

Book Review

Breaking Through: Understanding Sovereignty and Security in the Circumpolar Arctic. Edited by Wilfrid Greaves and P. Whitney Lackenbauer. University of Toronto Press, 2021. 224 pp.

Reviewed by Heather Exner-Pirot

For a variety of reasons, sovereignty and security have become the lenses through which Canadian Arctic policy has most often been analyzed, and through which the region's importance has been communicated to the public. Likely as a result, the terms themselves have been used in often contradictory and incoherent ways, suiting whatever purpose or agenda its proponent is inclined to advance.

It is in this context that Wilfrid Greaves and Whitney Lackenbauer, in their edited volume *Breaking Through: Understanding Sovereignty and Security in the Circumpolar Arctic* seek to consolidate our understanding of those terms, and shape that understanding with their own imprimatur. They promote a broad interpretation, with security going beyond military threats and dangers, and sovereignty going beyond the rights of states. They put forward the bold claim that “deepening and broadening our understanding of sovereignty and security can help reduce vulnerability and increase the resiliency of Arctic societies” (p. 14).

The volume is comprised of a dozen chapters and includes an all-star cast of Arctic security experts: many of the usual suspects in the Canadian field, alongside some well-known Russian, Norwegian, and Danish ones. Written in 2021, the reader may be inclined to ask whether it holds up against recent events, notably the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has seen Finland and Sweden announce they will join NATO, and the Arctic Council out on an indefinite pause—dramatic changes in the Arctic security environment.

In fact, it holds up pretty well in most respects, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 is addressed and analyzed across several chapters, with lessons that hold for today. It's an interesting test: the Arctic rupture feels very dramatic right now, in Fall 2022, but is clearly not a scenario that was wholly unanticipated.

The strength, and concomitantly the weakness, of the volume is its acceptance of such a broad definition of both sovereignty and security. As a student of human security myself, I have sympathy for this stance. But flung across the volume itself, one asks whether or what the common centre is: how to reconcile the inclusion of both Rob Huebert's pessimistic analysis (I am sure he would counter, realistic) of geopolitical trends, and Natalia Loukacheva's assessment of Nunavut food policy. Does one need to know about the other to advance policy and thinking in their own field? To be fair, Arctic studies have always taken the regional lens to its interdisciplinary extreme. The book reflects that: we are meant to address climate change, Indigenous rights, and geopolitical tensions together and always.

While there is intellectual merit to critiques, such as that provided by Hoogensen, of security defined strictly as state-centred, the analysis that Kikkert and Lajeunesse provide in their chapters is, I would say, necessarily concerned with a Westphalian, legalistic framework. We are free to expand our definition of Arctic security and sovereignty, and question why some issues get more attention and resources than others. But let us not pretend we are comparing apples with apples when we do. There is a considerable difference in how to approach policy over boundary disputes than with asylum claims.

That said, the security analysis, though wide ranging, holds up well despite the events since it was published. The energy analysis, however, comes across as being from a simpler time. Despite excellent analysis by Østhagen in his chapter arguing that there are many Arctics, extraction of hydrocarbons is described too often as a regional phenomenon, including in the afterword, where it is described as one of three Arctic security "pathologies," in the context of climate change. In fact, it is almost wholly a Russian Arctic one, with marginal contributions by Norway and Alaska, who have both seen production decline over decades.

Given the recent rupture with Russia and Putin's weaponization of its oil and gas production, it would be devastating if Norway were to voluntarily cut off its supply to the European continent. For a volume that privileges human security, defining it in the classic sense as "freedom from fear and freedom from want," there is no consideration of the need for reliable and affordable hydrocarbons for the material well-being of northern and Indigenous residents, who depend a great deal more than southern populations, per capita, on diesel generation for heat and power, and long-distance air transportation for medical and food deliveries. The energy crisis is and will be devastating for northern communities.

The book also describes resource extraction in the Arctic as choosing "short-term financial benefit" over long-term ecological and social catastrophe. But as the world races to advance the green energy transition, the reality that it will require an enormous expansion of the mining industry, not least in the Arctic region, is not addressed at all. "Resources" are often conflated with hydrocarbons

in the volume, but in the twenty-first century, mining may very well be the bigger political, economic, and environmental driver. This is something that will need to be more prominent in future Arctic security analyses, including energy security ones.

This book is well worth reading. It is an invaluable resource for students of Arctic security, exactly due to its breadth. Even those who would favour a narrower approach to security and sovereignty will find what they are looking for in the first eight chapters of the book, and will do well to be exposed to the broader conceptions found in the subsequent four chapters, and afterword.

If the volume does not deliver consensus on a definition of Arctic security and sovereignty, it does its part in mapping how those at the forefront of the field choose to approach it.

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