

© V. P. KARPOV, N. YU. GAVRILOVA

7654321.58@mail.ru

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### **RUSSIAN ARCTIC: CHALLENGES AND ANSWERS**

*SUMMARY.* An attempt to reveal the main objectives of the Russian government and ways of attaining them in the main periods of the Arctic exploration is made. The presence of Russians in Siberia increased economic and political significance of Russia. The idea of a powerful «Siberian rear», creation of a large economic potential of the region can be traced back to the government's plans in the 19th and especially in the 20th century, although the industrialization of the macro-region was of local character due to its immense space: gradually, from the west to the east, ambitious socio-economic projects of national importance were implemented.

The basic tendency in the development of the Russian North during the entire 20th century was to solve national problems associated with the growth of the economic potential of the country and to increase its military and defense capabilities. Not every Soviet experience can be applied to modern Russia, but the relevance of the ideas of a complex development of the productive forces is beyond question. They are particularly important in the context of the Arctic regions. The present article considers the problems of modern development of high arctic areas of the Russian Federation as well as the attempts of conceptualization of the northern policy of the state. The necessity of restoration of the Northern Sea Route is substantiated.

*KEY WORDS.* Russia, Siberia, the Arctic, stages of development, the Northern policy, the Northern Sea Route, integral development, oil, natural gas, Yamal.

Historical research plays a specific role in the study of the Russian Arctic, providing a stable connection between ages. Studying the past is stipulated by both the need to augment historical knowledge and the necessity of a full and clear idea of the peculiarities of the Russian Extreme North, without which it is impossible to put forth scientifically grounded state policy.

In the last decades, the issues of exploration of the North were mainly investigated within the study of regional history. The arctic areas of Western Siberia were the luckiest [1]. Modern regional historiography gave rise to works dealing with the history of specific regions of the Arctic area of the Russian Federation. A fundamental two-volume work (in 4 books) "The history of Yamal" was published in 2010 [2].

For researchers of the Tyumen sector of the Arctic, historical encyclopedias referring to both Tyumen region in general and its northern districts, as well as the Atlas of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug [3] (the first systematic collection of maps of the vast territory of the Okrug — 769300 square kilometers) are of significant interest. In 2011, the Institute of History of the Siberian Department of the Russian Academy of

Sciences published a collection of documents and materials “Study and development of the Arctic zone of Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup>— early 21<sup>st</sup> century”. [4], which undoubtedly will benefit both the study of specific issues of the Arctic and the preparation of generalizing works in the history of the arctic macro-region in general.

Literature related to the Northern Sea Route (NSR) can be singled out as a separate group. The history of Russian Arctic exploration is inextricably intertwined with the development of the NSR. The majority of publications date from the Soviet period. The authors of later publications, with a few exceptions [5], do not touch upon the current issues of sea communication in the Arctic.

In the present article it is attempted to display the tasks of the Russian state and methods to resolve them at different stages of Arctic exploration, modern issues of its development and attempts to conceptualize the state northern policy, and the necessity of reviving the NSR to strengthen the geopolitical and economic positions of the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

M.V. Lomonosov’s bold prediction, claiming two and a half centuries ago that “the power of Russia will grow through Siberia and the Arctic Ocean”, was based on objectively existing realities, the constant expansion, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, of the state to the east from its historical core. In the history of Russian Arctic exploration, the following main stages can be distinguished, in each of which Russia (USSR) had to respond to their specific challenges.

The first stage: the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the 1870s, from the beginning of the spatial expansion of the Russian state to the north-east to the opening of the waterway between the seas bordering the north coast of Asian Russia and Siberian rivers. The exploration of the Russian North was inhibited by the absence of transportation lines. Roads were laid by merchants with no support from the state. After conducting a research into the water system in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they made an assumption that the organization of piers in the “Ob Kara waters”, as well as the establishment of shipyards, would not be economically beneficial for Siberia and Russia.

The second stage: 1870s — 1916, from the beginning of occasional exploitation of the Northern Sea Route (by which at that time the line from Europe reaching only the mouth of Ob and Yenisei was understood) to the establishment of the NSR Committee (1916), which marked the beginning of the systematic study and exploitation of the polar route and therefore the intensification of state attention to Arctic exploration.

