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**The Case for RAIPON:  
Implications for Canada and the Arctic Council**

by Ron Wallace  
February, 2013



# Policy Paper

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## **The Case for RAIPON: Implications for Canada and the Arctic Council**

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## ► Abstract

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Canada is about to enter an entirely new phase of heightened diplomatic responsibilities in the circumpolar Arctic. This comes at a time when international attention to polar aboriginal, economic, strategic, SAR and environmental concerns approach new heights. Additionally, the deadline of December 2013 is fast approaching for Canada's anticipated first submission under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for claims to subsea lands that extend beyond the existing 200 nm limits delineated by the current Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ) in the Arctic<sup>1</sup>. For Canada, these represent material social, economic, diplomatic and strategic interests. They also constitute an opportunity for Canada to exert tangible international leadership in the Arctic – a region that many Canadians consider to be a vital component of our national identity.

Significantly, Prime Minister Harper has deftly selected an Inuk to lead Canada's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council at a time when these, and other, international issues are assuming increasing importance throughout the Circumpolar Arctic. This paper touches on current affairs that may affect Canadian and US relations with Russia and is meant to place in perspective recent events that affect our circumpolar trading neighbours, including the fate of indigenous peoples of the Russian North.

Under the renewed leadership of President Vladimir Putin, Russia has embarked on a determined course of heightened nationalism designed, among other things, to control "foreign influences" in Russia, especially those targeted NGOs and other agencies such as RAIPON (the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East) that have received external funding from the West. Such policies have material consequences for Russia's civil and political institutions – including their indigenous peoples throughout Arctic Russia. Without understanding the events that have overtaken Russia since the rise of the Putin regime, the significance of the recent international uproar surrounding RAIPON might well be lost. Canada, with its increasingly high-profile participation on the Arctic Council, may have a unique opportunity to work with other international agencies, and through diplomatic channels, to prevent a further deterioration of the Russian-Western dialogue by seeking to elevate and inform future discussions about the circumpolar region.

Recent events in Russia may force reconsideration by the West of Russia's developing political and international strategic intentions, many of which involve the circumpolar Arctic region. In short, Canada has an opportunity to advocate for the meaningful participation of Russia's indigenous peoples in the Arctic Council. Responsible Canadian leadership and advocacy in the Arctic Council could further elevate its work and also enhance Canada's position at a time when the Arctic – and its peoples – has become a growing focus of international attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada became signatory to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1993 and has been actively preparing its December 2013 submission for the United Nations' Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).

## ► КРАТКОЕ ИЗЛОЖЕНИЕ

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Канада стоит на пороге перехода к совершенно новому этапу, когда она должна будет принять на себя более серьезные дипломатические обязательства в регионе приполярной Арктики. Это происходит в момент, когда проблемы коренных народов, экономические, стратегические и экологические вопросы, а также проблемы *поисково-спасательных работ на море* в полярных областях привлекают к себе все большее внимание международного сообщества. Кроме того, стремительно приближается крайний срок (декабрь 2013 г.) первого запланированного представления предложений Канады в соответствии с Конвенцией ООН по морскому праву (UNCLOS) в отношении притязаний на участки морского дна, простирающиеся за существующие пределы в 200 морских миль, установленные нынешней Исключительной экономической зоной (EEZ) в Арктике<sup>2</sup>. Для Канады эти территории представляют существенный социальный, экономический, дипломатический и стратегический интерес. Помимо этого, они могут дать возможность Канаде стать реальным международным лидером в Арктике, регионе, который многие канадцы считают важной составной частью нашей национальной самобытности.

Характерно, что премьер-министр Харпер быстро и удачно выбрал для председательствования в Арктическом совете от имени Канады кандидатуру представителя народа инуитов в момент, когда эти и другие международные вопросы приобретают возрастающее значение для всего региона приполярной Арктики. Данная работа посвящена текущей ситуации, которая может повлиять на отношения Канады и США с Россией и призвана объективно рассмотреть недавние события, затрагивающие наших соседей по приполярной торговле, в том числе судьбу коренных народов Севера России.

