

RUSSIA'S ARCTIC STRATEGIES AND THE FUTURE OF THE FAR NORTH. By MARLENE LARUELLE. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2014. ISBN 978-0-7656-3501-3 (pbk.). xxvi + 251 p., maps, bib., index. Softbound. US\$34.95.

This book sets out to offer a comprehensive assessment of Russia's strategy in the Arctic. But it is aptly titled "Arctic strategies" in the plural, and the author makes it clear that Russia does not have a comprehensive strategy in the form of an integrated and coordinated policy. Even though a document entitled "Strategy for development of Russia's Arctic zone" was adopted in 2013—after the book had been completed—this observation still stands. That being said, there is no lack of official statements stressing the Arctic's significance for Russia and Russia's importance for the Arctic. The North has for a long time played an important role in Russia's statehood and identity. Nevertheless, the exact delineation of the Russian North, High North, or—increasingly—Arctic, is ambiguous and contested. This uncertainty is reflected in the vacillations in administrative borders and responsibilities, all well analyzed in the book. Although the Russian Arctic is populated by many small indigenous groups, indigenous policy plays a much less central role than in, say, Canada. Title to land is not an issue.

Even though the North and the Arctic are presented as something special in Russian political discourse, in reality developments there are very much a consequence of broader policies or are connected to what is happening elsewhere. In line with this understanding, a substantial part of the book is devoted to broader issues, but with Arctic implications. Russia's negative demographic development is well known, but it has particular implications for the High North, which is already sparsely populated, contrasting with the expansive vision of the country in the Arctic, heard in official statements and seen in some development programs. There the emphasis is on "economic conquest by *osvoenie*, massive population settlement" (p. 51), whereas many economic actors prefer a fly in–fly out system.

Climate change is of course a global issue, but it has particular repercussions in the Russian North, notably degradation of infrastructure due to melting permafrost. Even if such observations are now commonplace, the cost of adaptation does not seem to be taken into account in projections of social and economic development (p. 88).

The discussion of legal disputes in the Arctic is definitely non-alarmist. "The patterns of cooperation are therefore clearly prevalent, even among competitors" (p. 109). This statement is supported by a case-by-case review of salient legal disputes. Also the military development in the Arctic is put into a broader perspective: the Russian build-up taking place is seen as part of a global dilemma the Russian military is facing, in which means correspond neither with goals, nor with real needs.

"Interpreting the Arctic as a key economic resource is the main driver of Russia's interest in the region, even trumping

its security objectives” (p. 135). This is a bold statement and it is difficult to test the validity, precisely because there is no coherent policy. But there can be no doubt that resources are one important driver. An interesting question, which is pursued in the book, is how commercial interests interact with state security objectives. A case in point is the ambivalent attitude to foreign companies, which are needed but not desired. The commercial attractiveness of many Arctic projects is questioned. This corresponds well with a generally weakened Arctic hype that can be seen also in other parts of the region. Nevertheless, many promising investment opportunities remain, but they require advanced technologies, skillful management, and capital.

One of the most dynamic sectors in recent years has been shipping on the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans but also serves destinations along the coast of Siberia. Moscow wants to see more international use of the NSR to help finance infrastructure and icebreakers. The most promising customers are connected to extraction of raw materials and energy, but there are also many factors that limit international interest. In this sector too, the Russian ambitions are high, but the financial issues have not been solved.

This book is very useful as a comprehensive discussion of Russian thinking, policies, and challenges in the Arctic. It puts them into perspective and the overviews and conclusions are very readable in themselves. But the book goes farther. It gives a sometimes quite detailed presentation of current developments. One good thing here is the meticulous rendering of sources, very helpful for students and scholars who want to pursue particular questions. However, some of the details, particularly in the chapters dealing with legal and economic matters, are wrong or outdated, or their presentation is inaccurate, partly because the sources are questionable. Sometimes old plans or proposals are presented as descriptions of the current situation. The book may therefore not be suited as an “encyclopedia.”

For example, the Chinese icebreaker *Xuelong* is not the world’s largest, as stated on p. xvi; the summary of Svalbard’s history on p. 107 is very imprecise; the largest icebreaker in the world, *Fifty Years of Victory*, does not belong to the Northern Fleet (p. 121), but to the civilian Atomflot; and the Vidayevo base is hardly an example of military-civilian rapprochement (p. 123), as Gazprom was forced to change to another location, Teriberka, for its planned terminal. The discussion of the Russian views on the status of the Svalbard archipelago is mixed with bilateral Russian-Norwegian issues on the mainland, where the Spitsbergen Treaty has no relevance (p. 125). The United States is not going to overtake Russia’s position as the world’s largest gas exporter very soon (p. 148), but it may become the largest LNG exporter. It is correct that Russian gas output was reduced dramatically in 2009, but not because of production problems, as inferred on p. 142, but because of a drop in demand in both export and domestic markets, caused by the financial crisis. Gazprom does not plan to build the Yamal-Europe pipeline (p. 142)—it has been in operation

since 1999 (but there has been talk about constructing a second branch). Most of Fedinskiy High is not on the Norwegian continental shelf (p. 143). Presentation of offshore and onshore exploration issues is mixed in a way that makes it impossible for the reader to understand what the figures refer to (p. 149). BP cannot revive the Arctic agreement with Rosneft (p. 151), because the main elements were included in the deal between Rosneft and ExxonMobil (but other Arctic projects for BP cannot be excluded). Two legal issues concerning navigation on the Northern Sea Route have been confused: the status of straits—of which there are several—and the right of coastal states to regulate traffic within the exclusive economic zone if it is partly ice-covered (p. 170). The system and level of payment for going through the NSR were changed from 2012 (p. 177), and the allegation of discrimination (p. 172) is outdated, even though present practice is not transparent; territorial borders and state sovereignty are confused with exclusive economic zones and exclusive resource rights (p. 168). The new Northern Sea Route Administration, which was set up in Moscow in 2013, does not have the wide power described (p. 183). The new nuclear icebreakers will be operated by Atomflot, not by FESCO or the Murmansk Shipping Company (p. 186), and the floating oil storage Belokamenka is not in Arkhangelsk (p. 204), but in Murmansk.

Such mistakes, coupled with a sometimes superficial review of developments and uncritical use of sources, are disappointing in a book that has much good analysis. The closing words contain an interesting, but ominous, hypothesis: “. . .the cost of an Arctic-centered development model is probably higher than is estimated by the Russian authorities, and the relevance of this choice could be brutally undermined by developments in the international and domestic arenas” (p. 210). It seems that the hypothesis may be tested even sooner than the author had anticipated.

Arild Moe  
Senior Research Fellow  
Fridtjof Nansen Institute  
PO Box 326  
1326 Lysaker, Norway  
arild.moe@fni.no