



## Who Saved Antarctica? The Heroic Era of Antarctic Diplomacy

Andrew Jackson (2022)

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As climate change is unleashing challenges across the world, deliberations on melting of ice in the polar regions- Arctic and Antarctic - have come to draw the attention of both scholars and policy-makers. Consternation pertaining to what the unravelling of the Polar regions would entail in the coming future behoves the international community to seek and generate assurances for alternatives, particularly to avert international discord among nations. The manifestation of the search for alternatives has already culminated in the 'The New Great Game' among nations to explore and exploit the abundant rich resources in these two regions.

The book '*Who Saved Antarctica? The Heroic Era of Antarctic Diplomacy*' by Andrew Jackson, raises certain questions of contemporary relevance based on historical facts: Has diplomatic engagement been able to save the future of Antarctic or unleashed friction between and among nations to assert their sovereignty? What are the available instruments and conditions to determine assertion of such sovereignty and avert possible international

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discord that might ensue on account of 'mining' (mineral and marine resources) and environmental challenges? In doing so, the book focuses on the Antarctic Treaty in conjunction with its related agreements, treaties, instruments and institutions (conventions and protocols), together referred as the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Also, the book delves into the political and diplomatic history, involving single or multi-stakeholders, in arriving at a 'consensus' on issues related to mining and environment.

Tracing the historical background [Chapter 1-5], Andrew Jackson illustrates the role of different actors (majorly Australia and France) in the early phase of negotiations of the Antarctic Treaty. He provides a detailed account of the complex interaction of the two-level domestic-international paradigm and the process of consensus in negotiating the regulatory framework for Antarctic governance. The author contends that as one of the important regimes of International Law, the Antarctic Treaty System can be seen as ahead of its time. For instance, Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA) was adopted in 1988 despite noviable trace of economic potential of strategic and commercial value at that time. Jackson writes, "*Many previous environmental issues needed attention, but the impetus to 'save' Antarctica arose only in the context of mining, even though there were no known economic minerals*" (p. 365).

Yet, he also highlights how the apprehension of future economic prospects induced contested claims among different players, thereby making the

process of consensus elusive. Highlighting the difficulty in generating a political consensus among parties concerned, the author states,

*"In May 1989, less than a year after Australia had agreed to the text of the Convention, the Antarctic Treaty Parties were shocked when Hawke announced his Cabinet's decision not to sign it. Australia, a strong defender of the Treaty, had broken the precious norm of consensus. Rather than trying to make CRAMRA more palatable, the government proposed banning mining and establishing an Antarctic wilderness park. Instead of being praised for its bold initiative, Australia was blamed for destabilising the Treaty"* (p. 2)

Jackson also argues that as international regime on environmental politics gathered steam in the 1990s, a complex web of players, greater struggles and stakes in the region emerged that eventually became instrumental in building a consensus on Antarctic governance [Chapter 6-9]. Later, the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (the Madrid Protocol), which replaced CRAMRA, resulted in the prohibition of mining and establishment of environmental rules much before any known environmental challenges. But, not without any political rigmarole.

What makes the content of the book more interesting is the meaningful insights into the intertwined realm of politics, international diplomacy, international law and environmental politics. As the author writes,

*"It tells the story of a turning point in development of Antarctic governance, particularly the question of mining and*

*environment protection. It does this through the lens of the political arguments and diplomatic negotiations, rather than the legal substance of the issues being discussed. It adds to Antarctic history more generally, but also diplomatic history, international environmental history and understanding of environmental politics on a continental scale". (p. 8)*

The final chapter addresses the question of "Who Saved Antarctica?" wherein Jackson narrows down the 'competing claims' of multiple stakeholders (ministers, presidents and others concerned from the international community) and concludes that 'The Heroic Era of Antarctic Diplomacy' was more than the culmination of a single player, process or phenomena.

With climate change revving the debate on 'catastrophic ramifications' on the Polar regions, the book under review is a value addition to the sparsely available literature on political and diplomatic history of the Antarctic. The book is one of its kind as Andrew Jackson writes a historical account by drawing on the archival documents of Australia on Antarctic Governance. In the process, the author has successfully brought the less explored and known region into mainstream repository of knowledge.

By analysing the available provisions and conditions of the Antarctic Treaty regarding territorial sovereignty and exercise of rights of states with regard to high seas (Article IV and VI) as well as domestic-international linkages building the diplomatic history of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), Andrew Jackson responds to the many questions on sovereignty, environmental politics, international diplomacy and international

law of Antarctic region – a burning subject of contemporary relevance.

It also throws light as to how political dissensions on account of discovery of valuable minerals in the Antarctic region translated into political cooperation and also triggered environmental discussion. As Jackson aptly describes,

*"It discusses how the imagined prospect of valuable resources amplified existing friction over the Antarctic territorial claims and how the states involved developed environmental measures, overcame their reluctance to discuss resources and put in place a temporary mining moratorium while protecting their own national interests. Early ideas of environment protection are revealed."*  
(p. 9)

The book, thus, offers lessons on the real struggles and high stakes which intersected making cooperation and consensus possible among parties concerned. As such, the book can act as a window in addressing contemporary struggles and stakes of actors in the region, paving way for future research in the region.

The book, however, primarily focuses and relies on archival documents of Australia to build the entire mining and environmental narrative on the region. But, given the constraints to access government records as "much of the record is not public" (p. 5), the book can be a step forward for conducting extensive analytical research, encompassing different perspectives of the Parties concerned, based on a comparative assessment of archival reports and related documents of other concerned parties to the treaty. This will enrich and enhance the historical and diplomatic narrative on

how the two-level policymaking processes resulted in a political compromise between and among treaty parties for effective implementation of the treaty.

Notwithstanding, the book offers valuable lessons that can be applied to comprehend the present-day 'The New Great Game' in the Polar region which has become a theatre of geo-strategic and geo-economic calculations for scientific, military and diplomatic manoeuvres. Another novelty of the book that compels a reader is the application of theoretical frameworks, such as characterisation offered by Robert Mark on the circumstances shaping historical events categorised into contingency, conjuncture and accident and Oran Young's categorisation of leadership styles divided as intellectual, entrepreneurial and structural, to fill in gaps or substantiate

the archival data. Such mixed analytical methods definitely add to the richer understanding of the circumstances leading to Antarctic regime.

For anyone (students, scholars, faculty members as well as policy makers) who is interested in comprehending the politics and diplomatic efforts to protect the Polar regions from the adverse 'consequences' of mining and climate change as well as the future 'Great Game' among nations, the book is a useful read. The book offers as much to the discourse on international diplomacy, primarily politics of consensus-based negotiations involving multiple stakeholders, as to international environmental law seeking to find agreeable solutions to the question of territorial jurisdiction, mining and climate change.