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**Russian and Japanese Views on the Melting Arctic: a Pillar of Bilateral Cooperation?**

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ABSTRACT: The end of the Cold War led to a reassessment of Russo-Japanese relations, while China's ascent may be another development influencing bilateral relations. Hot on the heels of these major changes comes another significant transformation in the regional geography of North-East Asia, namely the gradual opening of the Arctic to regular navigation and further exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons.

As a major energy producer and exporter, Russia clearly stands to benefit from the changing physical geography of the Far North. At the same time, the establishment of regular shipping routes, together with tourism, could also bring significant profits to the Russian economy. However, an open Arctic also poses some clear challenges to Russian national security, and the need to defend a legal regime in its waters in accordance with that national security. Japan, as a major energy consumer, is interested in the emergence of new producing areas, in particular those not linked to the country through disputed waters such as those of the South China Sea. A second reason why Japan is interested in the Arctic is as an additional gateway to Western Europe. Finally, the continued conflict over the East-China Sea, plus that concerning the South China Sea (where Japan is not a party but is supporting Vietnam and the Philippines, the former also a partner for Russia), means that Tokyo is carefully looking at the debate on the legal regime of the Arctic.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze all these factors, present them in connection to wider political, economic, and security issues, review the progress to date (including the launch of 2+2 regular meetings), and ponder the prospects for reinforced bilateral cooperation concerning the Arctic and more generally the international law of the sea.

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