С возобновлением президентства Владимира Путина Россия приступила к реализации твердого курса на усиление национализма, направленного, в частности, на борьбу с «иностранным влиянием» в России, в особенности на контроль за целевыми неправительственными организациями и другими объединениями, такими как АКМНСС и ДВ РФ (Ассоциация коренных малочисленных народов Севера, Сибири и Дальнего Востока Российской Федерации), которые до сих пор получали финансирование с Запада. Эта политика имеет серьезные последствия для гражданских и политических организаций России, в т. ч. коренных народов всего Арктического региона России. Без понимания событий, постигших Россию со времени укрепления режима Путина, может остаться непонятной недавняя бурная международная реакция на то, что происходит вокруг АКМНСС и ДВ РФ. Канада, все более активно участвующая в Арктическом совете, может получить уникальную возможность работать с другими международными организациями и, используя дипломатические каналы, предотвратить дальнейшее ухудшение диалога между Россией и Западом путем поиска способов интенсификации и оживления будущих дискуссий о приполярном регионе.

Недавние события в России могут заставить Запад пересмотреть свое отношение к политическим и международным стратегическим замыслам России, многие из которых распространяются на регион приполярной Арктики. Одним словом, у Канады есть возможность поддержать значимое участие коренных малочисленных народов России в Арктическом совете. Ответственное лидерство Канады и ее деятельность по

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<sup>2</sup> Канада подписала Конвенцию ООН по морскому праву (UNCLOS) в 1993 г. и активно занимается подготовкой представления своих предложений Комиссии ООН по границам континентального шельфа (CLCS) в декабре 2013 г.

защите интересов в Арктическом совете могли бы способствовать дальнейшему совершенствованию его работы, а также укрепить позиции Канады в момент, когда Арктика и ее народы все больше привлекают к себе внимание международного сообщества.



## ► **List of Acronyms**

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CTRP - Co-operative Threat Reduction Program

EEZ – Economic Exclusion Zone

ICC - Inuit Circumpolar Conference of Canada

LNG – Liquefied Natural Gas

NGO Forum – Non-Governmental Organizations Forum

NSR – Russia’s Arctic Northern Sea Route or Northeast Passage

RAIPON - The Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East

SAR – Search and Rescue

UNCLOS - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WTO – World Trade Organization





## INTRODUCTION

**F**ollowing election to the House of Commons in October 2008, Ms. Leona Aglukkaq became the first Inuk to be sworn into the Federal Cabinet on 30 October 2008 as the Minister of Health. Re-elected to a second term in May 2011, she retained her role as the Minister of Health and assumed new duties as Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. In August 2012, she was named the Minister for Canada – and soon-to-be Chair – of the Arctic Council; Canada is about to assume the rotating chairmanship of the Arctic Council from May 2013 through to 2015.

This high-profile responsibility falls to Canada at a time when material issues will unquestionably emerge for this intergovernmental forum that is made up of representatives from eight circumpolar nations with others actively seeking observer status.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Canada will soon assume chairmanship (2014-2018) of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) - also a permanent representative on the Arctic Council.

What has all this to do with ongoing Canadian-Russian relations, especially in the circumpolar north? Potentially, issues are developing that could be of material interest to Canada and the international community. As Zilio and Munson (2013) recently commented: “As Canada heads into 2013, many of the country’s political and policy talks are expected to look in a new direction: North.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed it will.

That developing Canadian “northern viewpoint” may rightfully extend past Canada’s northern dominions of the Arctic Archipelago and continue over the pole to Russia – our Arctic neighbour with the single-largest geographic circumpolar presence.

First, to set the stage for future Arctic Council deliberations of interest to Canada, there are important matters that have emerged related to Russia’s current treatment of their indigenous peoples.

