

Course Information

Course Number: INTA
Course Title: Geo-Politics of the Arctic
Time: Mondays from 6:30 – 9:10 EDT
Location: Classroom TBD
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Details

Instructor: Brian Johnson
E-Mail: bricjohn@tamu.edu
Office Hours: Available in-person or video by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth analysis of the political, security, and economic dynamics of the Arctic, including the history, evolution, and current state of international competition and cooperation in the High North. The course begins with an analysis of how both Arctic and non-Arctic states have perceived the region over time. We will learn about the myths and legends that inspired early exploration and efforts to control the High North and how views of the Arctic's vast security and economic potential have evolved over time. The first part of the course proceeds chronologically from the Age of Exploration to the present to understand the most salient origins of contemporary Arctic affairs: the early search for passageways across the top of the world, the Arctic as a theater for imperial competition and expansion, the region's importance during the Cold War, and the rise and fall of Arctic multilateral governance in the post-Cold War era.

The second part of the course examines the factors that are shaping Arctic geopolitics today, during an era of renewed great power competition. We will look at how climate change and technology are shifting international perceptions of the region's potential, examine the national strategies Arctic states have developed to confront anticipated changes in the region, and how non-Arctic powers such as China are seeking to gain a foothold there.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Critically evaluate and analyze the historical, political, economic, and security dynamics that have shaped the Arctic.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the High North, the challenges Arctic and non-Arctic actors face accessing and maintaining a presence in the region, and the implications of a more accessible Arctic for global politics, economics, and security.
- Understand how global great power competition is changing interstate relations in the Arctic and the prospects for conflict over access to and control over territory, waterways, and resources.

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

- Coates, Ken S., and Carin Holroyd. *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020. [\[link\]](#)
- Koivurova, T., Broderstad, E.G., Cambou, D., Dorrough, D., & Stammer, F., eds. *Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic* (1st ed.). Routledge, 2020. [\[link\]](#)
- McCannon, John. 2012. *A History of the Arctic : Nature, Exploration and Exploitation*. London: Reaktion Books, Limited. [\[link\]](#)
- Nuttall, Mark, Torben R Christensen, and Martin Siegert, eds. *Routledge Handbook of the Polar Regions* (1st ed.). Routledge, 2018. [\[link\]](#)

These and all other assigned readings are accessible will be available on the TAMU Libraries website and/or on the internet. If students have a long-term interest in the Arctic, whether academically or professionally, these are good resources to purchase in hard copy as well.

Students also should keep up with current developments and engage in wider reading regarding the topics we will cover.

Coursework and Grading

Grades are based on in-class participation (15%), two analytic projects (50% comprised of two 25% projects each), and CHOICE of a final in-class essay exam or research paper.

The following scale will be used for calculating final grades for this course: 90-100 A; 80-89 B; 70-79 C; 60-69 D; and 0-59 F.

- **In-class participation (10%)**

The bulk of our time together in the classroom will be in discussion. Each student should be prepared to discuss the reading, either by briefing their responses to the pre-class writing assignments, critiquing a point from the reading you did not agree with, or drawing attention to an element of the reading that has been refuted or reinforced by recent events.

Class participation will be evaluated according to Department and University rubrics. If you have done the reading and are ready to discuss, that is clearly obvious to me, your colleagues, and yourself. If you have done the reading but are not ready to discuss, there will be other opportunities to participate but you will have limited the discussion. If you have not done the reading and are not ready to discuss, that is also clearly obvious to me, your colleagues, and yourself.

- **Analytic Projects (50% -- 25% each)**

Over the course of the semester, each student will produce two analytic papers covering some aspect of the course up to that point of no less than 1250 words and no more than 1500 words (exclusive of notes and citations).

Students must discuss in-person or via email their preferred topic for the first paper with the course instructor no later than the beginning of class on 15 September; they must do the same for their second paper no later than the beginning of class on 16 November.

- **FINAL CHOICE A: Final Exam (35%)**

The first choice for the final grade of the semester will be a final exam in the form of a hand-written essay that covers the course material and will be given whenever the University schedules the final exam.

