

## **Russia's international Arctic policy after the invasion of Ukraine : Experts' voices in the domestic media**

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In the second year of Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council (AC), the other seven member states unanimously condemned its invasion of Ukraine and suspended cooperation with Russia (the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) took similar steps etc.) (Bloom, Riedel et al.). This isolation – along with security challenges posed by Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO – became a major topic in Russia's domestic media, as the Arctic narrative has traditionally been high on the agenda in Putin's Russia (similar to the Soviet period).

This paper reviews the assessments of the current situation and forecasts by Russian experts published in March-October 2022 in the domestic media (the Russian government further tightened its control over them after the invasion), ranging from digital broadsheets (such as *Izvestia*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, and *RIA Novosti*) to local papers (e. g. *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*) and portals specializing in the Arctic and international issues (such as *Go Arctic*, *Arctic : Territory of Dialogue*, *Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)'s website* etc.). These experts represent such centers of international relations research in Russia as MGIMO University, Russian Academy of Sciences Institutes (the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Institute of Northern Europe etc.), Saint-Petersburg State University, and think tanks (the Russian International Affairs Council, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, Institute of Regional Expertise etc.).

Below is a summary of the main points of these commentaries, columns and interviews.

- Decision on the exclusion of Russia from the AC by the rest of its member states breaches the consensus as a decision-making rule of this forum and undermines the legitimacy of AC (Danyuk cited in Kazargin). The situation is further exacerbated by proposals of new cooperation frameworks excluding Russia such as Nordic Plus or Arctic Council 2.0 (see Kirchner, Rogoff). Such steps may jeopardize the Arctic foothold of such states as Denmark (connected to the Arctic only via Greenland) and the US, which is facing serious competition from China (as demonstrated, for instance, by comparison of the two states' icebreaker fleet) (Belukhin, Fedorov).
- If the current deadlock persists, Russia will have to consider such alternative forums for discussion of the Arctic agenda as the Arctic Circle or Arctic Frontiers (Lipunov, Zhuravel, Korchunov1).
- Scientific research in the Arctic, which is pivotal to studying the impacts of global climate change, requires the participation of Russia as the largest Arctic state (Lipunov, Labetskaya, Mikhailichenko).
- In the face of the boycott by the rest of the AC states, Russia will concentrate its efforts on the domestic Arctic agenda, inviting non-Arctic states such as China or India to join partnerships with Russian public bodies and private companies for the development of the Russian Arctic zone (AZ) (Lipunov, Zhuravel, Arctic : Territory of Dialogue).
- The closure of the Northern Sea Route to the vessels of unfriendly states is the necessary security measure in response to NATO's expansion and its military maneuvers in the Arctic (Fedorov).
- Science diplomacy, in which non-state actors are the key players, may pave the way out of the current deadlock. The expert community should act in the interests of humanity in general (Sergunin, Devyatkin cited in Sukhoverkova).

Most experts concur that international dialogue and cooperation in the Arctic are crucial for the sustainable development of the Russian AZ, although they emphasize Russia's self-sufficiency (Koktysh cited in Kazargin). The gradual worsening of the relations with the rest of the AC members led Russia to reconsider its "exclusionist" stance (formerly shared with Canada) on the non-Arctic states' involvement in the Arctic, although experts show apprehensions about the consequences of the breakup of the AC regional unity and the advance of "extra-regional" players such as China or the UK (Lipunov, *Izvestia*). Although the mediation by the expert community could be beneficial, considering the impressive record of scientific cooperation in the Arctic since the Murmansk Initiative, it appears problematic in view of the tight control (financial, regulatory) of the federal agencies over research and educational institutions and activities, as well as the media.

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