## THE CASE FOR RAIPON

Without a comprehensive understanding of recent events that have overtaken Russia since the rise of the Putin regime, the significance of the recent international uproar surrounding the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East (RAIPON) might well be lost. RAIPON has played a central role in promoting international co-operation among indigenous peoples of other Arctic states and has had, for 22 years, a formative role in protecting Russian indigenous peoples’ rights and legal interests while promoting their right to self-governance. It represents 41 indigenous groups of more than 250,000 indigenous peoples across the Russian Arctic extending from Murmansk to Kamchatka and has, until now, participated as a permanent indigenous participant in the Arctic Council, along with the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Saami Council, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, and the Gwich’in Council (George, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal representation on the Arctic Council has been a hallmark of its operations;

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<sup>3</sup> The Arctic Council is comprised of representatives from Canada, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States of America. The USA is set to assume the chair after Canada in 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Zilio, M. and Munson, J. 2013. Looking North: 2013 Promises Busy Year on Arctic File. iPolitics January 6, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> George, J. 2012. Arctic Officials Call for Reinstatement of Russian Indigenous Org. November 15, 2012. Nunatsiak News.



although the “permanent participants” don’t have votes, they are fully consulted and have rights of participation (Weber, 2012).<sup>6</sup>

As Thomas Axworthy, President and CEO of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation so eloquently described in “Turning Back the Clock” (Axworthy, 2013)<sup>7</sup>, recent moves by the Russian Ministry of Justice to suspend RAIPON’s legal status threatens not only the rights and international presence of Russian indigenous peoples, but may threaten the very integrity and future of the Arctic Council – just at the moment when Canada is about to assume the chair.

Canada has had a long and distinguished presence in furthering the role of Russia’s indigenous peoples, starting when Mary Simon was president of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. As early as 1988, she began a dialogue with the Gorbachov Soviet regime to secure the participation, as one of three permanent participants, of RAIPON in the Arctic Council in 1996. Fast-forward from those earlier, heady times to the international uproar that erupted after the Russian Ministry of Justice announced on 1 November, 2012 that RAIPON would be closed for six months due to “an alleged lack of correspondence between the association’s statutes and federal law” (Axworthy, 2013). A subsequent 8 November, 2012 release from the Russian Agency of Social Information stated that the Ministry had found that “not all regional offices of the association are legal entities”, thus concluding that RAIPON’s activities were “illegal” (George, 2012). In short, these precipitous actions and allegations could erase Russia’s prior commitment to allow their indigenous peoples to participate meaningfully in international circles of Arctic diplomacy.

As Axworthy (2013) commented:

In less than six months’ time, Canada will be assuming the chair of the Arctic Council. Canada should continue to raise its concerns with its Russian counterparts regarding RAIPON, and should encourage Council members to support the permanent participants. Russian President Vladimir Putin must be persuaded that Russia has more to lose internationally by weakening the structure of the Arctic Council than he might gain domestically by suspending an opponent of excessive development.

Such advice is responsible, ethically sound, diplomatically balanced, and timely. Nonetheless, given the developing political environment within Putin’s Russia one could be forgiven for harbouring cynicism at the future prospects for success. As George (2012) observed: “With the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council then going to Canada, where it will be chaired by Nunavut MP Leona Aglukkaq, the problems facing RAIPON may end up getting passed on to Canada.” Or, as CDFAI Senior Fellow Dr. Rob Huebert succinctly stated: “All of a sudden we’ve got a huge curve ball about the role of the permanent participants. This is all of a sudden a brand new challenge that Canada is going to have to face” (Weber, 2012). Duane Smith, head of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference Canada, and a delegate to the Arctic Council, further noted that: “Any time the rights and roles and responsibilities of an indigenous organization like that can be impeded concerns ICC” and also observed that even the Council’s Russian ambassador Anton Vasiliev seemed initially surprised by the development – enough so that he participated in signing the Arctic Council’s statement of concern sent to Russia.

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<sup>6</sup> Weber, B. 2012. Canada Concerned as Russia Shuts Down Arctic Aboriginal Group. November 15, 2012. Canadian Press.

<sup>7</sup> Axworthy, T. 2012. Turning Back the Clock. Embassy. January 9, 2013.



However, who better than Canada now to advance the case for Russian indigenous peoples through RAIPON and, specifically, who better than a Canadian Inuk chair of the Arctic Council?

As noted above, Russia is critically bound to future resource developments for economic development that include massive potential developments throughout Siberia and especially in the gas-rich Arctic regions such as the Yamal Peninsula. Vukmanovic and Koranyi (2013)<sup>8</sup> quoted Charles Emmerson of London's Chatham House who opined that such developments are key to Russia's future: "The Russian state is very keen to develop the Arctic, because they see it as key to maintaining exports, which is in turn key to sustaining fiscal revenues and to keeping its geopolitical standing in the world.... For Russia, it is difficult to exaggerate the potential geopolitical and geoeconomic importance of the Arctic."

