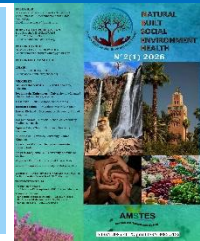




Natural Built Social Environment Health

ISSN 3085-461X

www.nbseh.org



BOOK REVIEW



A Research Agenda for Arctic Security and Governance, Elgar Research Agendas, Edited by Marc Jacobsen and Elana Wilson Rowe, 2026, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, pages xi + 207, \$130.50/£100.00, (hardback) ISBN: 978-1-0353-1860-5

Unlike Antarctica which is a landmass covered by thick ice, the Arctic is a frozen water body surrounded by landmass that include the United States and the Russian Federation. The Arctic was heavily militarized during the Cold War (p. 176). With the end of the Cold War new avenues of cooperation emerged. Creation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991, inclusion of Indigenous permanent participants in AEPS, and subsequent creation of the Arctic Council in 1996 were instrumental in making the Arctic a unique zone of cooperation insulated from global conflicts ('Arctic Exceptionalism') (p. 175). As a result, the Arctic was referred to as a 'region' and a 'geographical space' (p. 161). This simplification disregarded its vast expanse and geographical constraints (p. 165) and overlooked the intertwined security interest and governance needs of states in the Arctic (p. 161). This broad brush approach has mixed everything with everything else. Statements like 'interest in the Arctic region' do not indicate *which part* or *for what reason* but create ambiguity.

It is to remove this ambiguity that this book, a collection of ten papers from various authors, presents different viewpoints on the Arctic in terms of its spatial extent and relevant policy issues. The book discusses a diverse set of issues that include *regionalism* (c. 2), *scholarship* (c. 3), *governance* (c. 4), *science diplomacy* (c. 5), *security* (c. 6), *energy* (c. 7), *connectivity* (c. 8), *geography* (c. 9-10), and *threats* (c. 11), providing a temporal perspective on how each one may be outlined in the future (p. 3). But what happens in the Arctic does not remain in the Arctic. The Arctic is impacted by global geopolitical events; the chapters are interlinked with cross referencing between chapters.

As climate change reshapes the region, it is possible that some countries may be excluded from the Arctic construct. Changes in the physical and political climate of those living there are

visible (p. 3). As an ice-free Arctic brings in security rivalries and change in military balance (p. 4), the impact of climate change on transnational and regional Arctic security and governance needs to be empirically explored and not assumed (p. 5). Accordingly, the book examines regional options of mitigation (p. 4) but does not discuss their governance. Once considered a region of peace and cooperation ('Arctic Exceptionalism') the Arctic is slowly transforming into a focal point of international rivalry and strategic competition (p. 175). Geopolitics has returned to the region, but it is not the same as seen during the Cold War. It is more complex and personal. In this Cold War 2.0 era, the fight is between democracy and authoritarianism; but acceptance of authoritarianism drives Arctic Exceptionalism 2.0 (p. 179). Understanding the context in which these threats operate is essential to prepare future mitigation and resilience strategies (p. 176).

Acts of aggression by Russia on Crimea and Ukraine in 2014 and again on Ukraine in 2022 are driven by territory expansion as the other 79% wars between 1648 and 1990 were (p. 168). This has become possible because the United States has shifted its priorities towards the Arctic. Today, the United States focuses on neighbouring Arctic territory (Greenland and Canada) and not on the European Arctic. The United States defends Greenland to defend itself (p. 159). This has allowed Russia to exert authoritarianism to weaken European states and spread the territorial boundary of Russia (p. 189). The United States and Russia staying out of each other's way is a feature of Arctic Exceptionalism 2.0. This book is about why we are here and who is responsible (p. 198). Russia may be blamed for initiating the shift through aggression, but the United States has only made things worse with China playing an apt role to ensure that their polar ambitions are realized. These shifts have forcefully stopped many bilateral relations, e.g., people-to-people cooperation, but some bilateral cooperation grounded in international law has continued (p. 5). Treaties like those on radioactivity and wild-land fire on the other hand have been shelved (p. 6). Before 2022, the Arctic Council was considered a 'reassurance' globally and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (p. 7). Today, there is lack of conversation amongst members with seven of the members boycotting Russia after the 2022 attacks on Ukraine (p. 8).

The Arctic has always been projected as a space of limitless opportunities which reached its apogee about 2010 (p. 107). But there is no single definition of the Arctic or the Arctic Ocean. The act of defining itself is a political practice. Likewise, the Central Arctic Ocean is a jurisdictional space that is adjacent to the North Pole and over 200 nautical miles from

territorial baselines and outside the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of states. Nevertheless, the focus of a changing Arctic is invariably directed to the coastal waters (p. 109). Attempts to reverse the climate impacts are forcing reorientation of energy generation, use, and consumption. With the Arctic gaining strategic significance because of minerals (p. 6), the tussle between securing Arctic resources for national development and energy transition to achieve sustainability continues and creates both security and governance challenges (p. 108). Developing these resources to achieve security of 'new energy' raises securitisation concerns especially when countries aim to secure energy and mineral supplies for themselves.

