



DISARMING ARCTIC SECURITY

Briefing papers by Ernie Regehr, O.C., Senior Fellow in Defence Policy and Arctic Security

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The 2016 Arctic Yearbook

On the state of Arctic Politics, Governance, and Security

The fifth annual Arctic Yearbook, with a primary focus on the Arctic Council, is now available.¹ This 2016 edition includes a broad range of scholarly articles offering critical analysis of the Council's 20-year record, and the editors² clearly like what they see. In their Introduction,³ they acknowledge its imperfections, but also declare that "the Arctic Council is in many ways a marvel," and is "perhaps the first true post-modern regional organization." A section on Arctic Geopolitics and Security moves beyond the Arctic Council focus, and its four papers are briefly highlighted below.

The editors commend the Arctic Council as a model for east-west cooperation, for building regional stability, and for engaging non-state communities. In advancing those approaches the Council "has not so much blazed a trail," say the editors, "as invented and occupied a unique space in international relations: one that has privileged cooperation and consensus to the point that it has withstood broader geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West; has provided meaningful inclusion of indigenous peoples and other non-state actors; and prioritized environmental protection using scientific and traditional knowledges as its evidence base."

Through scholarly articles, briefing notes, and commentaries, the *Yearbook*³ explores the Arctic Council as an institution, its role in advancing and supporting Arctic science, and local and indigenous issues in Arctic governance.

Arctic security is addressed in a final section on "Arctic Geopolitics and Security." Here's a brief look at the four main papers on security issues:

1. George Soroka of Harvard University writes on "the political economy of Russia's reimagined Arctic."⁴ He argues that "the Arctic represents a key component of Moscow's attempts to reorient geopolitically and economically after its annexation of Crimea, and that it is part of a larger, long-term plan to develop Siberia and the Russian Far East as both a resource base for the country and a transit route for goods moving between

Asia and Europe." He says "Russia's recent efforts to develop the Arctic are motivated not only by material incentives, but also involve a significant status-seeking component that draws on Russia's view of itself as the preeminent Arctic power."

In consequence, the Arctic plays a growing role in Russian foreign policy and its pivot towards Asia, with President Vladimir Putin explicitly inviting China's participation in Arctic ventures. Russia's interest in China as an energy market and source of capital is "an ironic by-product of Western sanctions," even though there is still "an undercurrent of reticence" in this building relationship.

Moscow's efforts to rebuild a military presence in the Arctic, says Soroka, is part of the overall modernization of its armed forces, and not part of a more fundamental shift in strategy: "its military facilities in the High North are increasingly being tasked with multiple-use functions, including supporting the Border Service," and remain in the service of three main goals: "asserting Russia's sovereignty, shielding its economic interests, and demonstrating that it is still a world-class power."

2. Two Canadian Academics, Frédéric Lasserre and Pierre-Louis Têtu of Laval University academics, look at Russian military strategy through an examination of "Russian Air Patrols in the Arctic."⁵ They document flights and intercepts and conclude that these are routine events and not on their own a sign of building tensions in the Arctic. It is a richly detailed study, referred to at greater length in a November briefing here,⁶ and characterizes the Russian air patrols as reflecting "the desire not to lose operational capacity and, above all, as a political tool designed to display capability, rather than the sign of a renewed aggressiveness in the Arctic."

3. Matthaios Melas looks at the geopolitical realities that link the European Union, Norway, and Russia,⁷ noting especially "the fields of energy, environment and migration." Norway and Russia are two major energy suppliers for the EU, all three share an interest in protecting the Arctic environment, and "the recent migration crisis in Europe not only rattled the foundations of the Schengen treaty [⁸] but also raised tensions between Norway and Russia especially at their borders." Melas describes "energy exploitation and distribution, environmental protection and migration flows [as] the new geopolitical elements of the 'European' Arctic." He insists that attention to these geopolitical factors "is crucial for identifying important underlying issues that could lead to political, military or economic destabilization if disregarded."

4. The fourth piece in this geopolitics and security section is Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen's look at Denmark in the Arctic.⁹ The focus is two new Danish Parliamentary publications – a foreign policy report (Danish Diplomacy and Defence in a Time of Change) and a defense report (The Ministry of Defence's Future Activities in the Arctic), published in May and June 2016, and the paper asks "whether the documents represent a break in Danish Arctic policy." The conclusion is that they "represent continuation, rather than change," and that "the High North continues to become steadily more important on the Danish foreign policy agenda." At the same time, the study notes, "Greenlandic policymakers have criticized the documents for being too Denmark-centric, which indicates a nascent Greenlandic resistance to Danish centralization of authority over foreign policy within the Kingdom of Denmark." Rahbek-Clemmensen refers to "a fault line" that is opening between Danish and Greenlandic policymakers, with growing Greenlandic resistance the Kingdom of Denmark as a unitary actor.

Once again the Arctic Yearbook admirably fulfills its "mandate to inform observers about the state of Arctic politics, governance and security."

Notes

¹ *The Arctic Council: 20 Years of Regional Cooperation and Policy-Shaping* www.arcticyearbook.com

² Lassi Heininen of the University of Lapland is Editor, and Heather Exner-Pirot of the University of Saskatchewan and Joël Plouffe of École nationale d'Administration publique (ENAP – Montréal) are managing editors.

³ Co-authored by the editors and the Chair of the Editorial Board, Lawson W. Brigham (Distinguished Professor of Geography & Arctic Policy, University of Alaska Fairbanks; Senior Fellow, Institute of the North, United States of America).

⁴ George Soroka, "the Political Economy or Russia's Reimagined Arctic," *2016 Arctic Yearbook*, Edited by Lassi Heininen of the University of Lapland, and by Managing Editors, Heather Exner-Pirot of the University of Saskatchewan and Joël Plouffe of École nationale d'Administration publique (ENAP – Montréal). <http://arcticyearbook.com>

⁵ Frédéric Lasserre and Pierre-Louis Têtu, "Russian Air Patrols in the Arctic: Are Long-Range Ombre Patrols a Challenge to Canadian Security and Sovereignty?" *2016 Arctic Yearbook*, Edited by Lassi Heininen of the University of Lapland, and by Managing Editors, Heather Exner-Pirot of the University of Saskatchewan and Joël Plouffe of École nationale d'Administration publique (ENAP – Montréal). <http://arcticyearbook.com>

⁶ "When Bears Still Fly: Responding to Russian Bomber Patrols in the Arctic," *Disarming Arctic Security* briefing, November 16. <http://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/projects/disarming-arctic-security-briefing-papers>

⁷ Matthaios Melas, "The Arctic as a Geopolitical Bond among the European Union, Norway & Russia," *2016 Arctic Yearbook*, Edited by Lassi Heininen of the University of Lapland, and by Managing Editors, Heather Exner-Pirot of the University of Saskatchewan and Joël Plouffe of École nationale d'Administration publique (ENAP – Montréal). <http://arcticyearbook.com>

⁸ The 1985 European agreement to gradually end checks at the common borders of signatory states.

⁹ Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen, "'An Arctic Great Power'? Recent Developments in Danish Arctic Policy," *2016 Arctic Yearbook*, Edited by Lassi Heininen of the University of Lapland, and by Managing Editors, Heather Exner-Pirot of the University of Saskatchewan and Joël Plouffe of École nationale d'Administration publique (ENAP – Montréal). <http://arcticyearbook.com>