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Jeffrey McGee
David Edmiston
Marcus Haward

The Future of Antarctica

Scenarios from Classical Geopolitics

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Jeffrey McGee · David Edmiston · Marcus Howard

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Jeffrey McGee
Faculty of Law
Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies
University of Tasmania
Hobart, TAS, Australia

David Edmiston
Faculty of Law
University of Tasmania
Hobart, TAS, Australia

Marcus Haward
Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies
University of Tasmania
Hobart, TAS, Australia

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Foreword

Antarctica is a magnificent place, a vast area of the planet that has been free from large-scale nation-state conflict from the advent of the age of exploration, when pioneers like Amundsen, Bellingshausen, Byrd, Mawson, Scott, Shackleton and Shirase arrived, to the present day. When the Cold War threatened to extend global tensions to this region, twelve nations negotiated the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, effectively setting aside differences over territorial claims and preventing militarization over a significant part of the globe. Over time, with participation of many more states, additional instruments covering environmental protection and marine conservation were added to create the Antarctic Treaty System. The intention by these states was to establish a “natural reserve, devoted to peace and science”, and as a general proposition, the Treaty System has been successful and that vision has been achieved.

Yet the world is experiencing considerable geopolitical turmoil, and Antarctica is not immune. While governance in Antarctica has gone smoothly by comparison with other regions, the underlying circumstances of relations among states in Antarctica have evolved over the past six decades. There are any number of economic and security tensions in Antarctica that require careful attention so that a peaceful future for the region can be secured. There is a growing desire to know: Is the political future of the region stable? How will states balance economic (and in particular fisheries) interests? Can the status quo with regard to territorial claims continue? How will climate change affect the interests of and actions of states in the Antarctic? Will the current ban on mining continue perpetually? Can the region remain unmilitarized?

Given these critical questions, this new book, from a series of leading experts, comes at just the right time. The authors, prominent scholars at the University of Tasmania, located in Hobart, Australia’s gateway to Antarctica and home to the Australian Antarctic Division, have developed original scholarship with the goal of providing a new perspective on the prospects for political stability in the Antarctic region. Using a multidisciplinary approach, they have systematically considered how the future of the Antarctic Treaty System may develop, using a series of scenarios, and focusing in particular on the question of militarization. They present background and history on the Antarctic Treaty System, describe aspects of scenario planning,

focus on detailed aspects of militarization and ultimately construct five scenarios on the issue of Antarctic militarization. Along the way, they focus on important topical issues such as the impact of the rise of China on Antarctic geopolitics and other aspects of Great Power influence, the role of territorial claimants in Antarctic geopolitics and current and future interests in resources that could upset the current order.

The result is a comprehensive consideration of possible future paths. The analysis will be valuable to diplomats, political scientists and government officials, as well as all those interested in whether Antarctica will be able to meet the international community's expectation that it will retain its dedication to peace and science.

Evan T. Bloom
Former lead for U.S. Antarctic
Diplomacy (2006–2020)
Senior Fellow, Woodrow Wilson
International Center for Scholars
Washington, US

Preface

This book is written from the Antarctic gateway city of Hobart, Tasmania—a vibrant harbour for scientific and other interest in Antarctica in the Southern Ocean. Hobart played an important part in the “Heroic Era” expeditions of key figures such as Roald Amundsen and Sir Douglas Mawson. It is also home to Australia’s National Antarctic Program, administered by the Australian Antarctic Division, and much of the Antarctic scientific expertise of Australia’s national scientific body, the CSIRO. Over summer, it is usual to see icebreakers from the Australian, French and Chinese national Antarctic programs leaving port for Antarctic research stations in the south. Each October, the Member States in the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) travel to Hobart for a two-week meeting on marine resource management in the Southern Ocean. In ordinary times, there is a regular flow of people into Hobart for presentations on Antarctic science, policy, humanities and the arts. The temperate, windy and unpredictable weather here reminds us that Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are our neighbours to the south. They have a palpable impact on the mood and feel of the region. The authors of this book share an appreciation of the history and connection between Tasmania, Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

All three authors are located within the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) or the Faculty of Law at the University of Tasmania. This book is an interdisciplinary collaboration in that it draws together authors from the disciplines of international law, international relations and public policy to explore the futures of Antarctica through a common lens of classical geopolitics. Our shared interest in the future of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) is longstanding: Howard first published on the topic in 1990—at a time when the ATS faced significant pressures as it pivoted from a focus on regulating mining towards environmental protection in Antarctica. The more immediate inspiration for this book comes from a coursework masters project on scenario analysis and Antarctic futures that Edmiston conducted in 2019. This explored how the general literatures on scenario analysis might be applied to assess geopolitical futures for Antarctica.

