

RUSSIA IN THE ARCTIC

The Arctic was forgotten from geopolitical point of view by the end of the 20th century, but it has become the centre of interest due to the global climate change and the mineral resources discovered there in the first decades of the 21st century. Shipping lines opened by the melting ice caps, Arctic oil and gas potential and other minerals open a new chapter in the history of the region. As I indicated at the beginning of my study I will only examine a few aspects to outline Russia's situation in the Arctic.

INTRODUCTION

The Arctic was forgotten from geopolitical point of view by the end of the 20th century, but it has become the centre of interest due to the global climate change and the mineral resources discovered there in the first decades of the 21st century., Shipping lines opened by the melting ice caps, Arctic oil and gas potential and other minerals open a new chapter in the history of the region. The effects of climate change are shown faster and in several more forms in this region than anywhere else in the world. These effects significantly reshape the region's geopolitical picture. Given the receding ice the new opportunities and new security threats and challenges are shown.

However, previous prediction about unprecedented trade flows and new shipping lines turned out to be overly optimistic. Likewise, prediction about military conflicts in the region, proved usually overstated. The increased interest in the region has led to intensive political processes among the Arctic states. Thanks to this political process Russia and Norway signed an agreement to solve their territorial dispute.

Changes in the Arctic's natural environment caused by global climate change have led to a significant change in the strategic environment. The Arctic security environment is analyzed with focus on economic, jurisdictional, political processes.

The Russian Federation deserves extra attention, because it's a key player in the High-North. One of the reasons is that Russia is a determined Arctic player with high ambitions and great potential for development. Another reason is that Russian strategic thinking and security and defense policy are determined by the Arctic region. It is for these reasons that I chose this topic. I highlighted some areas and many important aspects of Arctic policy of Russia.

HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE

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 5. évfolyam 3-4. szám

1.) MAP: RUSSIAN FEDERATION¹



The Russian Federation is the largest country in the world. The middle of the country is almost 4000 km far away from the sea. Grassy steppes, taiga and treeless, marshy tundra are all present on its territory. The world's deepest lake and the highest mountain of Europe is also found there. The country has varied climate conditions due to various vegetation zones. However, the area north of 60 degrees latitude is covered with ice and snow in the greater part of the year. Less than 1% of the population of the country lives in this area.² This is the coldest part of the country with the average temperature below freezing. Lakes in the tundra and marshes are continuously fed by rivers flowing into the Arctic Oceans. It is located above the permafrost mineral-poor soil covered by moss, lichens and dwarf tress and lichens. The vast taiga can be found in the southern area with a vegetation of mainly coniferous trees, pine and cedar pastes. Towards the interior of the country this typical Russian landscape is only interrupted by large mountain ranges in some places. A relatively modest zone for agricultural production is located in the south most area of the country. However, this area is hit by drought with only brief periods of rainfall.

¹ Resources: <http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/evans/HIS241/Notes/Geography/Geography.html> letöltési idő: 2012-08-19 15:15

² ACIA report: Impacts of Arming Arctic Assessment <http://amap.no/acia/> 2012-03-14 22:42

IMPACTS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE

Russia is not a main contributor to the climate change but it cannot remove itself from its impacts. The Federal Institute of Meteorology and Environment (Roshydromet)' report³ states that the global warming-induced climate change affects Russia more than the average. The report notes that the average temperature of the country increased by 1,29C° in the period between 1907-2006 as opposed the IPCC issued⁴ 0,74C° average temperature. In addition the report states that the average temperature increase was 1,33C° in this period. The results of the experiment show that the annual maximum and minimum daily temperatures have increased, while the difference between them decreased. The results also showed that the daily minimum temperature increased faster than the annual maximum. The biggest difference experienced in the change of temperature fluctuations occurred in the cold season. However, the usual a number of frost days decreased mainly in Siberia and the Arctic territories. The distribution and amount of rainfall data showed significant differences. According to the report the annual rainfall has increased in Russia, however, the spring rainfall vary widely in west and north-east Siberia and the country's European regions. The winter precipitation decreased in north-eastern Siberia. The satellite measurement showed that the numbers of snow covered days have decreased significantly in the last decades. The snow depth decreased in the some regions of Russia, such as Chukchi. The main reason for decrease in precipitation is the increase of temperatures. However, it was found that in those regions where the precipitation increased and snow covered days were unchanged or slightly increased the snow depth increased by 20 cm.