To understand the impact of this transition, Norway is discussed in some detail (pp. 111-114). All this is closely related to greenhouse gases (GHG) and global warming driven by a civilization reorganized by the Industrial Revolution. The exploitation of resources leaves environmental harm for communities while benefits are concentrated in the hands of investors (p. 97), after decades of warning about climate change. Since these systems need to go hand in hand with legitimacy and accountability (p. 98) good governance is considered critical. With focus on resource exploitation, sustainable development too has become a focal point (p. 93). This sustainability is frequently framed in terms of renewable energy that requires these very resources. As climate change and security related challenges increase, access to these resources creates anxieties. This requires a balance between national priorities and resilience (p. 94). Similarities and differences need to be considered at the scale of cities and not at the national level to understand the prevailing governance process (p. 95).

Arctic security is important for governance, and so is *science* (p. 83). Scientific research in the Arctic is approximately eight times more expensive than in the Temperate zone. This demands cooperation and collaboration for research to be successful. From 1990 to 2020, Arctic research flourished. It experienced a break because of COVID and President Trump's disregard for scientific expertise. In the 1990s, scientific cooperation was considered a tool of foreign policy and the term 'science diplomacy' was defined in 2010 (p. 81). Initially, it was seen as a means of easing tensions among nations. By the mid-2010s, it became a means of advancing national interest and solving global issues but remained disengaged from politics, competition, and strategic dimensions. By 2025, science diplomacy merged with politics and competition to reflect a world of geopolitical tensions, technological advances, and global crisis. This forced a shift in scientific collaborations (p. 75). The 2022 attacks of Russia on Ukraine stopped scientific cooperation with Russia. Since access to Russian territory was

stopped, maintaining long-term data sets became a challenge. Russia continued planned activities alongside Non-Arctic states including China. This brought to the fore concerns over enhanced Russia-China convergence and increased Chinese interest in Arctic affairs (p. 48). Russia's isolation has created 'two Arctics' that do not overlap despite geographical continuity (p. 49).

Analysing the Arctic as a circumpolar region is yet another important aspect in this interlinked geographic space. But geographic spaces are never local, regional, or global naturally. They are made so and then positioned to influence outcomes. After the Cold War, the military build-up in the Arctic reduced. This demanded redefining the extent to which external actors should be included in Arctic political cooperation. For such decisions, the Arctic Council became the forum; making Arctic-based actors central and Non-Arctic actors participating when required (pp. 42-43).

Indigenous People are considered essential to analyse the Arctic as a circumpolar region (p. 42). This requires defining what the Arctic *is* and *is not* (p. 44). Indigenous People as an important link promote self-determination and conceptualize sovereignty through relations. They emphasize decentralization with power shared amongst groups and families based on knowledge (p. 21). Their presence and political engagements have settled national boundaries and awareness of interconnections has contributed to scientific knowledge (p. 41). The Inuit and Sami are permanent members of the Arctic Council. Other communities need to be included for a stronger Arctic (pp. 19-20). Most communities, however, exhibit numerous concerns such as demand for self-governance, lack of trust, and contested land jurisdiction. Indigenous people claim rights but states treat land as state property with no provision to share benefits (p. 20); unplanned resource extraction causes existential risk to communities (p. 20). To discuss concerns and possible future direction, Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) has been showcased (c. 9). It shows how small states have multiple options for security and defence. Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) acts as an essential staging, missile detection, and refuelling site for the United States and Canada; but Kalaallit Nunaat has no formal diplomatic relations with Canada (p. 143) and minimal, systematized cooperation with the United States. Greenland depends on Denmark for governance and on the United States for defence. Greenland's security options are the status quo, or acquiring power, or to be non-aligned (p. 136).

As ice melts, the *geography* of the Arctic is changing. This has created an inevitable race amongst states for territory, resources, and security (p. 160) but with diverging views. Norway,

Sweden and Finland look to NATO as their security guarantor (p. 161) with Norway trying to get NATO's attention since 2008 (p. 164). Canada is reluctant to use the term 'Arctic' in NATO summit statements. Nevertheless, there is consensus on non-traditional security threats. The Arctic Council agreed responsibility for Search and Rescue in 2011 and then for Oil-spills in 2013 (p. 164). Although Arctic states boycotted Russia in 2022, integrating Russia in all security forums and dialogues is essential (p. 165) as Russia has maritime boundaries with nearly all Arctic nations and controls nearly 25% of the coastline and nearly 40% of the landmass.