That work was expanded and refined in this book and is illustrated through a deep engagement with the topical issue of Antarctic militarization. Other case studies

might have been chosen, such as mineral resources or fisheries. In selecting militarisation as our focus, we do not wish to add weight to the more speculative claims on this topic that are already in the public sphere. Rather, we have sought to approach the issue in a rigorous, evidence-based and analytical manner, relying on information that is available in the public sphere and validating our conclusions with a small number of informed experts. We hope these scenarios do not incite undue alarm. Our aim is simply to highlight some of the pressures that might lead, plausibly, to a weakening of the historically successful non-militarization provisions of the Antarctic Treaty. We hope this volume encourages government agencies and researchers from various disciplines to consider the use of rigorous scenario approaches and techniques to inform their analyses of the future of the ATS. In doing so, we also hope to promote the resilience of the ATS and further its impressive record of managing the region over the last 60 years.

Hobart, TAS, Australia
August 2021

Jeffrey McGee
David Edmiston
Marcus Haward

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The authors acknowledge the generous contributions of colleagues in Hobart, Canberra, Washington, D.C., and Rotterdam, who have been kind enough to act as sounding boards for our ideas, give feedback on drafts or provide ideas for further enhancements. In particular, we would like to thank (in alphabetical order) Mr. Bruno Arpi, Dr. Anthony Bergin, Mr. Evan Bloom, Mr. Malcom Davis, Prof. John Dickey, Dr. Leonhardt van Efferink, Dr. Andrew Jackson, Profs. A. J. Press, Shirley Scott and Ms. Claire Young. Any errors or omissions of course remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

We would also like to thank Dr. Jacqueline Fox for her excellent copyediting assistance, which made the final stages of submission of this book a relatively painless, and even enjoyable, experience. Many thanks also go to Dr. Stacey McCormack for laying out our diagrams in her usual expert fashion.

Jeffrey McGee would like to thank his family, wife Maree and children Connor, Lucas and Declan, for their understanding and cheerful support during the long hours required to finalize this volume. David Edmiston is very grateful to his wife Gillian and children Hilary and Oliver. He apologizes to Otto, who missed out on so many walks. Marcus Haward wishes to thank Anne and Charles for their ongoing support.

Praise for *The Future of Antarctica*

“This timely and readable volume is social science at its best insofar as its authors make an original and valuable contribution to our understanding both of the subject at hand and to methodology. Applying scenario analysis to the issue of the militarization of the continent, the authors engage critically with the logic of the approach to yield methodological insights that will be helpful to organizations and educators who use scenario-based methodologies. The policy conclusions will be of interest to all those committed to a peaceful future for the Antarctic continent.”

—Shirley Scott, *Professor of International Law and International Relations Head, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy*

“This volume provides an outstanding contribution to the understanding of present and future Antarctic politics. By using scenario analysis, McGee, Edmiston and Haward give us a careful and thought provoking vision of Antarctica’s next decade, where climate change, balance of power and technological development might make the region a critical component of world politics. This book’s strength lies in aligning classic geopolitics with robust methodological frameworks, smoothly describing Antarctica’s realities and key drivers, and providing the reader with plausible consequential scenarios—some of which can be quite surprising. This is a must-read for both academics and policy-makers who seek to understand how Antarctic geopolitics might develop in the near future.”