Such planned activities certainly will have a material impact on Russian indigenous peoples. In 1997 the Finnish oil tanker *Uikku* was the first Western vessel to transit the NSR, followed in 2011 by the Russian gas producer Novatek who completed the first gas condensate shipment, and then in 2012 with Gazprom's first-ever LNG shipment from Norway's Snoegvit plant, the world's most northerly LNG export platform to Japan (Vukmanovic and Koranyi, 2013). The Gazprom test shipment erased 3000 nm off the traditional Suez sea route with resultant delivery and cost savings. The first Arctic LNG shipment is anticipated to originate from the Novatek/Total Project on the Yamal peninsula, with possible production in 2016. Notably, Novatek/Gazprom announced plans to build a second LNG plant on a second site on the Yamal, with another plant also planned at Pechora (Vukmanovic and Koranyi, 2013). The magnitude of determination, if not investment, required for Russia to realize these plans is reflected by the fact that no LNG ship has yet been built that can ship year-round through the NSR. Indications are that Russian capital investment required to upgrade the decayed, and lacking, infrastructure to achieve increased NSR shipping could exceed \$100 billion.

In the 1990s, I was privileged to work among the Nenets reindeer herders of the Yamal. At the time, I was employed by US corporations who were engaged in joint venture discussions with Gazprom to explore and develop those extensive Arctic resources near the then-closed gas-hub city of Nadym. A proud and independent people who had, over centuries, learned and developed the skills required to live off the land, the Nenets had successfully weathered the scorn of successive Soviet administrators and the Cold War consequences of nuclear fallout from the northern Soviet testing ranges of Novaya Zemlya.

In a staggering irony, meetings with the Nenets were held in the abandoned, but still useable, former camps of the Soviet gulag system (famously referred to by Solzhenitsyn as the "Gulag Archipelago"). The Nenets used the abandoned camps that were scattered along the southern boundary of their critical reindeer herd lands of the Yamal as meeting points. We met in the main meeting halls, which were used for "re-education" of former inmates by their Soviet hosts. All the westerners present felt surrounded by the ghosts of so many lost, unaccounted Soviet inmates just at a time when the Nenets were experiencing the empowerment of their first real international contact with the West in decades. The American oil company representatives made it clear to Gazprom that the Nenets would have to be consulted, their issues addressed and their lands protected before developments proceeded. Obviously, now that Gazprom has moved

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<sup>8</sup> Vukmanovic, O. and B. Koranyi. 2013. Russia's Revival of Arctic Northern Sea Route at Least 10 Years Away. January 25, 2013. Reuters.



ahead with the Yamal developments, without the need for direct US partnerships, those heady early days of optimism among the Nenets for high-level consultation, economic participation and environmental protection of highly sensitive, indeed vital, northern reindeer habitat may well be history – along with their international representative body RAIPON.

In October 2012, Gazprom commissioned the first production facility in the Yamal - the first of a possible series of natural gas megaprojects considered by Russia to be a major strategic resource. Russia's determination to move resources from Siberia has recently been strengthened by the successful voyage of the LNG carrier *Ob River*, chartered by Gazprom and loaded in Hammerfest, Norway accompanied by Russian icebreakers, in completing the first winter voyage through the Northern Sea Route to Tobata, Japan (MacLeod, 2012).<sup>9</sup> The pioneering voyage confirmed Russia's serious intent to turn the Northeast Passage into an international shipping route Gazprom noted: "The successful journey of the *Ob River* allows us to count on the full-blown usage of the Northern Sea Route to deliver Russian liquefied gas to both the Asia-Pacific region and the European market" (MacLeod, 2012).

The developing storm of potential future incursions into Nenets territory by Russian oil and gas interests, however, may present a clear and present danger to the preservation of their lands and way of life. While some environmentalists often decry the potential, and existing, negative impacts of Arctic oil and gas operations in the Canadian and Alaskan north, many would suggest first a careful consideration of the levels of ecological destruction that have often accompanied Soviet, and now Russian, oil and gas operations in Russian Arctic regions. And, as we have seen above, woe betide any who stand in the way of the "Putin Machine", especially those who might presume to slow, or re-direct, the Russian oil and gas export development juggernaut.