Significant changes can be observed in the Russian Arctic region. The impacts of climate change are the most dramatic in the Arctic region. It is roughly twice as fast as the global average. The temperature increased by between 0,7C°-4C° in the recent decades in different parts of the Arctic region.⁵ Winter is gradually becoming warmer, while the short Arctic summers become unbearably hot for the fragile ecosystem. Spring arrives 2-3 weeks earlier bringing rain and frost alternately. The ice of rivers melts or partially melts in late April. Over the past 30 years the average snow season was two weeks shorter. The Arctic ice decline appears unstoppable. In the 1970s Arctic ice was 7,5 million km² while in 2007 it was 4,3 million km². Research data show that impacts of climate change cannot be addressed at the same time however, we must strive to establish that long-term negative impacts can be reduced. It is important for Russia that it can reduce the dramatic effects of the climate change in the Arctic areas of the country. The country's scientist researchers and meteorologists constantly monitor changes in the region. The Federal Institute of Meteorology and Environment's report⁶ says that impacts of the global climate change in the Arctic are not strictly comparable with those of other regions. It is proved by the fact that although the global temperature increased by 0,7C°-0,8C° in the troposphere, the level of it was twice in the Arctic. The rate of warming has been 4-5 times faster than in the 1940s.

As I have already written in my previous study the Arctic region's ecosystem is highly vulnerable. Russia has faced similar environmental problems as the Scandinavian countries.

³ Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring: Assessment Report on Climate Change and Its Consequences in Russian Federation http://climate2008.igce.ru/v2008/pdf/resume_ob_eng.pdf letöltési idő: 2012-07-12 9:02

⁴ Technical summary: climate change 2001: impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability, in Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/climate-changes-2001/synthesis-syr/english/wg2-technical-summary.pdf> letöltési idő: 2011-10-09 10:42

⁵ IPCC report: Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr.pdf letöltési idő: 2011-10-09 10:45

⁶ Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring: Assessment Report on Climate Change and Its Consequences in Russian Federation http://climate2008.igce.ru/v2008/pdf/resume_ob_eng.pdf letöltési idő: 2012-07-12 9:02

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5. évfolyam 3-4. szám

These are:

DECLINING SEA ICE:

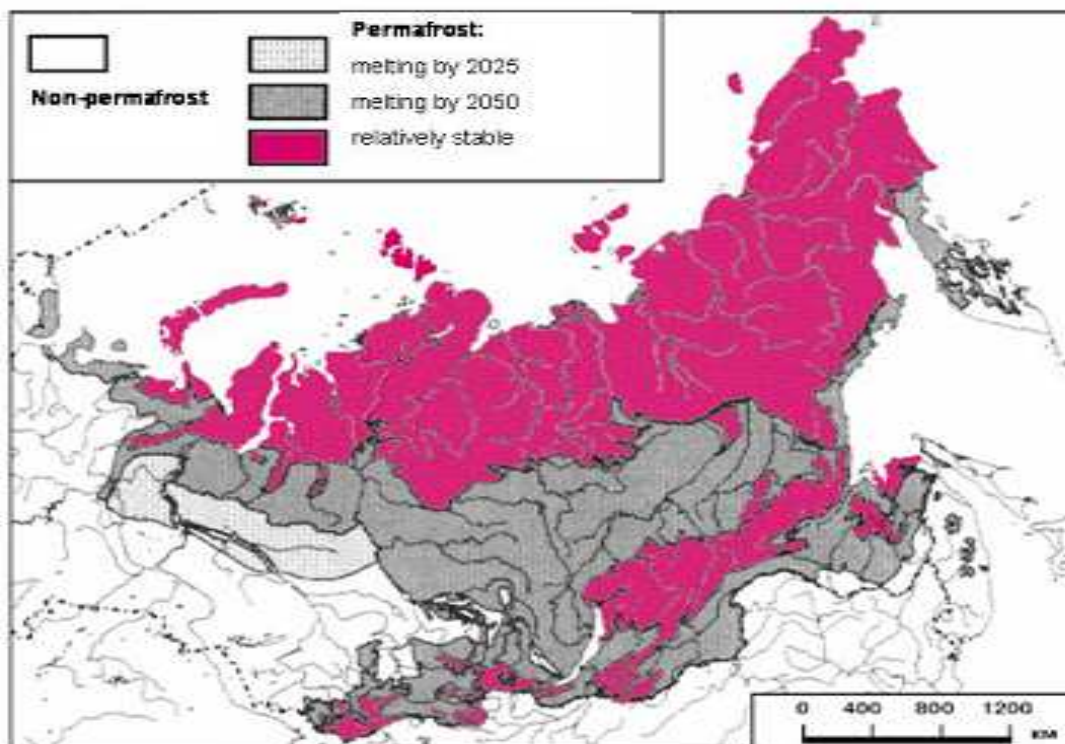
Shrinkage of the Arctic sea ice is observed in the Siberian seas (Laptev, Kara, Chukchi). The 200.000 km² of sea ice area is decreased in the warmest period of the 20th century.⁷ The retreat of ice sheet and the decreased centuries-old layer of ice show the negative effects of climate change.

THE SEA-LEVEL RISE:

Sea-level rise is unavoidable in the future. It will be caused by melting ice sheets and glaciers. Forecasts say that the increase of the level of fresh water in the Arctic sea decreases salinity. The shrinkage of salinity could significantly change the fragile marine ecosystem which will affect the life and the economic prospect of indigenous communities living in the coastal zone and the Arctic. Currently available data shows that the average sea level growth will be 0,2m to 0,59m compared to the current level.

MELTING PERMAFROST:

1.) GRAPH: PERMAFROST ZONES IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION⁸



⁷ ACIA report: Impacts of Arming Arctic Assessment <http://amap.no/acia/> 2012-03-14 22:42

⁸ Resource: <http://geocurrents.info/place/russia-ukraine-and-caucasus/siberia/global-warming-and-siberia-blessing-or-curse> letöltési idő: 2012-07-12 9:56

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The Siberian areas of Russia are severely affected by the melting of the permafrost. As can be seen in the graph about 60% of the country is located in the permafrost zone. The present data show that melting permafrost causes less serious damages in the European than in the Siberian part of the country. Increase of Russian Arctic area's temperature melted the layers (underground pocket) which store significant underground water. These areas grew by 14-80% in Siberia.⁹ The melting permafrost soils increased the risk of slipping considerably. The soil slippage and other soil degradation caused great damage to the building infrastructure in the permafrost zones. Over the past decades the melting permafrost posed particular risk to the Russian oil and gas sector. 30% of proved oil and 60% of gas reserves of the country and the majority of pipelines are in Siberia. The other infrastructures (roads, railways, airports etc.) are also significantly jeopardized by it.

COASTAL ZONE EROSION:

In general, the high winds, seas storms and extreme hydro meteorological phenomena enhance the erosion of the coastal areas.¹⁰

THE FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM¹¹:

The report issued by Nordic Council says that the climate change will adversely affect the ability of survival of native species. 14 species have been described in the report whose behavior indicates the environmental status of the region accurately. The seasons change and the rising temperature level does not favor the Arctic flora and fauna. Impacts of climate change can be observed in the behavior of polar bears and walruses. The retreat of sea ice reduces the amount of animal food and the survival ability because of the greater distances they have to swim in open water without rest. This can be especially fatal to young animals. The specific habitat conditions' change also means that these animals have to find new alternative sources of food to survive. They have already found the walruses as their new loot. Another source of food can be found in the villages and smaller landfills. The walruses are suffering from the consequences of climate change too. Many of them are forced to land where - because of the shock caused by human traffic - they trampled each other to death.

