easterly and back again, with a period of approximately 24 to 30 months; one of the few purely atmospheric sources of climate predictability on seasonal to decadal timescales
- Northern winter teleconnection** → here, the Arctic Oscillation (positive phase characterized by anomalously low sea level pressure over the Arctic and anomalously high sea level pressure over the North Pacific and North Atlantic)

- Models of $\sim 1^\circ$ atmospheric resolution require combined forcing of the QBO from resolved waves and the parameterization of nonorographic gravity wave momentum fluxes
- Supplemental figures: <https://awsisco.github.io/qbo-discussion/>

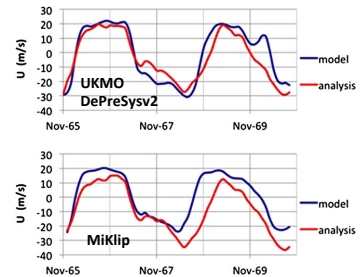
Goals

- 1) Quantify the prediction skill of the QBO in seasonal and decadal ensemble forecasts
- 2) Assess whether the influence of the QBO on extratropical surface winter climate is reproduced in these forecasts

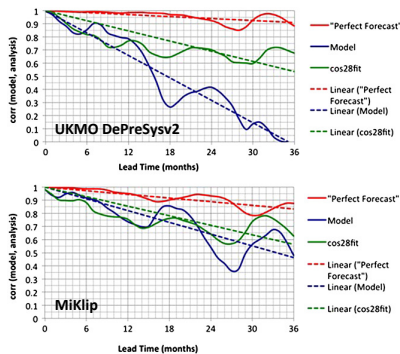
Hindcast Summary

Seasonal	UKMO GloSea5	1996–2009	9 members
	ECMWF System 4	1981–2010	51 members
Decadal	UKMO DePreSysv2	1960–2006 (1 Nov)	4 members
	MiKlip	1961–2012 (1 Jan)	5 members

- Both decadal systems capture the period of the QBO reasonably well
- UKMO better captures the asymmetric amplitude (E > W) than MiKlip
- Need a QBO diagnostic to assess predictability → 30 hPa monthly mean zonal wind near the equator



Predictability of the QBO



- 3 methods are used to assess predictability of the QBO:
 1. Compare ensemble mean forecasts to observations
 2. Compare observations to a cosine function with a period of 28 months
 3. Compare individual ensemble members to the mean of the remaining members (this is a perfect model experiment in which the same numerical model produces the forecasts and the data that replaces observations)
- Method 1 (blue) shows correlation scores > 0.8 up to 6 months and > 0.7 up to 12 months
- For UKMO DePreSysv2 forecasts started in early November, the probability of correctly predicting the winter QBO phase is greater than climatology (50%) for the 3 coming winters (not shown)
- Method 2 (green) shows that using a simple statistical model yields skill at least as high as that found in dynamical prediction systems, especially beyond 1 year
- Method 3 (red) removes the effect of model error and has correlation scores > 0.8 out to 3 years ahead → thus, higher forecast skill is achievable if initial condition and model errors are reduced
- However, having a constant source of parametrized gravity waves from the lower atmosphere is not realistic; the scores for Method 3 may therefore be an overestimate

Sensitivity to the Seasonal Cycle and QBO Phase

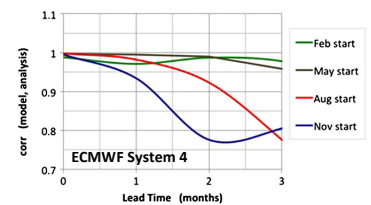
- Westerly phase is weaker in amplitude, propagates down faster; easterly QBO phase in winter exhibits enhanced stalling (i.e., a delayed transition to easterlies between 30 and 50 hPa)

Dependence on phase at initialization

- Split forecasts into W and E categories based on phase at model initialization
- Differences in skill were small, but starting in the westerly phase with impending easterlies a year later showed slightly lower skill

Dependence on season at initialization

- Forecasts initialized in winter are less skillful than those initialized in other seasons
- Decrease in skill as winter approaches is consistent with irregular downward QBO propagation



Teleconnections to Boreal Winter Surface Climate

- Westerly QBO → stronger SLP gradients and stronger, northward shifted tropospheric jets
- Easterly QBO → more negative NAO/AO
- UKMO DePreSysv2 (b): small and statistically insignificant differences between E and W phases
- MiKlip and ECMWF System 4 (d and e, respectively): very weak teleconnection signatures
- UKMO GloSea5 (c): sign and spatial pattern is reproduced (high pressure over Arctic and lower pressure at midlatitudes) but amplitudes differ from observed
- Skillful QBO prediction does not guarantee predictability of the extratropical winter teleconnection