- **FINAL CHOICE B: Research Paper or Briefing Package (40%)**

The second choice for the final grade of the semester will be to select one of the following: 1) a research paper on a topic of the student's choice, as discussed with the instructor ahead of time; 2) an in-class presentation on a topic of the student's choice, as discussed with the instructor ahead of time; or, 3) a mock briefing package consisting of a scener setter memo, background paper, and talking points to prepare a US official for their meeting with a foreign counterpart on some aspect of Arctic affairs.

Students must clear their topics with the instructor before proceeding and have a clear topic question and/or Arctic policy issue to analyze. The research paper and briefing package will be no less than 1500 words and no more than 2500 words.

Students selecting this option will turn in their papers whenever the University schedules the final exam. They will not sit for a final exam.

Late Work Policy

Analytic papers will be considered late after 6:30 pm EDT on the day of the class meeting. There will be a penalty of one letter grade per day following the due date.

Course Schedule

Please note that all readings are subject to change. Any changes will be communicated to you as soon as possible.

Week 01 | August 25 | Defining the Arctic: Geography, Peoples, and Players

Objective: identify and critically examine the basic building blocks of the Arctic: where it is, who lives there, who controls it.

Week 02 | September 01 | No Class – Labor Day

Week 03 | September 08 | The Arctic in Popular Imagination and National Myth

Objective: understand how and why some countries attach such importance to their status as Arctic states and how this affects has and continues to influence their behavior.

- Doubleday, Nancy C. "Arctic Worlds and the Geography of Imagination." *GeoJournal* 26, no. 2 (1992), pp. 211–15. [\[link\]](#)
- Hansson, Heidi. "The Arctic in Literature and the Popular Imagination." In *The Routledge Handbook of the Polar Regions*, eds. Mark Nuttall, Torben R Christensen, Martin Siegert (Routledge, London, 2018), pp. 45-56.
- Potter, Russell A. "Introduction: Exploration and Sacrifice: The Cultural Logic of Arctic Discovery." In *Arctic Exploration in the Nineteenth Century: Discovering the Northwest Passage*, ed. Frederic Regard (Taylor & Francis Group, Oxford, 2015), pp. 1-17.

Week 04 | September 15 | Exploration, Passageways, and Imperial Expansion in the High North

Objective: examine early drivers of Arctic exploration and conquest; compare and contrast the nature by which governments in Europe and North America sought to govern their Arctic holdings compared with colonial practices elsewhere in the world; assess the impact of these legacies on contemporary Arctic affairs.

- Kaalund, Nanna Katrine Lüders. *Explorations in the Icy North: How Travel Narratives Shaped Arctic Science in the Nineteenth Century*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. [\[link\]](#)
- Regard, Frédéric, ed. *The Quest for the Northwest Passage: Knowledge, Nation and Empire, 1576–1806* (1st ed.). Routledge, 2013. [\[link\]](#)
- Zellen, Barry. "Strategic Expansion to the Arctic Region." In *Arctic Exceptionalism: Cooperation in a Contested World*, pp. 13-46. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2024. [\[link\]](#)

Week 05 | September 22 | The Cold War and After: Confrontation and Cooperation in the Arctic

****Topics for analytic paper #1 due by 6:30pm**

Objective: examine the Arctic's military significance to the United States, Soviet Union, and NATO during the Cold war; assess how regional cooperation evolved among regional actors afterwards and determine the extent to which cooperation in this region was unique compared to other parts of the world.

- Landriault, Mathieu, Payette, Jean-François, and Roussel, Stéphane, eds. *Mapping Arctic Paradiplomacy : Limits and Opportunities for Sub-National Actors in Arctic Governance*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2023.
- Rottem, Svein Vigeland. *The Arctic Council: Between Environmental Protection and Geopolitics*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019. [\[link\]](#)
- Young, Oran R. "Governing the Arctic: From Cold War Theater to Mosaic of Cooperation." *Global Governance* 11, no. 1 (2005), pp. 9-15. [\[link\]](#)

Week 06 | September 29 | Climate and Technology as Drivers of Change in the Arctic

Objective: examine how a changing Arctic climate and advances in technology—particularly with regard to resource extraction—are changing regional dynamics; assess the implications of a more accessible Arctic for global politics, economics, and security.

