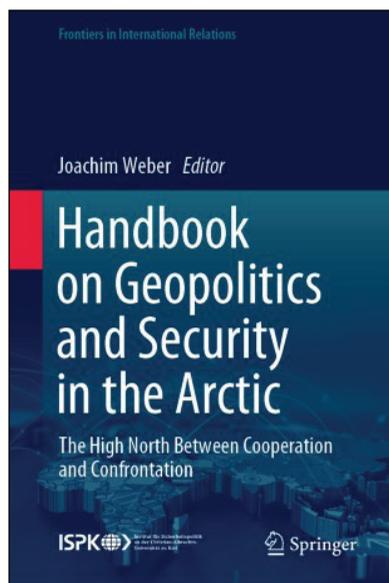


## Review of Joachim Weber (ed.), *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation*



Joachim Weber (ed.), *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation*. Berlin, Springer. 2020. ISBN 9783030450045.

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The *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation*, edited by Joachim Weber, is part of the Springer series *Frontiers in International Relations*. Published in 2020, the anthology comes at a turbulent time in Arctic geopolitics, when the traditional supremacy of the Arctic littoral states has started to be challenged by the lurking interests of non-Arctic stakeholders and global anthropogenic challenges, such as climate change, raising questions as to the future security and geopolitical balance in the region. The Handbook comprises a compelling read, with diverse areas of discussion that give an insightful exploration of the most pressing issues relevant to Arctic geopolitics. The multidisciplinary of

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approaches utilized in the volume and the variety of relevant topics covered have the potential to mark a turning point in international scholarship on geopolitical studies.

The volume encompasses five main aspects of geopolitical analysis articulated into five parts, with 21 chapters in total, preceded by an editorial preface by Joachim Weber and a prelude written by Doaa Abdel-Motaal. Part I addresses major geopolitical issues pertinent to the Arctic littoral states, with chapters 1–5 authored by: 1. Jørgen Staun, 2. Victoria Herrmann and Lillian Hussong, 3. Adam Lajeunesse, 4. Christoph Humrich, and 5. Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen and Line Jedig Nielsen. Part II scrutinizes the role of non-Arctic states in Arctic geopolitics, with chapters 6–10 authored by: 6. Sybille Reinke de Buitrago, 7. Johannes Mohr, 8. Andreas Raspotnik and Adam Stępień, 9. Aditya Ramanathan, and 10. Richard A. Bitzinger. Part III covers interdisciplinary themes from the fields of economics, infrastructure, and law, with chapters 11–14 authored by: 11. Clive Schofield and Andreas Østhagen, 12. Rachael Gosnell, 13. Solveig Glomsrød, Birger Poppel, Lars Lindholt, Gérard Duhaime, Sébastien Lévesque, Davin Holen, and Iulie Aslaksen, and 14. Michael Delaunay and Mathieu Landriault. Part IV examines geopolitical oscillations between confrontation and cooperation, with chapters 15–19 authored by: 15. David P. Auerswald, 16. Daniel Lambach, 17. Rebecca Pincus, 18. Roald Berg, and 19. Benjamin Schaller. Part V comprises conclusory remarks on Arctic security and compares the situation to Antarctica, with chapters 20–21 authored by: 20. Joachim Weber, and 21. Doaa Abdel-Motaal.

More precisely, the five parts of this volume shed light on the following themes:

Part I of the book is dedicated to geopolitical issues related to the Arctic littoral states (Arctic Five). It starts with a contribution by Jørgen Staun discussing Russia's two-faced approach to the Arctic, which consists of a civilian and material interest in ensuring long-term resource extraction in the Circumpolar North, as well as the general ambition to remain a powerful state in the region, supported by prominent military reforms. In the following chapter, Victoria Hermann and Lillian Hussong explore how the Arctic has gradually (re)claimed a significant position on the U.S. agenda, addressing different elements of the fragmented U.S. Arctic congressional policy. Subsequently, Adam Lajeunesse illustrates the Canadian approach to Arctic geopolitics, focusing on two core policy issues: regional security and sovereignty, particularly in the context of the much-contested Northwest Passage – yet highlighting Canada's overall interest in perpetuating successful collaboration in economic, environmental and safety issues among Arctic states. In turn, Christoph Humrich discusses Norwegian geopolitical issues of security, sovereignty, and sustainability from the end of the Cold War to 2020, observing that, although Norway is a small and coastal state, reality has shown that it is not a “small coastal state” (p. 59). This segment concludes with a co-authored contribution by Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen and Line Jedig Nielsen, who describe how

Greenlandic geopolitics has been driven by three competing forces: U.S. security interests in Greenland, Danish willingness to ensure the integrity and prosperity of its Kingdom, but also preserve its good bilateral relationship with not only the U.S., but also Russia, and Greenland's increased autonomy which has changed the Greenlandic approach to its own geopolitics.