Animals and flora living here do not have time to adapt to the climate change which can also lead to the extinction of some species.

THE ARCTIC IN THE RUSSIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

During the Cold War era the biggest two powers, the Soviet Union and the United States stationed significant naval forces in the region. Early warning systems scanned movements of submarines equipped with nuclear warheads. Land-based and maritime military exercises in Norway - the only NATO member among Nordic countries in the region that bordered the Soviet Union - provided good opportunities to observe the enemy. The region faces more and more challenges because of the geopolitical changes that took place in the 1990s: primarily the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the birth of the Russian Federation.- interests of the Russian Federation can reboot great-power rivalry; secondly, the competition for the oil and natural gas reserves and the exploitation of renewable energy resources; thirdly the competition for the use of new supply routes and the fishing rights in the north seas; and last but not least conflicts between indigenous peoples as a result of global warming and the combined effects all of these factors.

⁹ Kokorin A.O.- Karelin D.V- Stetsenko A.V.(ed.): The impact of climate change on the Russian Arctic: analysis and paths to solving problem WWF-Russia Moscow, 2008 http://www.wwf.ru/resources/publ/book/eng/308_2012-08-12 22:21

¹⁰ Arctic Climate Impact Assessment: Executive Summary (2005), <http://amap.no/acia/> letöltési idő: 2011-06-02 20:23

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The region of the Arctic is of military strategic importance. During the Cold War era there were a number of naval bases in the region. The largest of these, which is still operating at full capacity is the Northern Fleet base in the Kola Peninsula. The current fleet stationed there is greater than the combined fleet power of all countries in the region. The Northern Fleet has the Russian Federation's largest strategic submarine unit.

During the Cold War air and sea conflicts were common between the superpowers but because of their mutual strategic interests in the region armed conflicts did not broke out.

In the first decade of the 21st century the search for hydrocarbon reserves and renewable energy sources gained in importance. The search showed that approximately 30% of the world's oil and gas reserves from the seabed are in the Arctic region. The race for these resources can result in military crises.

In 2008 the Arctic policy of the Russian Federation was adopted by President Medvedyev. In 2009 the strategy¹¹ and the English-language version of its main priorities was issued. The document sets out the overall aims of the Russian Federation and its main priorities and identifies a schedule for implementation of the strategy and methods. The Russian Federation's strategy limits the country's northern region of the geological mapping for Norway, USA, Canada and Denmark.

The characteristics of the policy are:

- Extreme climatic conditions
- Industrial and economic growth
- Low population density
- The distance and economic dependence of southern distribution centers
- Low sustainability of ecological system

The Arctic will turn up in the section "National Interests of the Russia Federation in Arctic" of the strategy for the first time as a strategic resources base, which offers solutions for economic and social issues.

Its main areas are:

- Social and economic development: expansion of the resource base
- Military security: maintenance of favorable operative regime in the Russian Arctic zone
- Environmental security : preservation and maintenance of the Arctic environment
- Information technologies and communication
- Science and technology
- International cooperation: maintenance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation of Russia with the sub-Arctic states

Based on the above mentioned areas the strategy sets out the key priorities and identifies the problems to be solved as well.

