

International Relations and the ARCTIC

**UNDERSTANDING
POLICY AND GOVERNANCE**



**EDITED BY
Robert W. Murray and Anita Dey Nuttall**

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE ARCTIC

Understanding Policy and Governance

Robert W. Murray and Anita Dey Nuttall



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What began as a casual conversation between two colleagues at the University of Alberta in the fall of 2010 has finally ended up as a collection of thoughtful, insightful and well-crafted essays of which we are extremely proud. There is no denying that interest in the Arctic has intensified in recent years for scholars, policy-makers and casual observers, and this book illustrates how the political variables at play are at the forefront of discussion and debate about the future of the region, its peoples and environments.

A project of this magnitude could never have been achieved without a large team of people all believing in the importance of making a significant scholarly contribution to Arctic political discourse. We owe a profound word of thanks to the world-class group of contributors who donated their time and brilliant scholarship to this project. Without them, this book would never have come to life. The team at Cambria Press, especially Paul Richardson, Toni Tan and Michelle Wright, have been so helpful in both the manuscript editing and preparation processes, but also as fierce supporters of this project from start to finish. Together, we are indebted to the Canadian Circumpolar Institute, the University of Alberta, OCSTA and the Frontier Centre for Public Policy for their

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Robert W. Murray and Anita Dey Nuttall

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INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING POLICY
AND GOVERNANCE
IN THE ARCTIC

Robert W. Murray and Anita Dey Nuttall

From the outset, the academic field of study that became known as international relations (IR) was preoccupied with the study of interstate relationships in the international system. Conflict, power, security, and the perception of and the prospects for peace have been constant themes in how scholars come to understand the international realm, as well as the various actors and trends involved in global complexity. Typical studies of international security and conflict have focused on two world wars, the Cold War and nuclear deterrence, civil conflicts, prospects for humanitarian intervention, gender and neocolonial issues, and, more recently, the effects of modern globalization processes. All of these matters are important in their own right, but there remains one

prominent element of the contemporary international security environment that continually goes unnoticed, and that is the Arctic.

Discussion on the changing Arctic environment, as well as on the impacts of such change on the cultures and livelihoods of indigenous and local communities, plays out against the backdrop of the shifting views on the concept of sovereignty in international relations and international law, and it generates both concern and interest over the future of the region and its peoples. Questions about the defense of state territorial rights over the Arctic, the impact of changing maritime borders, climate change and protection of vulnerable ecosystems, safeguarding of future livelihoods of local inhabitants, and enforcing regulations of ice-free waterways and sea routes, to name a few, deepen the complexities of interstate relations and bilateral or multilateral agreements of the Arctic states. As contested territorial claims in the Arctic remain, and as non-polar countries look increasingly to the circumpolar North and imagine it to be a region that will provide global resources for the future, the potential stresses these developments place on international security cannot be ignored.

LOOKING NORTH

The proliferation of interest in the circumpolar region has been an exceptionally noteworthy trend in state and institutional policy making since the end of the Cold War. There are a variety of factors that have led to such intense interest on the part of states and the organizations they comprise. Mark Nuttall summarized some of the reasons for intense Arctic interest in recent decades:

Previously, it could be argued, the Arctic had, since the end of World War II, been divided between the Western Arctic and the Soviet Arctic, with the two regions becoming strategically important in a military sense. From the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, awareness of the effects of contaminants, trans-boundary pollutants and climate change played its part in new

circumpolar initiatives to assess, understand and call for the development of policy strategies to deal with significant environmental issues that affect the region but are global in origins or impact. Initiatives such as the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) and, since 1996, the Arctic Council have aimed to ensure that Arctic issues remain high on the domestic and international agendas of the eight Arctic states (Canada, the United States, Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia), as well a handful of non-Arctic states.¹

Despite the overt policy strategies being developed by numerous states, the reactions of existing international organizations, as well as the concerns of indigenous peoples within Arctic nations and the formation of new entities designed to specifically address issues in the Arctic, international security scholars have paid relatively little attention to the region in a way that has advanced theory in the study of international relations.

There are many reasons why this could be the case, though no singular explanation is entirely adequate. The field of security studies has grown well beyond the traditional focus on interstate relations and war and now involves many more actors, trends, and theoretical elements that in some ways results in a situation where the importance of state-based conflict has become conveniently ignored or overlooked. There is also a marked increase in the distance between international relations or security research and policy, thus in many ways begging whether IR scholarship is even capable of engaging in matters of Arctic security because of its growing abstractness. Whatever the reason, states have certainly shown their interests in looking north, and it is time international security scholarship followed suit. This volume is an effort to examine the theoretical, policy, and strategic trends of actors in the Arctic region through an IR perspective. However, the uniqueness of this volume lies not simply in understanding the Arctic from the disciplinary perspective of IR, but more importantly we want this compilation of chapters to throw light on how the Arctic as an area of study contributes to the

development of the IR discipline. In addition to IR specialists and political scientists, we consciously chose international expertise on Arctic security and sovereignty from different disciplinary backgrounds, such as anthropology, geography, law, and history. Hence this volume is distinctive in that it provides coverage of Arctic issues by scholars from those disciplines whose work converges on areas traditionally seen as the intellectual domain of IR. We believe that the contributors to this book bring critical perspectives to our focus on the confluence of politics, society, and environment to inform a better and comprehensive understanding of contemporary Arctic issues.