With the start of NSR exploitation a fundamentally new stage in the Extreme North’s development began. In 1876 the Swedish professor and renowned polar traveler A.E. Nordenskiöld delivered a batch of foreign goods to the mouth of the Yenisei on a steamship provided by a Russian gold mine owner A.M. Sibiryakov, thus discovering the sea link with mouths of Siberian rivers (The Ob, the Yenisei). The first passage through the NSR entering the Pacific Ocean through the Bering Strait was made in 1878-1879 under the leadership of A.E. Nordenskiöld on the steamship “Vega”. The expedition was sponsored by M.K. Sidorov, a merchant from Krasnoyarsk [4; 11].

An appeal to foreigners was necessary due to the lack of appropriate support from the Russian authorities to entrepreneurs and explorers of the North. In 1901, V.I.

Kovalevsky, the head of the Department of Trade and Manufactures, angrily responded to the offer by Vice-Admiral S.O. Makarov to explore the northern and western areas of the Kara Sea: “Does our government have reasons that are strong enough to go in that direction further than Western European governments, spending millions on abstract scientific research in the arctic seas with the risk of lagging behind the experienced Western scholars?... This question, without the fear of being accused of obscurantism, can be safely answered in the negative” [6; 47].

However, during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the government estimated the full strategic value of the NSR. While sailing to the mouths of the Ob and the Yenisei had been mainly due to commercial interests at first, in the context of congestion of the Trans-Siberian Railway by military traffic the need of an alternative route became obvious. In 1905, 6 steamships and 9 lighter ships successfully sailed from Murmansk to Yeniseysk, thus proving safe exploitation of the Kara area of the NSR [4; 136].

However, after the war, the government forgot about the northern route again. The NSR Committee, on behalf of the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Russia, was created as late as in 1916. The same year (September 20, 1916) Russia, following Canada and Denmark, claimed the territory north of the national borders with a note from the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Empire [4; 7].

The third stage: 1916-1934 — the search for models to manage the development of the North and the NSR, which ended with the creation of the Chief Directorate of the Northern Sea Route (GUSMP) and converting it into a kind of People’s Commissariat in the North. It goes without saying that during the revolution, the Civil War and post-war breakup (1917 — mid 1920s), attention to Arctic exploration decreased due to objective reasons.

Unlike Washington, Ottawa, Copenhagen and Oslo (up to 1925 — Christiania), Moscow not so much thought of the legal consolidation of old Russian Arctic domains as focused attention on creating a regularly operating Northern sea route — i.e. exclusively on the economic aspect of the problem. This tactic is understandable, given the long run of non-recognition de-jure of the Soviet state by capitalist countries.

At the beginning of its activity, the USSR government issued the note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated September 20, 1916, which declared Russian ownership of lands and islands in the area adjacent to the Russian arctic coast. In 1920 the Soviet variant of the NSR Committee was formed as part of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee with an office in Arkhangelsk. It was supposed to organize the export of raw materials and food from Siberia in exchange for delivery of machinery, tools, hunting equipment and other goods needed by the region. On December 17, 1932 the Chief Directorate of the Northern Sea Route (GUSMP) was formed to meet the challenges of manufacturing, maintenance and provision of navigation on the NSR from the White Sea to the Bering Strait. Then the powers of GUSMP were greatly enlarged following the decision of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and the Council of People’s Commissars concerning

“measures for the development of the Northern Sea Route and the northern economy” dated July 20, 1934. It took responsibility for enterprises of national importance, river and sea transport, aviation, exploration, educational institutions and other businesses and organizations. The terms of reference of the Chief Committee extended to the islands and seas of the Arctic Ocean in the European part of the USSR and to the whole territory north of the 62nd parallel in the Asian area [4; 220-225].

