

The North in international relations

Анисимов П.А.

1 курс аспирантуры

Introducing the current state of affairs

- In August 2007, a titanium Russian flag was planted demonstratively on the seabed of the Arctic Ocean. The message was clear and a global warning had been sent—the Arctic had been claimed and it was Russian.
- As global energy resources dwindle in the face of increasing global demand, fuelled in particular by the rise of China, the Arctic has rapidly become the focus of intense geopolitical interest. The Arctic may hold the last great deposit of undiscovered energy resources on Earth and as a result of climate change it is melting faster than any other part of the planet. Certainly, Russia's assertive Arctic stance has intensified international focus upon the region as it emerges as a potential flashpoint for conflict.

The riches of the North

- Although it is not known exactly how large the deposits are, the 2008 US Geological Survey estimates that the Arctic holds 30% of the Earth's remaining natural gas and 18% of the world's remaining oil reserves. According to Russia's Ministry of Natural Resources, the Arctic region claimed by Russia could possess twice the volume of Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. Given the challenges to global energy security, the region and its riches are often touted as a future flashpoint for conflict.

Military activity in the region

- Russia's military activity in the region is not solely to blame for such an assumption — in 2012 Norway conducted a series of Arctic war-games which amassed 16,000 troops in the Arctic. True, Russia's shift to the north has coincided with Russia's efforts to modernize its military. However, a knock-on effect within the Arctic region has seen the other Arctic rim powers — Norway, Sweden, the United States, and Canada — reassess their Arctic military capabilities and move military units north.

Arctic strategy: conflict or cooperation?

- The Arctic is widely considered to be a potential flashpoint for international conflict over access to, and control of, its riches.
- For now, Russia may continue to try to repair relations with the West, where possible, including the Arctic and many Western leaders and corporations will want to respond positively.
- Even if tensions persist in Russia's near abroad, including the Baltic region, the 'new cold War' paradigm will not apply to Arctic resources and governance issues.