—Dr. Daniela Portella Sampaio, *Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany*

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About the Authors

Jeffrey McGee is an associate professor at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) and Faculty of Law at the University of Tasmania. His work is published in leading international journals in the fields of Antarctic policy, international environmental law and climate change policy. He co-edited the book *Anthropocene Antarctica*, a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Maritime and Ocean Affairs* on Twenty-First-Century Challenges to the Antarctic Treaty System, and the *Edward Elgar Research Handbook on Climate Change, Oceans and Coasts*. He is an affiliated researcher with Humanities and Social Science expert group of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. He is also a member of the Australian Government's consultative forum for the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and the Tasmanian Polar Network. In 2021, Jeff was a member of the Australian delegation to the 43rd Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. He also has experience as a lecturer on tourist flights to the Ross Sea area and East Antarctica.

David Edmiston is a Ph.D. candidate in the Faculty of Law at the University of Tasmania. A career public servant, David holds masters degrees in public administration and environmental governance, with a focus on Antarctica. In 2019, David undertook an intensive course in geopolitical scenario planning at the Maastricht University Summer School, under the guidance of Dr. Leonhardt van Efferink. David's doctoral project is titled: *Portents from the North: Is the Arctic an indicator of future challenges for Antarctic geopolitics, law and governance?*

Marcus Haward is the professor of Antarctic and Ocean Governance at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania. He has been a member of Australian delegations to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. He has published extensively on Antarctic and ocean governance. He is currently co-leading (with Jeffrey McGee) a multi-year project on Antarctic Geopolitics funded by the

Australian Research Council. He co-edited *Australia and the Antarctic Treaty System: Fifty Years of Influence* UNSW Press, 2011 and most recently authored *Governing Oceans in a Time of Change: Fishing for a Future*, Edward Elgar, 2020.

Abbreviations

AAT	Australian Antarctic Territory
ATCM	Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting
ATCP	Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
CAMLR	(Convention for the) Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources 1980
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CCAS	Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals 1972
CCCR	Command, Control, Communications and Reconnaissance
CEP	Committee for Environmental Protection
COMNAP	Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs
CRAMRA	Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities 1988 (not in force)
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty 1996
CU	Critical Uncertainty
IAATO	International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators
ICRW	International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling 1946
IL	Intuitive Logics
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (fishing)
MARPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCP	Non-Consultative Party (Antarctic Treaty)
OSPA	Oxford Scenario Planning Approach
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal
SCAR	Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research

TUNA	Turbulence, Uncertainty, Novelty and Ambiguity
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract There is growing interest in the future of Antarctic governance. For the last 60 years, the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) has been comparatively successful in meeting its objectives, and sufficiently adaptive in the face of change. However, within the literature, there is increasing concern that, in the medium to long term, ATS responses to emerging geopolitical challenges may be inadequate. How do we assess this concern? How can organisations evaluate the future robustness of their current strategy? Antarctic futures have been explored within national Antarctic programs and they have been the subject of serious academic attention. Unfortunately, much of this commentary lacks a common language and analytical approach. To address this gap, we explore how the multi-disciplinary focus of classical geopolitics might be applied systematically to Antarctic scenarios. Here, we define geopolitics as the intersection between power, authority, and space, in rivalry between states. Over the course of this book, we illustrate a possible approach with the topical example of Antarctic militarisation. Along the way, we make suggestions to augment the current theory and practice of geopolitical scenario planning. We hope this work may be useful for those interested in the rigorous assessment of geopolitical futures—in Antarctica and beyond.

Keywords Antarctic futures · Antarctic scenarios · Geopolitical scenario planning · Classical geopolitics · Critical geopolitics · Critical realist geopolitics · Ggeopolitics definition

There is no shortage of popular and academic interest in the future of Antarctica. Its remoteness and the challenging physical conditions for human existence are a source of continuing fascination with the ice-covered continent. This interest extends to the current and future political status of Antarctica, and the governance arrangements in place under the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Commentators on Antarctic affairs routinely speculate on the impact of current activities for the geopolitical future of the continent and for the ATS. This commentary is varied and at times takes some surprising and eye-opening turns. For instance, in recent years some writers have called for Australia to pay close attention to how it might militarily defend its Antarctic territorial claim; some have expressed alarm at the expansion of Chinese activities in Antarctica, and even suggested that New Zealand look to Antarctica as an