

## **Russia and the North, edited by Elana Wilson Rowe**

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RUSSIA AND THE NORTH. Edited by Elana Wilson Rowe. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009. 219 pp. \$29.00 CAD/USD (paperback). ISBN 978-0-7766-0700-9.

The Arctic is currently producing roughly 10% of the world's crude oil and 25% of its natural gas, and the Russian Arctic accounts for 80% of this oil and 99% of the gas. This geographic fact explains much, although not all, of the mood swings in Russian government policy towards the Arctic since the 1980s.

During the early years of the Cold War, the Arctic became the central front owing to the polar juxtaposition of the Soviet Union and the United States and the concentration of strategic weapons and warning systems around the Arctic. This polar focus diminished in later years (at least in part because of submarine-based missiles) but the Arctic retained both its strategic military significance and Cold War infrastructure. Then, with the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, everything

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changed. The post-Soviet government decentralized its functions in general and lost interest in the Arctic in particular.

A new policy emerged when Putin became president in 1999–2000, reflecting a defiant reassertion of Russian national interest, which has been expressed in various forms, and a recentralization of power in Moscow. The impact of this new policy on the Arctic is the primary focus of a series of papers assembled by Elana Wilson Rowe in *RUSSIA AND THE NORTH*. The papers have been authored by scholars in a wide variety of disciplines ranging from geography, politics, and economics to military affairs and anthropology. They cover subjects like the fisheries industry, Russian military, climate change, oil and gas development, and indigenous peoples—all within the context of Russian policy and its effects on the North.

The book opens with an introductory overview from the editor, which provides a useful road map for the individual papers that follow. The first of these is authored by P. K. Baev and focuses on the Russian military in the Arctic. Despite its earlier status as the central front in the Cold War and a general resurgence of military muscle-flexing, Baev observes that the Arctic has not been a particular focus of renewed military activity. Nevertheless, there have been some recent developments that reflect the impact of the new policy, including the reactivation of several northern airbases and 2007 resumption of high-latitude strategic bomber flights. Much of the motivation behind the reassertion of a military presence in the Arctic is tied to concerns about protection of the hydrocarbon resources in the region from perceived threats of foreign encroachment. Baev emphasizes the technical problems that have plagued the Russian military in the Arctic, illustrated by the sinking of the submarine *Kursk* in 2000 and subsequent loss of an antiquated Tu-160 aircraft.

One of the most important papers in this volume is authored by Craig ZumBrunnen and addresses the issue of climate change. The principal focus of the paper is Russian government policy towards the Kyoto Protocol, but the paper also contains a useful summary of the projected warming impacts and secondary feedback effects on the Russian Arctic. These include the potentially catastrophic impact of the release of methane hydrates stored in west Siberian bogs (containing an estimated 70 gigatons of carbon). Americans may be both relieved and appalled to learn that the United States is not the only major nation where some politicians continue to deny the unfolding reality of global warming. Such behavior has been seen in Russia as well, despite inescapable evidence from the North, which includes a dramatic expansion of Siberian lakes in recent decades. Nevertheless, as ZumBrunnen observes, the Russian government perceived both political and economic benefits from ratification of the Kyoto Protocol—stepping into the leadership vacuum created by the hapless Bush administration. Implementation of the agreement has been more difficult.

Another major paper, co-authored by Arild Moe and the editor Elana Wilson Rowe, concerns the development of northern offshore oil and gas development. It is the wealth of hydrocarbon resources—so critical to the Russian economy of the early 21st century—that has restored the importance of the Arctic in government policy. The strategic value of the oil and gas industry extends beyond its role in ensuring economic growth and a happy electorate. In 2003, the Putin administration began—for the first time—to develop a strategy for development of the offshore resources of the North (which includes the Russian Far East). A major concern is maintaining Russian control of companies that are extracting gas and oil from the region. As the authors explain, competition between the two state-owned giants Gazprom and Rosneft has complicated implementation of the strategy.

Other papers in the volume address the troubled state of the northern fisheries industry (plagued with bureaucracy, corruption, and over-fishing), human population trends in the Russian Arctic and their effects (significant migration as the region adjusts to a market economy), and the impact of the oil and gas industry on indigenous peoples. The editor provides a brief afterword that summarizes national political trends in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union and their effects on the Arctic.

*RUSSIA AND THE NORTH* contains an informative set of papers on a variety of issues and is recommended to anyone with an interest in the Russian Arctic and especially to those who live and/or work in the North. Russian government policy is having an impact in all areas of circumpolar life—political, economic, and cultural. Occasionally, some of the papers manifest a slightly naïve tone when discussing the motives and goals of the Russian government—as though shocked to discover their pursuit of narrow national interests at the expense of others there—but readers will be well served overall by the thoughtful analyses of current policy and likely future directions. The book is not heavily illustrated, but some papers contain supporting maps and diagrams. One of the strengths of the volume is timeliness; many papers contain references to events that took place only months before it was published.

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