More recent reports, however, may give rise to some optimism that the Kremlin may be making efforts to at least appear more balanced in its approaches to northern development. RAI Novosti (January 23, 2013) suggests that the Russian domination of the Arctic Sea Route may be subject to new laws, citing the Regional Development Ministry's website that details Russia's proposed State Program for the Arctic on which comments were allowed until January 29, 2013. The proposed laws would establish a mandatory review of any business activities that could pose an environmental hazard, which includes provisions that could bar the privatization of any airlines in the region, and allow certain regions to be closed for environmental reasons with associated bans for off-road travel in regions of tundra (Oliphant, 2012).<sup>10</sup> Oliphant also noted that: "While the document does make note of the need to defend the region, it does not directly mention rumoured plans to close areas like the Yamal Peninsula to non-residents."

Notwithstanding these recent Arctic policy initiatives, as Bennett (2012) commented: "The Russian government is likely "concerned" because RAIPON may be viewed as obstructing its attempts to extract more and more resources from Siberia. RAIPON was recently involved in a hostile takeover of a jade mine in Dylacha Evenk by a company owned by the head of the local security service." Novaya Gazeta quoted Rodion Sulyandziga, Vice President of RAIPON, as saying "RAIPON is one of the last barriers to companies and states to the extraction of these resources and [it is] easier to use force, using selective justice, so as not to distract the extra energy, time and resources to negotiate with some indigenous [peoples]" (Bennett, 2012).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> MacLeod, I. 2012. Russian Tanker Transits Arctic Ocean in winter. December 8, 2012. Postmedia.

<sup>10</sup> Oliphant, R. 2012. Russia to Submit Claims by Year's End. January 23, 2013. Moscow Times.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, M. 2012. Why Did Putin Suspend Key Russian Indigenous Group? November 24, 2012. Alaska Dispatch.



Bennett further noted that not everyone in Russia appeared to be incensed about RAIPON's closure, citing an editorial in *Novaya Gazeta* that provided some calculated political advice: "Although this organization [RAIPON] pursues very moderate and reasonable policies compared with others it should probably have shown more loyalty to the Kremlin." Indeed.

Perhaps critical to understanding recent events, in August 2012 RAIPON, along with other representatives of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North, supported a demand to ban oil production on the Arctic continental shelf in areas of traditional land use and called on all Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic to join with Russian representatives in this demand (Burgwald, 2012).<sup>12</sup> This development was followed, as was undoubtedly anticipated by Putin's administration, by preparations for the Arctic Council meetings at Kiruna, Sweden in May 2013. The draft Kiruna Statement or Declaration proposed that the Arctic be recognized as a "homeland – a vulnerable environment in need of protection" to focus on the rights of indigenous peoples and the interests of all Arctic residents (George, 2012). Discussions that potentially challenge Russian concepts of "homeland," and which could also advance the cause of indigenous rights in the face of accelerating plans for Russian Arctic oil and gas development activities, must have given Putin's people serious pause. Additionally, Putin may have viewed RAIPON as having potentially fallen under the influence of "foreign entities" since it has received funding from the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and also the European Commission Directorate General for the Environment. Co-incident with the new Russian ban on RAIPON, a November 2012 Arctic NGO Forum meeting held in Haparanda, Sweden was set to focus on petroleum activities in the Arctic. This meeting had been scheduled *precisely* at the time when Russia was preparing its own new draft Law on the Arctic, one that is reportedly designed to enshrine rights of indigenous peoples.

Not surprisingly, Bellona (2012)<sup>13</sup>, the Russian watchdog agency, has termed Russia's actions as a continuation of a Russian "war on NGO's" and noted that RAIPON had a special consultative status in the UN Economic and Social Council, was an observer in the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the UN Environment Program, and that many members of RAIPON's presidium were members of the Russian Public Chamber, the UN Expert Mechanism in Indigenous Rights, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the UN Working Group on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations.