Its main priorities are:

- 1) Carrying out an active interaction of Russia with the sub-Arctic states with a view of delimitation of maritime areas on the base of norms of international law, taking into account Russia's interests
- 2) Building-up on efforts to create a uniform Arctic search and rescue regime and joint preparedness
- 3) Strengthening of bilateral relationship within the framework of regional organizations for example: Arctic Council and Barents Euro Arctic Region Council.
- 4) Assistance in the organization, management and effective use of new transportation routes in the Arctic

¹¹ Russia's Arctic Strategy: http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/98.html#** 2012-07-14 22:13

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- 5) Activation of the participation of Russian official agencies and public organization in work of international Arctic forum
- 6) Delimitation of maritime spaces in the Arctic Ocean and maintenance of a mutually advantageous presence of Russia in the Spitsbergen archipelago
- 7) Improvement to state management of the social and economic development of the Arctic through increased support for scientific research
- 8) Improvement of the quality of life of the indigenous people and their economic activities in the Arctic environment
- 9) Development of the Arctic resources base through improved technological capabilities
- 10) Modernization and development of the infrastructure of the Arctic transport system and fisheries in the Russian Arctic

Russia – as is apparent from the priorities of the strategy – wants to continue to be a key player in the region. As I indicated at the beginning of the study the situation of Russia in the Arctic will be highlighted from certain aspects only.

MILITARY POINT OF VIEW

The Arctic has a very special importance in the Russian defense strategy given the facts that significant economic industries and infrastructures have been settled in this area since 1950s and the Northern Fleet has its base here too which is part of the Russian nuclear deterrence.

After the geopolitical and geostrategic appreciation of the region Russia adopted a new maritime doctrine¹² in 2004. The doctrine states that competition for the world's renewable water resources and reserves will be the most important direction of the development of the civilization in the third millennium that the main maritime powers will lead in collaboration or in struggle with each other Russia is one of the leading maritime powers taking into account its geographical and geophysical characteristics and its place and role in the regional and the overall international relations. Furthermore, for Russia the sea transport plays an important role especially in regions where shipping is the only transport sector and the only way to conduct foreign trade. The maritime transport will continue to be vital to the Far East and the northern areas. For the purpose of ensuring this Russia has to increase the participation of the Russian shipping companies in trade and transit transport, modernize the merchant navy fleet, develop the domestic plants concerned, preserve the pioneering and leading role in nuclear powered icebreaker building in the World, develop the coastal port and navigation infrastructure.

The exploitation of raw materials of the world's oceans is essential to Russia for widening its raw material basis and keeping its economic and food independence. In interest of enhancing its inventories of raw materials and its strategic reserves of raw materials Russia has to explore the raw material reserves of its continental shelf.

The elimination of the threats of Russia and its allies in the world's seas and the enforcement of the Russian national interests are based on the maintenance of the Russian Navy's power. The Navy must be capable of stopping military force attacking the country, ensuring the country's sovereignty, protecting the country's economic zone and the continental shelf. It should maintain Russian naval presence in the world's seas and take part in military and peacekeeping operations with respect to the interests of the country.

In accordance with the Maritime Doctrine and the Arctic strategy the protection of the country's Arctic positions turns up in the Navy Policy¹³ too. The document points out that the Navy should ensure the rights of Russia in the Arctic region,

¹² Russian Federation Maritime Doktrine <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/34.html> 2012-07-12 22:55

¹³ Bases of the politics of the Russian Federation in Naval Activities

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as well as guarantee the free activities for it in the Black and Caspian seas and continental shelf. The document states that the Azov Sea should be declared as an inland sea of Russia and Ukraine and the Russian Navy should secure unimpeded crossing regarding the bays and straits. The document also states that the legal background of the foreign stationing of the naval forces and of the Black Sea Fleet's international legal status as well as enforcing of the Russian interests in connection with the country's territorial seas, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelf should be ensured. As is apparent from the documents the stakes in the region appreciated from the geostrategic point of view are enormously high because at the moment the Russian Navy can only access the Atlantic Ocean across the territory of NATO members. It generates an ongoing tension between Russia and NATO countries.

