

Baseline of Russian Arctic Laws. Paul Arthur Berkman, Alexander N. Vylegzhanin, and Oran R. Young (eds.). 2019. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, Hdbk, 734 pp., 3 Illst. €149.99, ISBN 978-3-030-06261-3 ISBN 978-3-030-06262-0 (eBook).

This is such a monumentally useful book that its title should sell it alone. As promised, it is a compendium of Russian laws related to the Arctic. International treaties, bilateral and multi-lateral political agreements, and domestic law and regulation are all covered.

The book is a direct translation of “Volume 3: Applicable Legal Sources” (Том 3. Применимые правовые источники) of the three-volume “The Arctic Region: Problems of International Cooperation” (Арктический регион: Проблемы международного сотрудничества) published by the Russian International Affairs Council through the Aspect Press in Moscow in 2013. As such, the book was originally conceived as a compendium of Arctic law in Russian, for Russian scholars and legislators, so that it constituted a one-stop shop to codify the Russian conception of the contemporary legal regime in the Russian Arctic. As a result, the parts that are most useful to Russian speakers are not the same parts as are more useful to English readers in this translation.

As primarily a collection of laws, formulaically laid out, there is little to analytically engage with, although the translated original Russian introduction by Alexander N. Vylegzhanin, Head of the International Law Department at MGIMO University, is excellent and reads more like an essay or stand-alone journal article in its scope and depth. It is authoritative, well-written and holds gravitas. It is also astutely political, embedding language in support of particular positions and of the State that its laws represent. Policy sensitive words are italicised to ensure their encoded meanings are transmitted. This is a political document to accompany a systemic choice in the collection of laws presented, and both the laws and the political directive accompany each other finely. Vylegzhanin’s essay clearly orders, interprets and proposes how these constituent domestic, bilateral and multilateral laws form a consistent legal regime. To this end, the book is essentially political and projects its acute interpretation to a wider application. From a Russian perspective, it is strong. From a Western perspective, it is worryingly subjective. The sarcasm of the author also belies how difficult any future international cooperation is going to be though, for example, taking offence at the suggestion of the North Sea route being in disrepair or the ubiquitous Russian derision of the global universalism of Western values.

Unsurprisingly, Vylegzhanin’s macro interpretation is one of Russia as *sui generis*: the implication is that Russia is special and so does not have to engage with the international legal norms of the “West”. The Russian political bias in this text is unashamed. But that does not lessen the impact of the interpretation or the legal regime it describes. The frustrations of anyone working to extend the cordial and cooperative international legal frameworks of the North American and European Arctic States will not be assuaged by this legal position. Its political position is from the first page establishing itself as defending a Russian legal regime between two “extreme” positions, sovereignty extended from the sea bed as an Arctic sea bed governance regime and UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) as an ocean governance regime. It may surprise some Western readers to see UNCLOS listed as an “extreme” argument.

If the original Russian introduction is hard fought, bared down and arms ready, then the English Preface is as flaccid as warm lettuce. Poorly written, archaic and pompous, the Preface is by parts self-congratulatory for providing a basic translation service and worse, shoe-horning in extraneous or irrelevant research, ideas and arguments. This detracts from, rather than builds confidence in, what follows as a fine set of translations. Why the Preface author’s funding arrangements in his home university are published on page *viii* is simply bewildering. And the “possible uses of the book” suggestions as organised into research questions belong in the author’s undergraduate class notes, not this publication. Spruiking his own research projects only cheapens the work. This is a book of translations that should serve the English-reading audience in government, policy-making and academia, as with the original Russian audience. We are talking about maritime and international laws of the highest importance, across a geography that encompasses the littoral United States, Russia and Europe and is increasingly accommodating China. This is a very important book and commercially advertising your research project is entirely inappropriate in this context.

The main contrast is again that the Western translators of this collection have seemingly no reason for doing so, while the original Russian compilation has very deep and multifaceted motivations behind it. The English editors seem oblivious to this, at least in writing. Not only is the Russian original written with purpose, it is written with depth of scholarship, conviction and weight of history, institutions and legal regimes.

The main body of the book is simply a compendium of laws, both international and domestic, that apply to Russia in the Arctic. For this it is a hugely useful reference book, though for its price and weight, is probably confined to a readership of specialists. There is nothing here for the generalist or casual reader—this is a book to either refer to often, or not at all.

Chapter Three is probably the most useful to the English reader, being a translation of selected Russian national domestic legislation. The domestic legal architecture in Russia being one of the key obstacles to greater international cooperation in the Eastern Arctic. This collection going back to 1821 Tsarist Russia solidifies a legitimacy claim of long legal custodianship of multiple sectors of the Arctic. The internal Russian legal system of laws and regulations, building on the Socialist Law of the Soviet Union, is extraordinarily important for those from Common Law or Civil Law jurisdictions to understand. For Russia, and increasingly China, internal regulations with roots in Socialist Law will determine much future activity in the Arctic space.

For the Russian reader of the original, probably Chapter Four is the most useful, being translations into Russian of major political and legal documents of the other Arctic eight states. This section covers the policy documents and national strategies of the Arctic states that proliferated in the latter part of the first decade of the 21st century.

The Chapter One treaties are obviously individually available in English originals. Though the selection of which laws were included in the collection is significant in understanding the construction of Russia's Arctic law regime. The long memory of

Russia's institutionalisation of Arctic law is telling here, with the inclusion of the *Anglo-Russian Treaty of St Petersburg* of 1825 regarding North America. However, the order of listings (presumably order of importance to the Russian state) was confusing.

Chapter Two is also interesting as a composition. It covers the institutional development of Arctic legal regimes and rules in international law. Internal Russian regulations, Joint Statements and Memoranda of Understanding between States, and the series of multilateral Declarations of the 2000s from Tromsø to Fairbanks are all presented as a contiguous system of increasing internal legal and institutional complexity, and legitimacy.

The problems with this book are mostly typesetting and mostly occurring near the front of the book in the Preface and the Introduction. The seemingly random hyphenation is both ubiquitous and distracting, for example, page v “of-the”. It is seemingly a hangover of Russian English creeping into the editing process, but to the modern English reader, it is extremely distracting. The price of the book is also a bit ridiculous. For something as important as this, we would think that this could be an affordable reference book rather than priced for specialists and libraries.

On a more positive note, it has a two great index sections, one index on the laws included and an index on people and places mentioned. This is a classical book, where unfortunately many publishers of late have succumbed to cheapening their products; this one should stand bound in libraries for decades to come.

This book is as important for what it is to the English reader as what it represents to the Russian-speaking Arctic scholars. The choices in this compilation, and the need for its construction in Russian, are telling. The interpretation and reception of the book in English should be hugely welcomed, but its very existence and the choices of its formation should be studied closely by scholars outside Russia. (Tristan Kenderdine, Future Risk, Almaty, Kazakhstan (tristan.leonard@frsk.com))

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