- Keil, Kathrin. “The Arctic: A New Region of Conflict? The Case of Oil and Gas.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, no. 2 (2014), pp. 162–90. [\[link\]](#)
- Lasserre, Frédéric and Olivier Faury. *Arctic Shipping: Climate Change, Commercial Traffic and Port Development*. Routledge Studies in Transport Analysis. London: Routledge, 2020. [\[link\]](#)
- Rodin, Anthony. “Rising Temperatures, Rising Tensions: Climate Change and Power Transition Theory.” *Journal of Strategic Security* 15, no. 2 (2022), pp. 65–84. [\[link\]](#)
- Serreze, Mark C. *Brave New Arctic: The Untold Story of the Melting North*. Science Essentials. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. [\[link\]](#)

Week 07 | October 6 | Myths Redux: The Promise and Peril of an Accessible Arctic

****Analytic paper #1 due by 6:30pm**

Objective: place into context the possibilities of a more accessible Arctic, with particular emphasis on realistic timelines for profitable and resource extraction in the region.

- Bashkin, Vladimir N., and Olga P Trubitsina. *Geoecological and Geopolitical Risks for the Oil and Gas Industry in the Arctic: Challenges and Threats*. 1st ed. 2022. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Springer, 2022. [\[link\]](#)
- Borgerson, Scott G. “Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming.” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2008): 63–77. [\[link\]](#)
- Keil, Kathrin and Sebastian Knecht, eds. *Governing Arctic Change: Global Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016. [\[link\]](#)

Week 08 | October 13 | No Class – Fall Break**Week 09 | October 20 | The North American Arctic: The United States and Canada**

Objective: critically examine the strategic perspectives of the United States and Canada regarding the Arctic and evaluate the policies each has adopted in pursuit of strategic objectives; compare each country’s approach with focus on areas of overlap and potential competition.

- United States Department of Defense. *2024 Arctic Strategy*. [\[link\]](#)

- United States Coast Guard. *US Coast Guard Strategic Outlook*. [\[link\]](#)
- Government of Canada. *Canada's Arctic Strategy*. [\[link\]](#)
- Menezes, Dwayne Ryan, and Heather N. Nicol, eds. *The North American Arctic: Themes in Regional Security*. UCL Press, 2019. [\[link\]](#)
- Nicol, Heather and Andrew Chater, eds. *North America's Arctic Borders: A World of Change*. University of Ottawa Press, 2021. [\[link\]](#)

Week 10 | October 27 | The Nordic Littoral: Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Norway

Objective: ascertain the strategic perspectives of Denmark—including territories Greenland and the Faroe Islands—as well as Norway regarding the Arctic and evaluate the policies they have adopted in pursuit of strategic objectives; compare their approach with focus on areas of overlap and potential divergences.

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. *Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2023*. [\[link\]](#)
- Government of Greenland, *Greenland in the World: Nothing About Us Without Us. Greenland's Foreign, Security and Defense Policy 2024-2033 – an Arctic Strategy*. Ministry for Statehood and Foreign Affairs, 2024.
- Norwegian Government. *The Norwegian Government's Arctic Policy: People, Opportunities and Norwegian Interests in the Arctic*. [\[link\]](#)

Week 11 | November 02 | The Russian Arctic

****Topics for analytic paper #2 due by 6:30pm**

Objective: assess Russia's Arctic ambitions and the policies Moscow has adopted to pursue its strategic objectives; compare Russia's approach with other littoral states and determine areas of overlap and potential conflict

- President of Russia. *Decree on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Moscow: The Kremlin, 2023. [\[link\]](#)
- Grajewski, Nicole Bayat. "Russia's Great Power Assertion: Status-Seeking in the Arctic." *St Antony's International Review* 13, no. 1 (2017): 141–63. [\[link\]](#)
- Hønneland, Geir. *International Politics in the Arctic: Contested Borders, Natural Resources and Russian Foreign Policy*. London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2017. [\[link\]](#)
- Kjellén, Jonas. "The Russian Northern Fleet and the (Re) Militarisation of the Arctic." *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 13 (2022), pp. 34–52. [\[link\]](#)

- Wall, Colin, and Njord Wegge. "The Russian Arctic Threat: Consequences of the Ukraine War." Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2023. [\[link\]](#)

Week 12 | November 09 | Other Arctic Players: Finland, Iceland, Sweden, the EU, and NATO

Objective: determine other Arctic states' policies towards the region as well as the role of multilateral institutions NATO and the EU; compare their approach to the Arctic with focus on areas of overlap and potential divergences with other regional players.