The second part of the book elaborates on the emerging interests of non-Arctic countries in the Circumpolar North and reminds the reader that what happens in the Arctic does not stay there. Part II begins with two chapters which evaluate China's emergence as a powerful Arctic economic player and address how China has gradually expanded within the Arctic. In chapter 6, Sybille Reinke de Buitrago discusses the spatial and identity dimension of China's self-positioning as a "near-Arctic state" and explores how China could potentially reorganize the Arctic legal order in the context of ocean commons governance, and in chapter 7, Johannes Mohr articulates the Chinese approach to investments in Greenland. In the subsequent contribution, Andreas Raspotnik and Adam Stepień discuss the multifarious aspects of E.U.'s environmental, scientific and economic footprint in the High North and conceptualize the many colors of E.U.'s 'Arcticness'. The next two chapters of this segment are devoted to the Arctic policies of observer states to the Arctic Council, offering a bird's-eye view of how the Arctic is conceived of by India and Singapore respectively. First, Aditya Ramanathan draws parallels between India's approach to the Arctic and its geographic opposite, and sketches India's scientific, environmental, commercial, and strategic approach to Arctic engagement, which is alternately driven either by "maximalist or minimalist tendencies" (p. 155). Secondly, Richard A. Bitzinger delves into the environmental, economic, and governance dimensions embedded in Singapore's Arctic policy, sketching the State's promising but proactive approach to joining Arctic debates in light of its future interests.

Part III employs a variety of disciplines to address existing facts and structures in interstate relations that are shaping the future of Arctic politics. It begins with a contribution from Clive Schofield and Andreas Østhagen on the legal background of Arctic geopolitics, examining how international law has contributed to the mitigation of geopolitical tensions among Arctic states. The authors observe that, consistent with the law of the sea, Arctic stakeholders have successfully settled the vast majority of their territorial disputes, succeeding in creating an overall atmosphere of peace and collaboration. Yet, they highlight the importance of resolving states' overlapping assertions on continental shelf claims. In the next chapter, Rachael Gosnell presents a comprehensive analysis of Arctic shipping, addressing both commercial and military marine traffic and highlighting the sector's major challenges and opportunities. The next chapter, by Solveig Glomsrød et al., is devoted to the interplay between geopolitics and the heterogeneous economies of the Arctic Eight, building upon the results of the ECONOR project, which analyzes different socio-economic indicators. Part III concludes with a chapter written by Michael Delaunay and Mathieu Landriault, which focuses on the role played by unevenly distributed

access to network infrastructure in Arctic geopolitics, bringing the discussion back to Sino-Arctic engagement and elaborating on China's foreseeable interests in a digital polar silk road.

Part IV investigates different issues pertinent to Arctic security, which is generally characterized by competing narratives. It starts with a contribution by David P. Auerswald, who relates narrative contestation to underlying geopolitical competition in Arctic governance dynamics, after distilling fruitful methodological insights from narratology. The author delves into three different types of competing narratives: a) the narratives of Arctic environmental protection and economic development, b) the maritime governance narratives of the Arctic five vs. those of the Arctic three, c) Russo-American conceptions of the Arctic order in response to China's own narrative. Following Auerswald's discussion, and drawing on Liberal Institutional Approaches, Daniel Lambach aims to conceptualize the "unusually smooth" (p. 274) negotiation and implementation of the SAR Agreement in a world of competing narratives and conflicting geopolitical interests. In the next chapter, Rebecca Pincus' contribution explores how Arctic fisheries may influence geopolitical tensions in the region and, through a twofold approach, she first examines how fisheries discourses may reach the highest levels of foreign affairs, and secondly how fisheries can be used by states as a domain for grey zone warfare. With climate change already having profound implications for Arctic fisheries, Pincus sees that additional tensions may arise in the imminent future. Fisheries, along with other resources, have also triggered debates pertained to the Archipelago of Svalbard, the unique case of which is illustrated in the subsequent chapter. Through a historical retrospection from the adoption of the Svalbard Treaty onwards, Roald Berg argues that, despite its remoteness, the Archipelago will continue to occupy a central position in Arctic geopolitics, not least because of its demilitarization clause and its central role in sustaining peace and collaboration in the North. The last chapter of Part IV, written by Benjamin Schaller, discusses how the intersection of global and regional security dynamics may affect the military security situation in the Arctic. Schaller affirms that, within the Arctic, state collaboration in the pursuance of common interests prevails over military interests. He also delves into the non-Arctic dimension of security in the High North, with particular focus on the current deterioration of relations between the NATO alliance and the Russian Federation, as well as Russia's unique ambition to maintain its status quo as a superpower, simply "by playing by the rules" (p. 333) of Arctic politics and legalities.

