

Peter Hough, *International Politics of the Arctic: Coming in from the Cold* (London: Routledge, 2015 pbk.)

Peter Hough's contribution to the scholarship of Arctic international relations, *International Politics of the Arctic: Coming in from the Cold*, has now been made available in paperback. Given that the target audience is likely to consist of students and those with a general interest in the field, the paperback edition (and more accessible price) is most welcome.

Hough explores Arctic international relations and geopolitics with a broad brush to a readership unfamiliar with this area. In each chapter, he describes the key features and then explains these in light of international relations theories. He selects realism (and neo-realism), liberalism, Marxism and social constructivism as the models against which to assess Arctic cooperation.

In the first chapter, Hough explains various definitions of the Arctic and introduces the Arctic States. The following chapter, *Imperialism*, discusses the riches (both real and mythical) of the Arctic and examines the Arctic as a new frontier in an unfinished colonial project. He introduces the Arctic States' respective Arctic strategies as well as the agenda of some of the most important non-Arctic actors (eg the European Union (EU) and China). While his knowledge of international relations is sound, his attempts to explain some of the more complex features of law of the sea go awry (34-37) and this section could have benefited from review by a legal scholar. Already by the end of this chapter, Hough's view that realism is an inadequate theory to explain Arctic cooperation becomes apparent and this analysis is repeated through the rest of the book.

The third chapter, entitled *Globalization*, is better understood by its subtitle: *Environmental change and human security in the Arctic*. Hough tries to explain the key environmental challenges in the Arctic in light of globalization and emphasises the two-way interplay between the Arctic and the rest of the World. The Arctic is deeply affected by decisions taken thousands of miles away; but Arctic changes also influence the rest of the World. Climate change has already brought, and will continue to bring, major changes to the Arctic, but while many of these are to be feared, there will also be winners (48-50), especially as the rapidly warming Arctic will permit access to valuable resources and sea-routes. But Greenland, for all its ice-cap is slowly melting, is a long way from becoming a "verdant isle" (61) and only the very Southern tip can support settled agriculture. Hough is confusing on the Arctic Council working groups, mentioning only five in Chapter 3, skipping the Arctic Contaminants Action Programme and only introducing this in Chapter 5 (in which he omits to mention the Sustainable Development Working Group!).

Chapter four, *Decolonization*, explores the history of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic and their historic and ongoing battles for greater autonomy. The present reviewer would

take issue with his analysis that a newly independent Greenland would immediately be cast out of NATO and lose the American military bases that provide its *de facto* defence. Such matters would be (re)negotiated: this time by a Greenlandic rather than a Danish delegation. A cursory glance at a map indicates that NATO and the US need Greenland more than Greenland needs either. Within his analysis of Arctic self-governance, Hough draws attention to the lesser status of Canada's three Arctic territories (compared with the 9 full provinces) and their effective subjugation to federal government control (83-87). The short conclusion to this chapter, which is otherwise fairly descriptive, proposes that the nation-State and Westphalian sovereignty are inadequate bases on which to analyse contemporary Arctic governance (thus refuting realist interpretations) given not only the extent of indigenous and other local influences but also the reach of supra-national entities such as the EU.

Hough clearly differentiates the concepts of international regimes and international organisations (IGOs) - but then undoes his good work by declaring that the Arctic Council is "a fully-fledged IGO" (99-100). This is simply not true: the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada, are quite clear that the Arctic Council is no more than an "intergovernmental forum" even if Finland has expressed enthusiasm for the Arctic Council to become a treaty-based IGO. Hough highlights the special nature of Arctic international relations and the more cooperative approaches that can be found in the frozen North in contrast to the usual bluster between States that are otherwise cautious of one another and hesitant to commit too much: especially on climate change (105). In this context, Hough's recognition of the importance of soft law measures is insightful (see also 70).

Moving beyond State cooperation, international non-governmental cooperation is extensive in the Arctic in respect of NGOs (both from inside and outside of the Arctic), indigenous peoples' organisations, multi-national corporations and scientists (120). The realist explanations of Arctic international relations are once more insufficient to explain the influence of non-State actors.