This is one of the reasons why the Russian fleet wants to increase the strategic protection of Barentsburg and Russian fishermen. Russian military ambitions have been emphasized by high profile naval exercises aimed at ensuring Russia's presence in key operational areas of the world's oceans. After the end of 2007 with the military exercises in the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and elsewhere Russia wanted to demonstrate that it was able to conduct major military operations and had the means to defend its national interests.¹⁴ To this end Russia held a military exercise near the Spitsbergen in the summer of 2008. The strategic plan is that these exercises should be regular. The Northern Fleet has also increased its activity in the region. The strategic bombers flew over the area first since the end of the Cold War. The flight provoked negative echoes from the coastal countries. Meanwhile the Ministry of Defense announced that there is a new special force to support Russia's Arctic policy. The increased military activity has reinforced the message that Russia remains a formidable military power, able to hold in check what is seen as an American geopolitical offensive.¹⁵

The island of Svalbard in the Arctic region is the only one of strategic significance from the military point of view. Svalbard is perceived in Russia as a crucial role player concerning the country's position in the Arctic. There is a widespread conviction in Russia that Norway's Svalbard policy is aimed at "driving Russia away" from the archipelago and adjacent waters.¹⁶ Norway's Svalbard policy has for a long time been perceived by Russia as 'unfair' and 'doubtful' from a legal perspective. Russians have claimed that behind it are hidden strategic agendas connected to Western security interests. Moreover it claims that the Norwegian anti-Russian policy is covered by Norwegian economic and environmental investment companies.

The Convention on Svalbard¹⁷ signed in Paris 1920 declared the area of Svalbard an overseas part of the Kingdom of Norway. Article IX of the Convention prohibits Norway to establish a military base in the island. The same article also states that Norway may not engage in any war activities on the island. Article X of the Convention says that Russia can join the treaty under the same conditions. Norway within the meaning of the Convention itself the challenge of Svalbard island military significance beyond.

There is one additional aspect that the armed forces and more precisely the Northern Fleet could be used in defense of Russia's economic interests. Together with the increased regional and international focus on existing and potential energy resources in the region, there has been a move towards an intensification of Russian military presence in the Arctic.

¹⁴ Zysk K: Russia and High –North: security and Defence Perspectives in Holtsmark S.G.-Smith-Windsor B.A (ed): Security prospects in the High North: geostrategic thaw or freeze? Rome, May 2009

¹⁵ Zysk K: Russia and High –North: security and Defence Perspectives in Holtsmark S.G.-Smith-Windsor B.A (ed): Security prospects in the High North: geostrategic thaw or freeze? Rome, May 2009

¹⁶ Sorokina N: V strategicheskikh interesakh Rossi Iaroslav Butakov, Moskva-Oslo arkticheskiy spor, Russkaya Tsivilizatsiya, www.rustrana.ru 09-08-2012

¹⁷ Convention on Svalbard : <http://www.jus.uio.no/english/services/library/treaties/01/1-11/svalbard-treaty.xml> 02-01-2012 19:02

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The possibility of the occurrence of high or low intensity conflicts in the region is determined by the climate change caused by global warming. The crisis is clearly due to the carbon-hydrogen stocks of marine resources and the possession and acquisition of control over the shipping lanes. Åtland writes in his study¹⁸: The security defined by states is different from the security defined by different sectors and interest groups. It often occurs that a social group gives voice to security needs because of its ongoing project. However, these are not the same security needs as those of a state which are based on the political and military requirements of that state. While the security defined by a state means an acceptable stability in a county or a region, the energy security could mean something else for the industry players and for a variety of safety and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

SUMMARY

This paper is not a comprehensive analysis of the security policy of Russia in the Arctic. I highlighted issues that I consider important from the point of view of climate change. In the first part of the study I presented Russia's environmental problems and emphasized the issues of melting permafrost and biodiversity. The second part of the study deals with the Arctic focused on the important elements of the Russian security strategy that defines Russia's security and military interests in the Arctic region. Of course, there are a number of security related problems in the region that could have been elaborated. Due to space limitations I did not mention any issues between countries associated with the subject in which Russia is not a protagonist.

Keywords: Russian Federation, Arctic policy, Climate change, Navy, Maritime Doctrine

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¹⁸ Åtland K: Security Implications of Climate Change in the Arctic <http://rapporteur.ffi.no/rapporteur/2010/01097.pdf> 2011-10-02 15:37

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