

The Future History of the Arctic

Gunnar Sander, August 2011

1. Project / publication	<p>Emmerson, C. (2010): <i>The Future History of the Arctic. How Climate, Resources and Geopolitics are Reshaping the North, and Why it Matters to the World</i>. London: Vintage, 490 pages.</p> <p>http://www.vintage-books.co.uk/books/0099523531/charles-emmerson/the-future-history-of-the-arctic-how-climate-resources-and-geopolitics-are-reshaping-the-north-and-why-it-matters-to-the-world/</p>
2. Initiator	Independent work of the author
3. Objective	<p>In the foreword, the author explains his own personal fascination since childhood for the Arctic and his interest in exploring the new, changing realities of the region. A bearing idea is that ideas of the Arctic as “permanent, pristine and unchanging” will have to change and adapt to the new realities.</p> <p>Regarding the apparently contradiction embedded in the title – the future history – he explains this twofold: Partly, the book is the history of how the ideas of an Arctic future emerged, what those ideas have meant and how they inform our current ideas about the Arctic’s future. The second is the more classical one on how understanding history is a precondition for understanding the future; “the past does not determine the future, but it moulds it”.</p>
4. Geographical delimitation	The whole Arctic
5. Time horizon	The time horizon is the history up to the contemporary situation (2009-2010).
6. Thematic focus	The book touches most issues on the Arctic agenda, but has a clear focus on some of them: the historic and future division of Arctic territories, military uses of the Arctic, climate change and the oil industry. Shipping is an example of an issue that is only briefly described compared to these.
7. Images of the future	<p>Explicit statements about the future are rare. When the future is addressed, it is done as extensions of the theme under discussion. Examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The remilitarization of the Arctic as a conclusion of the chapter on the military role of the Arctic (page 140 – 43) • Climate change: projections on future changes including impacts are provided in the section called “Nature” <p>His final comment on the future is that the Arctic may develop as a zone of global cooperation on science and environmental stewardship. More likely, he sees the Arctic as a battleground for states and different economic and political interests, trying either to develop its economic potential or to protect the environment. “A battleground does not mean war, but it does mean conflict and competition: political, economic, cultural and diplomatic.” (p 344)</p>
8. Key driving forces	<p>Looking at the whole book, the important drivers for change are climate change and the rising demand for new resources, in particular petroleum. He explores how this leads to environmental problems and commercial and political rivalry between states involved.</p> <p>Reading the different sections of the book more in detail, the reader gets a good view of the historical roots of contemporary issues. Particularly the chapters about the oil industry tells a lot about the drivers behind its rises and declines in the various countries and periods – most general in ch 8, more specific on Russia in</p>

	ch 9, Alaska in ch 10 and Norway in ch. 11.
9. Uncertainties/wildcards	No particular "wildcards" for the future are discussed.
10. Accomplishment and collaboration	The book is written by one author, based on extensive use of cited literature and interviews often referred in reports from places he has visited.
11. Method	Qualitative
12. Sources of information	44 pages with notes including literature references, a selected bibliography and acknowledgments naming people he has interviewed.
13. Strengths	<p>The book is one in a bundle that can be characterized as "one author trying to explain the Arctic to the general public in a mixture of literature review, interviews and reports from travelling". The book is well written, gives a good overview and is rather thorough on the issues where it concentrates. What the reader finds particularly interesting or useful will depend on interest and previous reading.</p> <p>To me, not knowing North-American history well, the chapter about the making of the American Arctic was useful. It gave an understanding of why borders are where they are, and a glimpse into Canadian-US rivalry in the short but decisive historical period covered.</p> <p>The treatment of the Arctic in Soviet economy and the role of the gulag system is a good historical backdrop for understanding Russia's industrial heritage and national sentiments to the Arctic. Combined with the chapter on Russia's Arctic dilemma on future petroleum development and the west, the discussion of Russia is good.</p> <p>There is also much to learn about Alaska, seen through the lenses of national energy security and oil developments.</p> <p>The treatment of the oil industry takes most space and is interesting, placing the Arctic into broader global developments.</p> <p>It is seldom to find an analysis of Iceland included in books about the Arctic; the aftermaths of the financial collapse with future prospects for energy development and relations to the EU are discussed.</p>
14. Weaknesses	<p>Discussing weaknesses to a large extent will be to point out issues that are not covered as extensively as the main issues mentioned above. Canada, the second largest Arctic nation after Russia, is not highlighted as much as could be wanted. Shipping, fisheries and tourism are other thematic examples.</p> <p>Given the title, I had hoped to find more elaborate discussions about the future development of the Arctic.</p>
15. Attention and significance	This is hard to judge.
16. Relevance for the Fram Centre	The description of the petroleum industry in the Arctic is the most interesting for our research topics.