Royal Holloway Geography for Schools Lecture Series

Global Governance and global systems: The Arctic
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A Level Syllabus:

- Pearson and OCR Global governance: power and borders. What is meant by sovereignty and territorial integrity? The Arctic and the world political map.
- AQA Global governance: the global commons. Is the Arctic a global common? What are the threats facing the Arctic: climate change, fishing, mineral resource activities, strategic rivalries? Role of science and tourism.
- EDUQAS: managing marine environments. Global commons and sustainable management of marine environments. How to avoid over-exploitation of marine ecosystems?

The Arctic is very different to the Antarctic. While both are cold places subject to long periods of darkness during the winter months and long periods of daylight during the short summers, the Arctic is an inhabited region. Indigenous people in the Arctic have lived there for millennia. The Antarctic does not have an indigenous human community.

Arctic communities, indigenous and non-indigenous, number around four million with two million living in the Russian Arctic. Elsewhere population numbers vary as does the percentage of indigenous peoples in a national territory. In the case of Greenland, over 90% would consider themselves indigenous Greenlanders out of a population of around 56,000 people.

There are eight Arctic states: Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.

The Arctic has in recent years become associated with global climate change. The Arctic is warming three times faster than anywhere else in the world and that brings with it a host of consequences for local and global communities and ecosystems. Sea ice melt is transforming the Arctic Ocean into a more open water environment rather than frozen ocean. Permafrost thawing is making previously frozen ground unstable. Wildfires are becoming more ferocious and long-lasting. Weather systems are being disrupted by the movement of warm and cold air in and out of the Arctic. Animals including fish are moving northwards into the Arctic, with implications for fishing activity.

All of which poses questions for how the Arctic is governed in the future? Arctic states are determined to protect their borders, national security, and territorial integrity. Indigenous peoples are eager to ensure that their voices and interests are heard and respected. And external powers such as China and the European Union are interested in the Arctic for science, transport, resource, and trading purposes.

Tourism is a major earner for Arctic states such as Iceland and Finland and East Asian tourism has been crucial for many northern communities.

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The Arctic is not a global common. But the Central Arctic Ocean is international waters, which means that countries such as China, India, the UK, and Japan will be very interested to shape its future management – ships might sail across the world and commercial fishing might be a reality there in the 2030s.

International legal frameworks such as the UN Law of the Sea Convention are important for ensuring that there is marine governance. And the Arctic Council, as an international governmental forum, which includes Arctic and non-Arctic states helps to ensure that there is dialogue between states and other organizations.

There are tensions. Russia and NATO countries such as the US and UK continue to conduct military activities and training. Arctic resources do generate controversies with local communities at loggerheads with national governments and external investors about what should be exploited and what should not. Climate change in the Arctic is not uniform and the loss of sea ice, permafrost thaw and wildfires affect places differently.

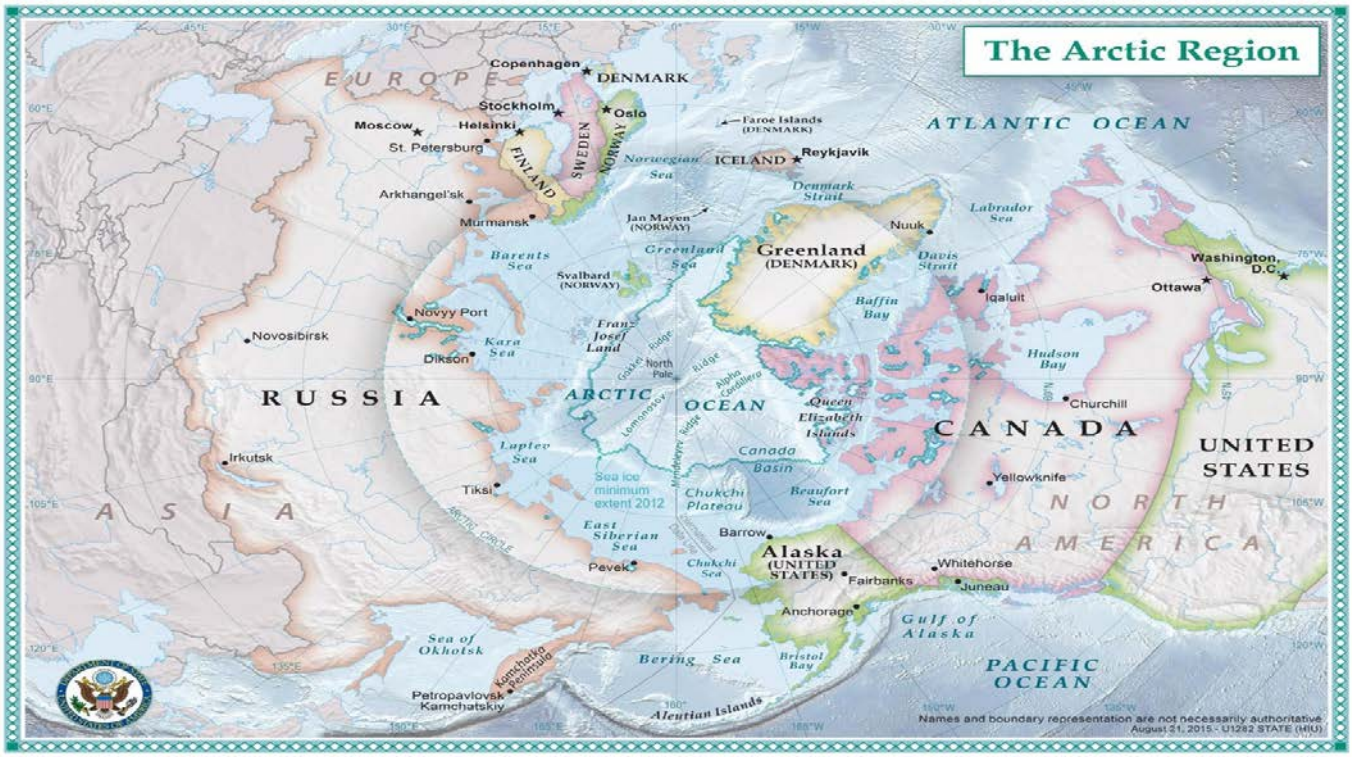

Figure 1. The Arctic Region. The area inside the Arctic circle is considered as indicative of the Arctic region (66 degrees North). Sometimes the area where the average temperature for the warmest month (July) is below 10C is also used for defining the Arctic region and in the past the area above the treeline might also have been indicated but climate warming in the Arctic has meant that vegetation is now growing further north than previously thought possible. Nationally, countries such as Canada and Russia often define their 'northern territories' as starting anywhere from 60 degrees North so where the Arctic ends and the North begins is blurry. Arctic, North Atlantic and North Pacific marine ecosystems are also interwoven with one another so the Bering Sea and Norwegian and Greenland Seas are often considered to be part of the Arctic marine environment. The depiction of sea ice in and around the centre of the Arctic Ocean reveals that ice often congregates around northern Greenland and Canada due to prevailing oceanic currents.

Source: This map of the Arctic was created by State Department geographers as part of the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. URL: https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/oes/ocns/opa/arc/uschair/258202.htm

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Further reading

- Discovering the Arctic: https://discoveringthearctic.org.uk/
- Arctic Sea Ice and News: http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/
- Arctic Council: https://arctic-council.org/en/
- Indigenous peoples of the Arctic: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=2228ac6bf45a4cebafc1c3002ffef0c4
- UN Atlas of the Oceans: http://www.oceansatlas.org/
- Cyropolitics (a topical blog hosted/written by Dr Mia Bennett): https://www.cryopolitics.com/

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