The singularity of the institution was noted by O.Y. Schmidt (the head of the Committee in 1932-1939): “The peculiarities of the GUSMP lie in the fact that although we work as a People’s Commissariat, we are not like a People’s Commissariat. We are rather an edge, but we also do have central office functions... The point is that the whole North is treated as a single issue that has The Northern Sea Route in its basis... Once the fact that the Northern Sea Route does exist was proved, the idea of uniting the economy of the North emerged. Thereupon the GUSMP developed. We are an institutional body fighting to raise the economy of the North on the basis of the Northern Sea Route” [4; 14].

The fourth stage: 1934 — the end of 1980s, intensive economic and military development of the soviet Arctic. In this stage, the periods of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) and “the Cold War” (1946 — the end of 1980s) are prominent. Due to the fact that the Trans-Siberian Railway was overloaded with military traffic in 1941-1945, the NSR was often the only “lifeline” connecting areas of the North of Siberia with the country. The NSR was also used by combat ships to sail from the Pacific Ocean to the Barents Sea; the polar route became one of the most vital alternative routes to deliver supplies from the Allies to the Soviet Union on lend-lease. Over the four years of war, water craft delivered a total of 795.3 thousand tons of cargo and 14, 369 passengers through the GUSMP to arctic ports [2; T. 2. Book 1 p. 279].

Lessons learned from the events of the war on the sea lanes of the western sector of the Arctic had important consequences for the further development of the soviet Extreme North. From the late 1940s the importance of the region was recognized not only in economic, but also geopolitical categories: the Arctic is a part of the northern border of our country. The war showed its strategic vulnerability and the difficulty of protecting the Arctic coast of Russia with insufficient development of transport and military infrastructure. During “the Cold War” it was one of the strongest motivations to develop projects for creating a naval harbor in the Gulf of Ob and laying a polar railway between Chum, Salekhard and Igarka.

In the 1950s the Northern fleet essentially developed from coastal to oceanic, therefore GUSMP was allotted to the Ministry of the Navy of the USSR (1953) and was completely dissolved in 1964. In 1970 the Northern Sea Route Administration (NSRA) was established under the Ministry of the Navy of the USSR.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century confrontation escalated in the Arctic not only because of “the Cold War”, but also due to the fact that the center of world economic development increasingly shifted towards the North. The sectoral division of the Arctic was de facto recognized by all states of the world until giant oil and gas fields were discovered there (including the bottom of the Arctic Ocean). A struggle between

competing countries for international de jure recognition of rights for these resources began. According to the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea, any country may apply to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (established in 1977) for the development of natural resources of the sea shelf that are not within the jurisdiction of the coastal state.

Given the above, in the postwar period the Soviet Union created a strong infrastructure for the NSR with aircraft, icebreakers, sea ports and a network of polar stations. With the advent of nuclear icebreakers (1959) and specially designed icebreaking cargo ships, it became possible to sail through the NSR all year round. It is important to note that Russia had a monopoly in the area of nuclear-powered icebreakers. There were attempts to build a powerful vessel with an atomic installation in the US (“Savannah” icebreaker), Germany (“Otto Hahn” icebreaker), Japan (“Mutsu”), but they all proved ineffective.

The fifth stage: the 1990s. State interest to the Arctic and its further exploration plummeted; there was an almost complete destruction of the infrastructure of the Extreme North. During the years of “liberal reforms” the population of this area decreased by half. There was nearly a one-third reduction in the number of inhabited villages and towns. The military foothold established in this era of the Soviet Union faded to a considerable extent. The United States and other countries of the circumpolar zone, sensing the weakening of Russia’s position in the 1990s, decided to take advantage of it. Norway moved operational command headquarters to the polar region. In 2010, the United States and Denmark for the first time took part in the annual Canadian Arctic maneuvers “Operation Nanook”. Several western countries established a joint Northern battle group with headquarters in Sweden. The Americans and the British carried out joint submarine exercises in the Arctic Ocean twice in the recent years [7; 9].

The sixth stage: from the beginning of the 2000s to the present day. With Russia’s recovery from the crisis of the 1990s, Moscow grew aware of the necessity of a new northern policy, a return of the State to the Arctic.