Finally, Part V of the Handbook, which concludes the volume, includes two contributions. The first, written by Joachim Weber, distills insights gained from the previous chapters of the volume (particularly by de Buitrago and Mohr) and sheds light on both the economic and military dimension of Sino-Russian cooperation, concluding with the vision that, notwithstanding the numerous economic interests by both states in the Arctic, a common military interest cannot yet be ascertained. Finally, the last chapter of the volume, by Doaa Abdel-Motaal, discusses the

plausibility of future trajectories of geopolitics both in the Arctic and its geographic opposite. Abdel-Motaal foresees the two poles' future driven by the world's most powerful states, while highlighting the increasingly important parameter that may lead to tectonic political shifts in both poles: climate change.

Although the anthology may be interesting for several reasons, a few observations are particularly prominent in the volume:

Of significant importance is the diversity of the volume's contributors and manuscripts. The authors, including both senior and junior scholars, comprise a group of researchers located across the Circumpolar North, a fact which points towards the book's recognition as a well-balanced and unbiased anthology. This diversity extends to the content of the chapters, which draws from a variety of academic disciplines and covers a wide range of regional and thematic stages of analysis. Yet, as the editor observes in the preface (p. x), participation of a Russian scholar would have further enriched the plurality of perspectives in the volume. Similarly, contributions about the Arctic Three (Sweden, Finland and Iceland) might have increased the diversity of topics explored in the book. Not least, the inclusion of a chapter on the role of Arctic Indigenous peoples as agents of Arctic geopolitical change would also have been valuable. Indigenous voices have been heavily involved in Arctic political dialogues, both within the Arctic Council and beyond, making a profound impact on political imaginations and dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

Also noteworthy is the fact that, disregarding the mainstream narrative of global media, which depicts the Arctic as a region characterized by political instability, constant confrontation and a lack of security, where the term "tensions" has become a buzzword, the authors of this volume, through considered and well-articulated approaches, highlight that the geopolitics of the Arctic are first and foremost characterized by dialogue and collaboration, rather than tensions and confrontation, verifying what was stated by the Arctic leaders in the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration.<sup>2</sup> In that regard, most authors dedicate a substantial part of their analysis to the historical aspect of their topics, demonstrating that most issues have traditionally been approached by interested parties via a broad consensus toward peace and cooperation in the region. This overall tendency towards dialogue and collaboration is shared by all of the Arctic states, and also echoed by non-Arctic-based stakeholders with interests in the Circumpolar North, all of whom are striving for a peaceful and proactive approach to the Arctic.

In the imminent future, the Arctic will remain a lucrative location for the extraction of natural resources and a crucial theatre of geopolitical rivalry and domination. In that regard, the book provides a broad overview on security and geopolitics-related topics in the High North and covers the majority of such issues in a handbook format. By definition, a handbook is "a book capable of being conveniently carried as a ready reference".<sup>3</sup> Weber's edited work seems to successfully meet this goal, comprising a comprehensive, topical, and well-structured manual for students, researchers,

practitioners, and decision makers in the Arctic. This book may be an indispensable tool for anyone interested in pressing topics of Arctic geopolitics and is worth being shelved as a rich-in-content and easy-to-read book.

## NOTES

1. Lassi Heinen and Matthias Finger, “The ‘Global Arctic’ as a New Geopolitical Context and Method,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 33, no. 2 (2018): 201.
2. The Ilulissat Declaration. Arctic Ocean Conference. Ilulissat, Greenland, 27–29 May 2008.
3. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Handbook” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/handbook> (accessed May 24, 2021).