

Arctic Studies and International Relations

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What are we teaching this quarter at the Jackson School of International Studies at University of Washington? The courses offered still reflect the history of civilizations as well as the contemporary world. I am teaching with Professor Joel Migdal in his famous course, "The Making of the 21st Century," which analyzes world history since WWI until now, and how world orders were established, how they collapsed and how they have been perpetually replaced by new orders.

But what drew my attention this quarter, in particular, were the posters for new courses in our School – courses entitled, "Arab-Israeli conflict," "Latin America and Labor Movements," or "History of Cities: Cairo, Rome, Athens." There are no longer the most attractive. What draws my attention are courses such as, "Arctic Studies as an Emerging Global Region." The course starts from the premise of climate change and how the Arctic transformed into a region of scientific, geographic and political interests in the 21st century. Consequently, the course addresses the region from different angles: the climate, human rights, the indigenous population's concepts of "territoriality," the historical interaction between the Arctic indigenous people and international law, as well as the national interests of states in terms of setting policies and passing laws on resource management, among other issues.

This is not a single course in passing, either. Rather, there is another course entitled, "Arctic Insecurities." It is a clever title that plays on the notions of "security" and "insecurities/fears," projecting the Arctic as an emerging region of conflict where national security interests of powerful states are likely to clash.

In addition to the courses, there is also a public lecture series, called *The Future of Ice* open to all in order to get acquainted with issues related to the Arctic. When you read the title of each lecture you realize Arctic Studies seem to be one of the most important fields in the near future. The backgrounds of the lecturers vary: journalists and photographers from BBC and National Geographic; marine biologists, political science and law professors.

I raise this issue this week, as we are about to vote on the constitution, perhaps in order to draw attention to the fact that the world is changing around us. The Middle East, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, the Arab World, Iran, Turkey and Israel, are not going to be the only areas of focus and attention in the future. Rather, environmental security fears; nuclear reactors' catastrophes; climate change; exploration of the Arctic as an emerging region of conflict over resources and strategic security are all rising into the public schema and crystallizing into actual public discourse, within the powerful countries.

Some may see in this some hope: meaning "good riddance" let the world forget about us in the Middle East and focus on the Arctic! But that may also mean that we are still outside the sphere of the future; we inhabit history; reinvent the wheel whereas the world's compass and direction is heading

somewhere completely different. Why don't we skip some steps and have some of our youth start specializing in "Arctic Studies"?! Perhaps if they started dreaming of having influential positions in this emerging field, the policies they help set will influence the entire world. I do not know about particulars but science is the future and scientists make mistakes in the "developed world." Japan's Fukushima nuclear reactor is a case in point, after it collapsed following a tsunami because it had been built in an earthquake zone in the first place! This is one of the worst examples of "scientists" making decisions that influenced an entire ocean, in which, the entire world is implicated. Given this uncertain reality, a young Egyptian scientist should trust him or herself some more. Perhaps if they do, they'll find a place for themselves in the future.



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