In a November 14, 2012 opening address sent to circumpolar Arctic officials, RAIPON's vice-President Rodion Sulyandziga added that: "From the moment of its establishment in 1990, RAIPON united, promoted and carried out its activities aimed at protection of the rights of 40 indigenous peoples of the North...Those were years of hope for improvement of the situation in Russia connected with practical implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. Today this hope is down." He termed the forced shutdown "repressive" and "an act of intimidation and rude interference" also coming immediately prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> assembly of Indigenous Peoples planned for Russia in March 2013 (Nunatsiaq News, 2012).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Burgwald, J. 2012. An Urgent Call to President Putin to Defend the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Russia. November 14, 2012. Greenpeace.

<sup>13</sup> Bellona, 2012. Russia Strangles International Indigenous Peoples Organization as War on NGO's Continues. Bellona.org. November 15, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Nunatsiaq News, 2012. Russian Indigenous Org Wants Arctic Council Support to Fight Shut-Down. November 14, 2012.



Bellona (2012) also remarked that in November 2012 Putin promised his newly formed Human Rights Council that he would review his controversial law that requires NGOs that receive foreign funding to register as “foreign agents” with the Justice Ministry and to undergo biannual financial audits. Bellona (2012) quoted Anja Salo of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat who commented on RAIPON’s sudden closure: “If RAIPON as an organization is shut down, it will have a serious impact on the indigenous peoples in the Barents Region” with the consequence that Russian indigenous peoples “will lack a common political voice.”

One might surmise that is precisely what Putin wants to achieve.

Obviously, given that Russia has issued a six month “suspension”, during which the charter for RAIPON may be re-written, there may be grounds for limited optimism that an adequate reinstatement can indeed be achieved. However, the message from the Putin regime is undoubtedly clear – little independent opposition from indigenous peoples that could affect or reflect upon Russian northern developments in international forums will be tolerated. Nor will foreign funding for any such agencies be acceptable.

With remarkable courage, RAIPON has chosen to fight back. In November the organization filed a critical report with the UN Human Rights Council in which it was claimed that Russia had failed to live up to voluntary pledges to improve the conditions for northern Arctic residents in key areas such as land rights, food, education, health, work and self-determination (Nunatsiaq News, 2012).<sup>15</sup> The report also contained recommendations that Russia make improvements to certain policies and was accompanied by a call for Russia to change its position on RAIPON.

RAIPON Vice President Pavel Sulyandziga subsequently made comments, which, interestingly, were then publicly opposed by RAIPON President Sergey Kharuchi, that suggested Russian authorities increasingly viewed indigenous peoples as a troublesome element to Russia’s Arctic development goals and aspirations: “There is an extensive hike in the level of industrialization in the north, and the indigenous peoples are among the last barriers against the companies’ and state’s development of the resources. The authorities strongly dislike RAIPON’s extensive international engagement” (Huffnews, 2012).<sup>16</sup> Sulyandziga also expressed a view that Russian authorities may be attempting to establish “alternative organizational structures” that could replace RAIPON entirely.

In a further indication of the divided opinions and conflicted management interests within RAIPON, Dmitry Berezhkov, RAIPON Vice president, observed: “We consider this [unjustified suspension by the Ministry of Justice] an attempt to divide the indigenous peoples’ movement in Russia and replace it instead with a subservient organization willing to agree to decisions that are in fundamental contradiction with the vital interests of indigenous peoples” (Nunatsiaq News, 2012).<sup>17</sup> Given these clear, at times discordant, signals emanating from senior sources within the organization, it would be logical to conclude that RAIPON is being subjected to withering internal political and legal pressures just at a time when the international community

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<sup>15</sup> Nunatsiaq News. 2012. Russia Stomps on Human Rights of its Arctic Indigenous Citizens: Report. November 26, 2012. Nunatsiaq News.

<sup>16</sup> Huffnews.com. 2012. Human Rights Groups and States Concerned Over Russian Suspension of RAIPON. November 26, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Nunatsiaq News. 2012. Russian Indigenous Group Seeks Letters of Support. November 28, 2012.



of polar nations is attempting to enhance decision-making on matters related to future development in the north. This is especially so for those matters that will directly affect indigenous peoples, most especially those within the Russian Federation.