When discussing *Arctic Security*, soft and hard securities both come to mind (p. 120). Amongst the hard security, non-traditional security threats are favoured; traditional threats are given a casual treatment. For a holistic view, inclusion of both, using securitisation and de-securitisation theories¹, is essential. One notices that Gorbachev's speech at Murmansk in 1987 (p. 121) and the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008 were de-securitisation acts. The Inuit in Canada and Sami in Norway act as securitising actors by presenting environmental and social challenges as a security issue. Russia fails to securitise situations at sea even while Greenland continuously securitises its issues (p. 121). Russia considers the Russian Federation as its primary Regional Security Complex (RSC).² The US and Canada remain nested in North America, and the European Arctic states consider Europe as their main RSC, treating the Arctic as an additional arena. Their RSC of interaction (same or across) depends on the prevailing interstate relations. To date, the Arctic is not considered a RSC (p. 123) because the global superpower dynamics never left the region alone (p. 121). The Arctic should be considered a Regional Security Configuration³ instead as threats faced and defence against them are unique and can be addressed better internally (p. 124). Using Greenland as an example (pp. 124-128), the book shows how different countries view Greenland even when it faces distinct security dynamics of climate change, Great Power Competition between Russia-United States-China, growing momentum to become a sovereign state, and threat of annexation from the United States (p. 124). For the United States, Greenland commands a geostrategic location and a store house for minerals (p. 125); for Russia, discussions are to be directed to Copenhagen; for

¹ Securitisation is about convincing others about security concerns. De-securitisation is about moving back into the normal sphere.

² A group of neighbouring states whose national security threats, and patterns of amity and enmity, are so tightly bound together that their security concerns cannot realistically be analysed or solved apart from one another

³ How nearby countries work together to manage safety, stop fights, and share defence rules

China, involvement in infrastructure development and mining is a way of securitising the island. But Greenland is not an RSC. It is part of the United States' RSC as the United States treats it as its property that needs protection. At the same time, it is also an RSC of Europe, as Denmark continues to hold formal authority on foreign and defence matters.

Things have changed since 2022. The strategic outlook of states has been driven more by Russia's war against Ukraine than climate change. The Arctic is transforming from a region of peace and cooperation to international rivalry and strategic competition (p. 175). In an evolving landscape of new opportunities and vulnerabilities, the Arctic is considered vulnerable to hybrid threats rather than direct conflict. The media often report conflict, competition, and cooperation focusing on state leaders and diplomats. Events not related to climate change or Great Power Competition are kept out of view. Hence, scholars need to be attentive to counter unbalanced media representation as Arctic diplomacy happens at more sites than the Council. Lack of awareness risks misunderstanding Arctic governance and security. The focus is on the role of diplomats, state actors, and non-state actors such as Indigenous groups, NGOs, scientists, Track 1.5, and Track 2.0 diplomacy. Work by non-state actors is in progress, but others need to step in (p. 50).

Growing geopolitics and ensuing dynamics in the Arctic have shown that Russia is a hostile third party. The United States is no more a reliable security partner. China, Russia and the United States are engaged in a Great Power Competition, somewhat like Britain and Russia during the 19th Century with regard to the Indian sub-continent. The Arctic will continue to attract extra territorial stakeholders with China seeking to extend its influence here. International frameworks and agreements of science, people-to-people networking, and areas of environmental management will be stress tested (p. 195). And, the United States is in danger of losing its status as a premier polar scientific power (p. 198). These matters together with rising global temperatures have put the Arctic security and its residents at a crossroads. The possibility of achieving a peaceful and collaborative Arctic for which Indigenous People, civil societies, intergovernmental forums, and communities of academia, diplomats, and journalists worked over the years has diminished (p. 198). Today, people have become the easiest target for hybrid warfare. They are being targeted to challenge the existing security and resilience mechanisms by creating mistrust (p. 181). This has created Cold War 2.0 where both struggling superpowers want to take control of the region but neither is interested in engaging in a 'hot' conflict (p. 189). The book raises such uncertainties and more, pointing to a plethora of

questions for future interdisciplinary research focused on region-wide and global aspects of security and governance (p. 9).

One realizes that an enhanced interest in Arctic studies began with the melting of the Arctic Ocean. But the Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 shifted this focus from climate change to Russia. Seven of the eight Arctic states are now NATO states that fear the expansionist agenda of Russia and have stopped all activity with her. This has put a serious strain on cooperation and peace in the Arctic. All efforts towards security and governance need Russia. Russia, however, wants to ensure that collaboration continues in areas of Search and Rescue, shipping forecasting, and environmental safety as a minimum. Non-Arctic states on the other hand aim to ensure maximum return on investment from their involvement in the region. The future of security and governance of the Arctic is clouded. Answers are not forthcoming, but this book flags relevant questions.

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How to cite this article

Agarwala, N., 2026, A Research Agenda for Arctic Security and Governance, Elgar Research Agendas, Edited by Marc Jacobsen and Elana Wilson Rowe, 2026, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, pages xi + 207, \$130.50/£100.00, (hardback) ISBN: 978-1-0353-1860-5. *Natural Built Social Environment Health* 2(4), 156-162. <http://www.doi.org/10.63095/NBSEH.26.645011>