Hough's general conclusions on the Arctic are rather uncontroversial for experienced Arctic scholars but may come as a surprise to those whose knowledge of the Arctic comes from inflammatory media reports. It is a zone of international cooperation and governance where non-governmental participants, in particular, indigenous representatives, have a unique status and influence. The Arctic Council is a unique body which is consensus-based and seats the permanent participants at the central decision-shaping table while the observers (including States, some of whom otherwise play a major role in international affairs) sit apart and are not permitted to speak in plenary meetings. While the United States and Russia hold - and regularly exercise - their vetoes at the UN Security Council, they are able

to work together in the Arctic. The stakes are very different and in the Arctic, no one can survive alone.

With the hardback version published in 2013, the speed of Arctic change has left a few issues already dated in Hough's text. Amongst these are the new binding Polar Code for Arctic Shipping, the second agreement of the Arctic Eight on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness and Response in the Arctic, and the admission of six new observer States to the Arctic Council (China, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore and South Korea with the EU's application still pending). Furthermore, it is no longer accurate to describe any of them as 'permanent observers' as they are all subject to periodic review and reassessment.

The book also contains a few errors, mostly of a legal nature and sometimes rather technical, that can be misleading. This is especially true in discussions of law of the sea. The outer continental shelf can extend even further than 350 nautical miles depending on the geology of the sea floor (35). The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is only one of three dispute settlement mechanisms under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea - the other two are the International Court of Justice and arbitral tribunals (36). The sector theory has mostly fallen out of favour and only rarely raises its head, with all the Arctic States having endorsed the law of the sea as the basis for delimiting and delineating maritime boundaries (36). The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has nothing to do with *terra nullius* (a concept which applies to land, not sea). Its provision on 'rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life' does not in any way compromise the potential for State sovereignty over such rocks (including territorial seas) but precludes only an exclusive economic zone or continental shelf extending from such rocks (36).<sup>[1]</sup> While the United States cannot submit its mapping data to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, it is too simple to say that this prevents it from declaring such a shelf (36). The United States will almost certainly unilaterally declare its outer continental shelf and argue that this is recognised under customary international law. Most significantly, the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf will review and assess the mapping data submitted by States in respect of their outer continental shelves but will under no circumstances 'rule' on overlapping submissions from neighbouring or adjacent States (36-37). It will not even consider a submission if any other State indicates that the area in question is in dispute. The High Seas cannot be described as a 'legal vacuum' and is governed by Part VII of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, customary international law extending back for centuries, and flag States (51).

Other inaccuracies are again mostly legal. Canada denounced the Kyoto Protocol in 2011 and hence currently has no binding emissions targets (42). The Polar Bear treaty cannot be described as 'soft law' (58). This is not what 'soft law' means: all treaties are by definition

Peter Hough, *International Politics of the Arctic: Coming in from the Cold* (London: Routledge, 2015 pbk.)

'hard law' even if their enforcement mechanisms are weak. It is unorthodox to describe the *Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission* and the *North Atlantic Marine Mammals Commission* as 'environmental agreements;' they are regional fisheries management organisations geared to sustainable exploitation of living marine resources rather than preservation of biodiversity. They have a treaty basis (as do all regional fisheries management organisations) but it is unusual to include them in a list of environmental treaties - certainly if one is to then exclude others of arguably more importance, such as the *North Atlantic Fisheries Organisation* and the *North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission*. And finally, the ban on seal produces into the EU was never about seal *meat*, but rather about furs (128). Even with the so-called Inuit exemption, the Greenlandic seal fur trade has been decimated and the indigenous Canadian trade has collapsed as it always piggybacked on the commercial market. The ban in any case was not based on any 'environmental instincts' (Danish or otherwise) but rather an emotional response to some vociferous members of the public in some EU States.

The text is admirably concise and for that reason is more broad than deep but it covers the main bases and would make an excellent textbook for undergraduate international relations students exploring the Arctic for the first time. In a classroom situation, it could easily be supplemented with references to Arctic Council meeting records and Working Group papers. For a non-academic audience that is nonetheless curious about the contemporary Arctic developments that seem to inundate our news media and wishes to put them in context and understand them better, the book is a great introduction.

[1] UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, 1833 UNTS 3, article 121(3).

## Share this:

- [Share](#)