## CONCLUSION

So, what might all this have to do with Canada, the circumpolar Arctic region, the Arctic Council and the future of Canadian and global political relationships with Russia in 2013? It could be suggested that there is much for Canada, and the Arctic Council, to consider here. While embracing the economic advantages of WTO Membership and expanded trade with the West, each critical to Russian economic interests, the Putin Presidency appears to be leading a determined turning away from the West. That determination appears to include efforts to suppress internal Russian public political dissent among opposition groups, the suspension of agencies such as RAIPON, and a unilateral withdrawal from the Co-operative Threat Reduction Program (CTRP) – all the while holding severely to account, and expelling, western funding agencies like USAID.

A comprehensive understanding of these complex events in Russia, taking into regard the nature of Russia's apparent domestic and international intentions - many of which involve the circumpolar Arctic region, will enable Canada to better lead the Arctic Council, to manage the relationships between members of the Arctic Council, and to enhance the position and role of the organization at a time when the Arctic is a growing focus of international attention.

Into this complex political and diplomatic maelstrom is soon to step Canadian Cabinet Minister and Arctic Council Chair Aglukkaq. Canada should not squander the opportunity to support an Inuk woman who has demonstrated that she is capable of meeting the significant political and managerial challenges thrown at her to date. Far from the biased, one-sided political sniping that has occasionally accompanied the appointment of a distinguished Inuk woman, who has probably yet to reach her peak, perhaps the critics could hold back, just a tad, until she has had a chance to demonstrate her developing capabilities at the Arctic Council. After all, it could be the last chance that RAIPON and the aboriginal peoples of Russia have to obtain a serious hearing, and champion, to return in a meaningful capacity to their rightful place at the tables of the Arctic Council. While some Canadians may question Canada's appointments to the Arctic Council, I doubt very much if disenfranchised Russian aboriginal peoples would do so. After all, it is highly doubtful, left to his own devices, that Putin will spontaneously see the "northern light of enlightened human rights."

This could be a stellar opportunity for Canada to stand tall in its role in the Arctic Council and add to the international chorus of efforts to resist the sweeping "incremental changes" well-described by Wegren and Herspring (2010) that appear to be employed by Putin with increasing force across a broad range of Russian and international social, political and diplomatic organizations. Putin's wrong-headed attempt to blame and purge "foreign influences" in favour of a self-serving nationalistic fervor that employs a repression of Russian internal dissent with diminished international political and institutional contacts will unquestionably sour international relations and investment interests – all this is coming at a time when Russia, as a new WTO member, requires more investment capital and expanded institutional relations with the West.



Basically, Canada has an opportunity to exert an influence through the Arctic Council that could potentially influence events throughout Russia. The “Putin Playbook” to disarm, divide and suppress individual rights in the face of rampant corporate and state corruption has to be seen, and acknowledged, for what it is: A backward step that, while of possible short-term advantage to the current crop of faux democratic political Tsars, who appear to view the world through the obsolete lenses of the Cold War, may well lead Russia itself down the path taken by a formerly repressed Eastern Europe.

If history is used as a guide, one cannot be filled with anything but concern and despair for the Russian peoples over Russia’s current and future prospects. But then, has much really changed for the Russians? In Soviet times the approach of Russian leaders was to seek out external scapegoats and enemies, especially the United States, a country portrayed by successive Russian regimes as “Scapegoat and Enemy Number One.” Putin has the chance to change an abysmal Russian social, political and economic history for the better. It is highly unlikely that he will accomplish this by further employing the tactics and measures of his former KGB employers – to be used either against the West or on his own peoples and their organizations.

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Dr. Ron Wallace is a Senior Fellow of the Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute having previously retired as the CEO of an award-winning Canadian-US defense manufacturer. More recently he has been appointed to successive Alberta advisory panels dealing with policies for federal-provincial monitoring of the oilsands region. Having worked extensively throughout the circumpolar Arctic region he was recognized with the 1996 Alberta Emerald Award for his leadership on behalf of Canada and the World Bank during the massive oil spill from the Kharaga Pipeline in the Pechora Region near Usinsk, Russia. He has served as the interim Executive Director of the NWT Water Board and has provided formative advice on corporate development to the Kitikmeot Inuit in establishing the Nunavut Resources Corporation. He has published widely on northern, environmental and military affairs and actively supports the western Canadian visual art community.



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