

**RUSSIA'S ARCTIC STRATEGIES AND THE FUTURE OF THE FAR NORTH.** Marlene Larouelle. 2014. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe. 280 p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 978-0-7656-3501-3. \$34.95.

Larouelle's book intends 'to offer a comprehensive assessment of Russia's strategy in the Arctic' (page xxiii) through an investigation of issues, policies, changes and challenges affecting the Russian north with an aim to tie them together into a coherent whole. It begins with an introductory chapter staging the 'Arctic theatre' (page xvi) as both a changing geographical and political space with complex legal characteristics and an increasingly globalizing and multidisciplinary debate shaped by various actors at different levels with diverse aims and interests. In this grand play, Russia is positioned as the least known of Arctic players despite its geographical, economic and historical importance in the region and the key role it has had in the Arctic political balance. However, not only is Russia important for the Arctic, but the Arctic is crucial for Russia; as a result of a series of complex and interconnected developments, the far north occupies a central place in Russian policy and discourse.

The first content chapter of the book takes an explicit focus on the development of Russian Arctic strategies. Since the turn of the millennium, the renewed interest in the country's Arctic regions has been expressed through the creation of a combination of more general policy guidelines and detailed programmes split under various ministries and governmental agencies. As such, the strategies are designed not only to address Arctic issues ranging from traditional and non-traditional security, socioeconomic development and infrastructure to science, communication and the like. Instead, for Russia the Arctic holds a high ideological value and through the increased attention on the Arctic region expressed also through the creation of the Arctic policies and strategies, this symbolism is harnessed for to serve national policy-making in domestic arenas on the one hand, and for Russia's nation-branding in front of international audiences on the other.

Larouelle identifies four key features in Russia's decision-making in its Arctic affairs: the centralized nature of Arctic policy-making; the coexistence of poorly coordinated and overlapping policies; the tensions between viewing the Arctic as a zone of security and as a zone of cooperation; and the close connections between the country's political and economic elites and their professional and private interests. Russia's Arctic policies are also portrayed as reflecting a set of more general processes unfolding in contemporary Russia: 'recentralization of political authority to the detriment of the regions; collusion between political and economic interests in Putin's inner circle; an oscillation between the use of hard power and soft power tools; and the extensive interplay of the domestic and international environments' (page 3).

From the second chapter onwards, the strategies themselves are set aside while each chapter takes a detailed focus on a theme familiar from political and popular debates on the Arctic either within or outside Russia. The second chapter discusses the special role that the far north occupies in the context of Russian political imagination. Russia's Arctic region is portrayed in highly symbolic terms as a key ideological resource while its social, economic and demographic concerns tend to be sidelined. In the third chapter, attention is turned to

the northern challenges faced by Russia in its domestic sphere. Larouelle depicts Russia as an 'archipelago of wealthy, urban, economically dynamic islands in an ocean of sparsely populated and undeveloped hinterland' (page 50). The geographical challenges are further complexified by dramatic social inequality, low birth rates, high mortality and migration. Together, these development trajectories not only raise concerns over the future social landscapes of the Russia's North, but also pose challenges to the country's industrial development projects and economic ambitions.

The fourth chapter of the book leaps to discuss the topic of climate change and the elusive stance that Russia has in relation to it. After a brief overview on the phenomenon and the potential benefits and disadvantages brought on by the changing climate, Russia's transition from climate change scepticism towards a view acknowledging the anthropocentric causes behind the phenomenon and the manners in which the swift domestic positions are reflected in Russia's 'zigzagging policies' (page 85) in global climate cooperation are traced and discussed. In the fifth chapter, focus is turned to issues revolving around territorial delimitation in the Arctic and the prospects of solving of potential disputes. While the potential for tensions is acknowledged, the author puts forward a view of an Arctic where the behaviour of states – including Russia – is and remains coordinated by the agreed rules of international law and characterized by cooperation. Related to this, the sixth chapter addresses the projections of military power in the Arctic where both traditional and non-traditional threats can be expected to continue to exist and emerge. The author points to the gap between Russia's military policies and actual capabilities, thus placing Russia as a regional power instead of one of a global nature.

The seventh chapter focuses on the discussion of the Arctic as Russia's 'new economic Eldorado' (page xxiii) and the dynamics between resource nationalism and international cooperation in its ongoing and future development. Here the author also expands the discussion beyond the common focus on hydrocarbons by touching upon both other mineral resources as well as living marine resources which both occupy a significant position in Russia's aspirations for future economic development. In the eight and final chapter, the question of prospects of commercial shipping along the northern sea route is raised. While the author does not present the route as a viable option as an international shipping lane, the utilization of it by Russia for its own industrial development is portrayed as both possible and crucial.

In Larouelle's conclusions, the contemporary Russian Arctic is depicted as a mosaic reflecting past policies, contemporary developments and future aspirations. Furthermore, the author's Arctic Russia is far from a distinct, unified region as the European transborder Arctic, the Central Arctic, the Sakha Arctic and the Bering Arctic are each different in terms of their socioeconomic composition, infrastructure, national and international connections as well as development needs and challenges. This internal diversity further contributes to the political and institutional challenges in drafting and implementing a coherent policy framework in the Arctic which will in any case either 'see the emergence of a new Russia, or resurgence of the old' (page 203).

As a whole, Larouelle's book is wonderfully accessible, informative and engaging. It is well-structured, each chapter

has a clear focus and the key points are summarized in the end of each chapter. However, the title of the book is profoundly misleading as it moves way beyond of what the focus on Arctic strategies in the title implies. In fact, Russia's Arctic strategies are not extensively discussed; instead, the focus is one hand on the broader societal and political contexts within which Russian Arctic-relevant policies are formulated, and on the phenomena and processes unfolding in the Arctic region and their implications on the Russian state and Russian policies on the other. It is a shame that the book's main contribution – the

systematic manner in which it situates the often superficially analyzed policies and programmes into a broader societal and political framework – is not signalled by the title in any manner. This might leave readers explicitly interested in the relationship between the strategies and the future of the far north disappointed with Larouelle's analysis while it also makes the book difficult to find for the audience(s) that would benefit from and enjoy it the most (Hanna Lempinen, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland ([hanna.lempinen@ulapland.fi](mailto:hanna.lempinen@ulapland.fi))).