Does geographical proximity make you closer to a region than long-standing historic ties? Is Britain a "forgotten Arctic State"? How can Britain find its way in the "Global Arctic"? These are the questions, Duncan Depledge, director of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Polar Regions Secretariat in Westminster and Special Adviser to the UK House of Commons Defence Committee tries to answer to in his new book *Britain and the Arctic.* In the field of polar research – in Britain or abroad – Depledge does not need any introduction anymore. His name, alongside his former professor at Royal Holloway, University of London Klaus Dodds, has become synonymous with high-quality research in both international relations and polar studies. Based on a doctoral thesis Depledge defended at Royal Holloway in 2014, this book might be regarded by some as a timely contribution to the field of polar studies, especially at a time where Britain is gauging its involvement in the Arctic. On a more structural level, *Britain and the Arctic* is written as a collection of six thematically self-standing essays that each tries to assess Britain's relation to the high north in an all-encompassing and detailed manner. Written in a short, punchy format, each chapter takes the form of an essay (with an abstract at the beginning) that makes the whole book more reader-friendly.

As pointed out at the beginning of the introduction, Britain's present interest in the Arctic has never been as high since the Cold War. Although one might be forgiven to think that British interests in the North is an offspring of Britain's colonial past, Depledge posits the Arctic has come into focus based on the need to make sense of how the Arctic is changing and how understanding these changes can help Britain be more productive in terms of science, trade, conservation and national security (p.6). With this new contribution, Depledge endeavours to analyse four overarching themes to better assess Britain's relation with the Arctic. Drawing on Britain's long history as a global power, Depledge first shows that Britain has had a massive role in influencing and defining the Arctic for centuries. He then argues that in spite of the "circumpolarisation" of the Arctic where the Arctic Eight (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US) have pushed non-Arctic states such as Britain towards the periphery of Arctic affairs, interests for the region within Britain domestic political, scientific and public landscapes have continued to grow in the last decades. The third theme is linked with the production of new scientific knowledge and the interests of British scientists in understanding how the region is likely to evolve in the future. This comes at the interplay of science, environmental, military and security concerns. Finally, Depledge also assesses the extent to which Britain's

contemporary engagement in the region, mainly due to its colonial past, is shaped by the country's need to atone and demonstrate sensitivity in engagement in postcolonialism and neocolonialism debates.

As Lassi Heininen suggests in one of the blurbs, the idea of that Britain might be a "forgotten Arctic State" definitely comes as a surprise at first. The layperson might indeed wonder how a State whose northernmost tip (Out Stack, Shetlands) lies a bit further north than Bergen, Norway but still south of the Faroe Islands could be an Arctic State, let alone a forgotten one. In Chapter Two (Britain: The Forgotten Arctic State), Depledge cleverly demonstrates that closeness is not only a matter of topographical proximity. In the Arctic, a geopolitical region that is being construed as more and more global, Depledge highlights the problems with creating an arbitrary dichotomy between Arctic and non-Arctic States that relies solely on geographical proximity. Such closeness, he argues, is also a matter of topology. While acknowledging that Britain's longstanding history in the Arctic comes as a result of its colonial past, Depledge demonstrates that topography and topology offer two different ways of thinking about Britain's proximity to the Arctic. Although topography might play a more important role in the contemporary geopolitical landscape and also makes the Arctic look further away from Britain – demonstrated in framing Britain as "The Arctic's Nearest Neighbour" in successive government policies since 2010 -, Britain, he argues, share deep and extensive topological links with the Arctic. From a topographical perspective, Depledge points out that the Arctic as a regional construct would still be vulnerable to further changes if and when the Faroe Islands and Greenland ever chose to become independent. In this changing Arctic landscape, Depledge also briefly mentions the "spectre of Scotland one day becoming independent" and how, he argues, "few would seriously question whether the rest of Britain's interest in the Arctic should be at all diminished or that Scotland should have a greater role than the rest of the Britain in Arctic affairs" (31). However, this analysis might come as oblivious of Scotland sharing a similar set of commonalities with northern/Arctic European states. Scotland's growing role in Arctic affairs over the past few years from its involvement in para-geopolitical fora such as the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik to being one of the driving Arctic forces within British politics.

Elsewhere in 2011 and 2012, Depledge had already made the case for the UK government to develop an overarching formal Arctic framework which would help Britain and other

stakeholders reflect on what actually matters for Britain in the region. Following the release of the Arctic Policy Framework in 2013, British involvement in the Arctic has not ceased to grow. Depledge highlights the challenges the Polar Region Departments have encountered in their attempts to communicate Britain's Arctic interests at home and abroad and the need for a new British Arctic strategic document. Such challenges include the recent short-term vision that has been dominating British foreign policy making. In *Britain and the Arctic*, Depledge argues for a review of the Arctic Policy Framework and for a new strategic document to be published. Since *Britain and the Arctic*'s publication however the UK Polar Regions Department did publish a new Arctic policy (Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic) in 2018. However, the 2018 policy did not surprise much and had a rather conservative approach to Britain's relation to the region.

Britain might not be a forgotten Arctic State, but the book's overall *raison d'être* appears less to be putting Britain on the Arctic map once again and more a statement for Britain to become even more involved in the Arctic than it already is. As Depledge argues if Britain wants to have a bigger role and an impact on Arctic affairs, the focus should be less on claiming topographical proximity ("Britain as the Arctic's nearest neighbour") and far more on making Britain the Arctic's closest neighbour through science, defense, trade and cultural links (127). This kind of involvement from contemporary non-Arctic actors is to be welcomed as the Arctic is being construed as a more global and evolving region. Cooperation between Arctic and non-Arctic stakeholders is key to build a better integrated region. *Britain and the Arctic* is an exemplar of quality research about the globalisation of the Arctic. With its practical outlook, Depledge has made many positive contribution to academic research in the field of polar studies and *Britain and the Arctic* offers the most recent example of such contributions. Its concise format and affordable price tag make it a must-read for everyone interested in Arctic affairs, from decision-makers and politicians to senior academics and undergraduate students.