Editorial

The Arctic region has become a stage for an escalating international competition. Climate change is rapidly reshaping the region and opening new opportunities for access to vast natural resources and shipping routes. The political landscape in the Arctic is increasingly about power, sovereignty, and strategic interests.

Russia has aggressively expanded its military presence in the region, reactivating Soviet-era bases and strengthening its Arctic fleet. The ongoing war in Ukraine has only intensified these apprehensions. Meanwhile, China is investing in scientific research stations and infrastructure under its Polar Silk Road initiative. Though not an Arctic nation, China's increasing involvement in the region signals long-term ambitions that challenge traditional Arctic governance.

The Arctic Council, historically a forum for cooperation among Arctic nations, has faced disruptions in its diplomatic function, particularly after member states suspended collaboration with Russia due to its actions in Ukraine. This has left Arctic governance in a fragile state, raising questions about the future of peaceful cooperation in the region.

At the heart of these tensions lies the region's Indigenous communities, whose livelihoods are directly impacted by geopolitical decisions made by major powers. As nations scramble for influence, the voices of Arctic Indigenous peoples must be amplified, ensuring that policies reflect their rights, traditions, and climate realities.

In her article, Minna Hanhijärvi argues that the recent conceptualisations of illiberalism involving ideational and practice approaches offer helpful insights to explain Russia's Arctic and dual climate policies when carefully contextualised with historic, economic, and political developments and power-elite struggles analysed by the rich IR literature.

In her article, Laura Junka-Aikio introduces the concept of subaltern security dilemma to offer a critical, deconstructive, and decolonial approach to the study of Arctic geopolitics and security. Junka-Aikio argues that both the green transition and militarisation need to be understood as new regimes or paradigms of land use that pose a significant threat to the viability of Sámi livelihoods.

In his article, Aleksis Oreschnikoff explores how both scientific and security considerations are embedded in Arctic research infrastructures. Oreschnikoff highlights the importance of examining scientific and security concerns in the Arctic as mutually entangled rather than opposing or mutually exclusive issues.

Finally, Joonas Vola asks a key question in his article: If the Arctic is the product of scientific practice, what function is it produced for? Vola reminds us that historically the Arctic has functioned as a vast natural laboratory for field sciences. He underlines that knowledge in the Arctic context is bound to the history and practice of colonialism.

We hope that this NRIS issue on the politics of the Arctic offers new and valuable perspectives to scientific and societal debates on the Arctic.

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