- Coates, Ken S., and Carin Holroyd. "Europe's North: The Arctic Policies of Sweden, Norway, and Finland." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Coates, Ken S., and Carin Holroyd, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020), pp. 283-303. [\[link\]](#)
- Dams, Ties, and Louise van Schaik. "The Arctic Elephant: Why Europe Must Address the Geopolitics of the High North." Clingendael Institute, 2019. [\[link\]](#)
- Liu, Nengye, Elizabeth A. Kirk, and Tore Henriksen, eds. *The European Union and the Arctic*. Brill, 2017. [\[link\]](#)
- Wegge, Njord. "Arctic Security Strategies and the North Atlantic States." *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 11 (2020), pp. 360–82. [\[link\]](#)

Week 13 | November 16 | China: "Near Arctic" Power?

****Analytic paper #2 due by 6:30pm**

****Final exam choice due by 6:30pm**

Objective: critically examine China's motivations for declaring itself a "near-Arctic state" and the policies Beijing is pursuing to secure a foothold in the region; determine the extent to which China's efforts stand to reinforce or undermine littoral states' stewardship of the region

- People's Republic of China. *Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative*. Xinhua, 2017. [\[link\]](#)
- Alexeeva, Olga V., Frédéric Lasserre, and Marie-Eve Reny. "The Snow Dragon: China's Strategies in the Arctic." *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (91) (2012), pp. 61–68. [\[link\]](#)
- Deng, Beixi, Matthew Melino, William M. Eichbaum, Peiqing Guo, David J. Hayes, Min Pan, Su Ping, Kai Sun, Shijie Xu, and Pei Zhang. "New Trends of Geopolitical Dynamics in the Arctic and China's Relations with the Major Arctic Players." Edited by Heather A. Conley. *U.S.-Sino Relations in the Arctic: A Roadmap for Future Cooperation*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2017. [\[link\]](#)

Week 14 | November 23 | Arctic Futures: Part One

Objective: identify and hypothesize how other countries and actors may seek advantage in a shifting Arctic geopolitical landscape

- Conley, Heather A., Matthew Melino, Nikos Tsafos, and Ian Williams. "Near-Peer Competitor – Military Posture in the Arctic to 2050: Three Scenarios." *America's Arctic Moment: Great Power Competition in the Arctic to 2050*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020. [\[link\]](#)
- Mineev, Andrey, Anatoli Bourmistrov, and Frode Mellemvik. *Global Development in the Arctic: International Cooperation for the Future*. Routledge; 2023. [\[link\]](#)
- Townsend, Jim, and Andrea Kendall-Taylor. "Partners, Competitors, or a Little of Both? Russia and China in the Arctic." Center for a New American Security, 2021. [\[link\]](#)

Week 15 | November 30 | Arctic Futures: Part Two

Objective: examine and develop policy options to advance US strategic interests in the High North amid shifting regional and global dynamics

- Foggo, James G., and Rachael Gosnell. "US Maritime Strategy in the Arctic: Past, Present, and Future." *Naval War College Review* 75, no. 3 (2022), pp. 13–36. [\[link\]](#)
- Menezes, Dwayne Ryan. "The Case for a Five Eyes Critical Minerals Alliance - Focus on Greenland." [\[link\]](#)

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

“The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence” ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

“Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one’s work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case” ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

Texas A&M at College Station

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Texas A&M at College Station

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

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Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus

Texas A&M College Station

Students who need someone to talk to can contact Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) or call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Campus-Specific Policies**Statement on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**

FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of educational records by limiting access to these records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their educational records and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Currently enrolled students wishing to withhold any or all directory information items may do so by going to howdy.tamu.edu and clicking on the "Directory Hold Information" link in the Student Records channel on the MyRecord tab. The complete [FERPA Notice to Students](#) and the student records policy is available on the Office of the Registrar webpage.

Items that can never be identified as public information are a student's social security number, citizenship, gender, grades, GPR or class schedule. All efforts will be made in this class to protect your privacy and to ensure confidential treatment of information associated with or generated by your participation in the class.

Directory items include name, UIN, local address, permanent address, email address, local telephone number, permanent telephone number, dates of attendance, program of study (college, major, campus), classification, previous institutions attended, degrees honors and awards received, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, medical residence location and medical residence specialization.