EXAMINING THE THEORIES AND POLICIES OF CIRCUMPOLAR POLITICS

This ambitious project aims to bring together some of the most important voices in the study of the Arctic to demonstrate the region's vital importance in discussions of international relations and security. While it is difficult to encompass the vast array of explanations and issues currently facing the Arctic, this volume is divided into three sections that all seek to influence how observers can contemplate the political landscape of the circumpolar region.

Section 1: Arctic Sovereignty in Theory

Before exploring the responses and strategies of individual states or institutions in the Arctic, it is essential to place debates about the security and behavioral dynamics of circumpolar relations in context. To do so, this section focuses on four of the most relevant and popular approaches to foreign policy analysis that apply to the Arctic. This is not to dismiss theoretical camps not included here but rather to emphasize the four schools of thought currently dominating explanations of Arctic sovereignty and security.

The first approach presented, which likely comes as little surprise because of its prominent place in international security debates, is realism. In a time when realist thinking finds itself constantly under attack and, according to many critical theorists, in serious decline, Robert Murray asserted that there is no better explanatory model for contemporary Arctic relations than realism. To make his case, Murray presented the subvariants of realist theory and remarked that, while realists themselves may not be entirely united in their analyses of current world events, the “three S’s”—statism, survival, and self-help—are all alive and well in the strategies being employed by states in the High North. To ground his theoretical analysis of realism empirically, Murray focused on two states in particular, namely Canada and Russia, whose Arctic strategies both employ heavily militaristic and survivalist elements. Murray contended that, far from being a theory of the past, the field and its onlookers must revisit the traditional works of realism to comprehend effectively just how various actors are approaching the Arctic region.

In response to Murray’s claims, Tom Keating dissected the liberal-internationalist aspects of Arctic affairs and offered an intriguing argument that states have actually sacrificed their independence and have instead chosen to embed themselves into institutions designed to mitigate conflict and hard power solutions. To do so, Keating provided a useful explanation of liberal international theory and its foundations in idealistic thinkers such as Locke and Kant. These foundational precepts, Keating claimed, have led to a regime where states seek to cooperate through systems of law, governance, and organization that would prevent the pessimistically realist prediction of conflict in the Arctic. Keating’s empirical demonstration for liberal ideology in the Arctic highlights the role of treaties and agreements that allow the Arctic to be managed and conflicts resolved, rather than states allowing their competing claims to escalate unnecessarily into real conflict.

Rather than presenting the case for Arctic sovereignty and strategy as a black-and-white argument, Matthew Weinert intervened in the theo-

retical debate by presenting a case for a hybrid approach, encapsulated through the English School of IR theory. Weinert's chapter presents the reader with a comprehensive explanation of the English School's tenets and shows quite compellingly that states and their leaders rarely (if ever) make decisions in world affairs using a singular lens of international theory. The beauty of the English School, according to Weinert, is that it allows decision makers to employ multiple frameworks in one coherent way of thinking, premised primarily on the function of international society. Weinert highlighted the complexity of defining sovereignty and the importance of secondary institutions in helping states to navigate their competing claims over the Arctic. At the core of the English School contribution to thinking about the Arctic, as explained very clearly by Weinert, is the concept of legitimacy. Realists see a claim as legitimate if State A can outgun State B; liberal internationalists see legitimacy as preference or institutionally driven; the English School, however, reminds people that legitimacy and how they address claims change over time with the values of a given international society. Historical context, then, is a core element in how one comprehends actors' strategies toward a given problem.

In a demonstration of one of the most contemporary outlooks in international relations, the next chapter introduces the perspective of green theory and ecological discourse on Arctic relations. Guy-Serge Côté and Matthew Paterson argued convincingly that the Arctic has become an ideal demonstration of postsovereign politics. This contention is predicated on the notion that, without a single site of authority to dictate or settle conflictual claims, the transnational nature of emerging institutions, practices, and networks all serve to bring traditional ways of thinking about sovereignty, like those presented by Murray, Keating, and Weinert, into question. Further, Côté and Paterson went on to introduce a new way of thinking about green theory and its understanding of sovereignty, noting that the Arctic poses both challenges and opportunities for ecopolitical progress in the High North. The emphasis on ecological and environmental aspects of the Arctic debate in both theory