During the Soviet period, the so-called arctic “Russian triangle” occupied about 7 million square kilometers of the exclusive mainland of the Arctic zone located north of the Arctic Circle [4; 7]. After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia became a northern country to an even greater extent. The length of the Arctic spaces in the latitude of the Arctic Circle is measured 7,250 km, the coastline of the marginal seas of the Russian sector of the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Sea are 10 400 km or 68% of the length of all the marginal seas of Russia [8; 4].

Since the beginning of the 2000s there has been a search for an adequate management model for the development of high latitudes and rational use of the Northern Sea Route. The RF Government Decree dated March 7, 2000 No. 198 “On the concept of state support for economic and social development of the regions of the North” states that the transportation system is one of the main conditions for sustainable development in the northern parts of the country and its role will increase with the economic development of the Arctic.

In the year 2000 short, medium and long term tasks were set for the NSR. The first short-term task was to restore the western area of the route; the second, to restore traffic volumes through the NSR to the level of the late 1980s; the third, a long-term task, was to transform the national traffic artery in the Arctic into an intercontinental one and to ensure self-financing of the NSR [4; 286, 287, 288]. In 2010 the Russian government specified the time perspectives in development of the NSR: 2010-2015 — restoration of the western part of the Northern Sea Route, 2016-2020 — the eastern part. The delay in the development of the Northern Sea Route and the creation of its coastal infrastructure may cause not only an economic loss but also the loss of control over a huge portion of Russian arctic space that cannot be measured [4; 324].

The document “Principles of state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic up to 2020 and beyond” identifies three stages of implementation of state policy in the region. In the first stage (2008-2010), materials should be prepared to verify the external border of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, to form a state program of development of the Russian Arctic. In the second stage (2011-2015), the task is to restructure the economy in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation on the basis of the development of the mineral and aquatic biological resources of the region. The establishment and development of the infrastructure and the communication management system of the Northern Sea Route will be ensured to meet the challenges of Eurasian transit. In the third stage (2016-2020), the transformation of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation into a leading strategic resource base of Russia is planned [4; 298-299].

The effectiveness of the solutions will be determined, first of all, by the degree of integration of the polar and subpolar regions into a single economic space in Siberia and Russia. Therefore, the government provides for the formation of a modern social infrastructure to support river settlements (Yenisei, Ob, Lena, Lower Tunguska, Khatanga) and sea ports of the coastline and islands of the Kara Sea and the Laptev Sea; a program of restoration of the icebreaker fleet has been developed, the reconstruction of sea ports across the NSR is planned. “Transport activity across the Northern Sea Route is a sensitive indicator of the state economy, says V. Ruksha, Director General of the Russian Atomflot. In the Soviet period we transported 7 million tons of cargo, by the end of the century only 1.4 million. Today, the cargo traffic has exceeded 2 million and continues to grow. Who controls the cargo traffic controls the Arctic. Once Russia steps aside, competitors will take its place...” [9; 22].

Out of the 8 arctic subjects of the Russian Federation, since the mid-1960s Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug has been the most rapidly developing, where the efforts of the state have enabled to build the world’s largest gas producing center. Diversification of the oil and gas production of Yamal due to the development of oil and gas refining is not possible without further transportation development and, in particular, the restoration of the NSR. Security of supply in the Arctic shall be provided by 4 icebreakers and a fleet of up to 20 vessels with a capacity of 140-160 000 cubic meters of gas. In the village of Sabetta (The Yamal Peninsula) a large sea port is

planned to be built (2018), the construction of which is regarded as the beginning of the revival of the Northern Sea Route [10; 94].

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The Soviet model of centralized management of the Arctic proved to be effective: the USSR became the leading arctic state of the world. The lack of attention of the state to the North during the post-Soviet period was an obvious error that needs to be corrected. The Russian government will have to confirm the Soviet achievements in the Arctic, which is not possible without increasing the presence of the state in the region, the development of all types of communications, including the Northern Sea Route. The first steps in this direction have already been made. The exploitation of the natural resources of the Yamal Peninsula can give the impulse for the intensification of the development of the whole Russian sector of the Arctic.

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