



Dr Elizabeth Buchanan

Dr Elizabeth Buchanan is the Europa Fellow with the Centre for European Studies at The Australian National University. Her areas of expertise are Russian foreign energy strategy and Arctic geopolitics. Elizabeth completed her PhD on Russian Arctic strategy under Vladimir Putin and holds an Honours degree in Russian-Ukrainian natural gas relations. In 2018 Dr Buchanan was the Maritime Fellow at NATO's Defense College where she examined the GIUK gap threat and sea cable security. Elizabeth has published widely on Russian energy strategy and Arctic affairs with Foreign Affairs, The Lowy Institute, The AIIA and The Moscow Times. In 2015, Elizabeth was a Visiting Scholar with The Brookings Institution's Foreign Policy unit. She has experience in the oil sector, tutors for the ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre and is Director of Polrisk. Dr Buchanan has a paper forthcoming with ASPI on the Russia-North

Korea energy relationship. Dr Buchanan was interviewed for the WDSN in May, 2018.



Thanks for agreeing to chat with us Elizabeth! Can you start by telling us more about your interests and research areas?

Broadly speaking within my strategic studies field, I am interested in international energy security. My specific

research area is Russian foreign energy strategy and the 'weaponisation' of hydrocarbons since 2000. Energy security is such a fascinating space to work in, constantly evolving and a challenge in terms of the lack of predictability. At the moment, my research is focusing on the emerging interests of states in the energy potential of the world's polar regions. My work is assessing the impact of polar energy strategies for future international security and polar geopolitics.

For the novices amongst us, can you give us a quick rundown of Russia's foreign energy strategy, specifically its polar strategy?

Climate change is 'opening' the Arctic at twice the pace of warming elsewhere on Earth. Much of the Arctic is rich in resources (oil and natural gas) beneath the Arctic Ocean seabed. There is also the development of new international shipping routes within the Arctic, through which East-West transits are substantially reduced. The majority of Arctic resources, as well as an apparent Northern Sea Route, are located within Russia's exclusive economic zone. As such, the Kremlin has earmarked Arctic development as the cornerstone of Russia's future economic base. Protecting these assets is clearly a primary objective behind Russian militarization of the Russian Arctic space, although certainly not the only driver. The challenge is around the fact that Russia lacks the technological expertise, located primarily in the West, as well as the financial ability, located in the East,

to exploit the resources alone. These, as well as a range of domestic drivers, have shaped Russian Arctic strategy to be fairly cooperative towards other states – on Russian terms of course. The incentive for East and West states partnering with Russia in the Arctic is of course – their own energy security. We can see this from China’s keen interest in Arctic development. Much of Russian Arctic strategy is fairly legitimate, basic geography ensures the Kremlin has a strong legal claim to these resources. Is it widely accepted that Russia employs its vast hydrocarbon wealth as a tool of foreign policy – primarily within the former Soviet Union to keep neighbours within the Kremlin’s orbit. When we shift to the Antarctic, Russian polar strategy takes a less transparent form. Australia, as the Antarctic’s caretaker of sorts, should be following closely Russian interest in the resources of the South Pole. As Russian foreign energy strategy shows, it has the potential to move between a competitive and cooperative agenda.

You are currently working on a project entitled “Russian Arctic Strategy: East-West Conflict or Cooperation?” – can you tell us a little bit about this project?

My PhD assessed Russian Arctic strategy under Putin, since 2000. It argued a neoclassical realist case for us to expect the continuation of Russian cooperation with the East and West, at least for the medium term. I delved into various drivers for this cooperative agenda, which

was certainly a divergence from Russian foreign policy as the Crimean Peninsula events illustrated. This involved examining the 'black box' of Russian foreign energy strategy – the who's and how's of foreign policy formation and the energy factor. Since completion, I have been approached to publish my first book on the topic.

What are the main policy implications of Russia's increasingly assertive stance in the Arctic for countries like Australia?

In the Arctic, Australia is not necessarily directly threatened by Russian strategy. It's basic geography. However, there are various indirect threats for Canberra posed by Russian Arctic strategy. For instance, the utilization of the Northern Sea Route for global trade will significantly impact our regional economy – much of our South East Asian neighbours rely heavily on their global shipping hub role. Many of the signals from Chinese and Indian interest in Arctic resources does not bode well for Australia's reliance on energy exports to these markets. Cheaper supplies made available by joint Arctic ventures between these states and Russia could potentially lock Canberra out of significant markets. Various studies have found the resource potential of the Antarctic to be vast. The region, as a landmass, also presents fewer logistical challenges than the Arctic, as an ocean, for resource exploration and production. The policy challenge for Australia is to brace for 2048, 30 years from

now when the Antarctic Treaty lapses. That is when the current Russian interest in the Antarctic will start to illuminate serious policy issues for Canberra.

What advice do you have for women wanting to get into this particular area?

Find a great range of mentors, across various sectors if you can. For example, I have many mentor relationships – spanning energy firms, consultancy, government and academia. Advice, direction and sounding board support is very useful if you can ‘pool’ from more than one mentor. Starting out, I really valued my generalist Arts degree, although political philosophy and politics focused, I was able to delve into sociology, security studies and ethics as well. Taking a year off between my BA and Honours to travel and see the world, I completed the Trans-Siberian railway, has also been an important stepping stone for me. Upon returning I entered the private energy sector with an oil major. In a sense, having a range of experiences was crucial in shaping my career trajectory – despite the fact that at the time I did feel like my non-linear progress was problematic! Plan for experiences and engage with research you find fascinating.

What podcasts are you currently listening to?

I am obsessed with the CSIS podcast. There are various specific podcasts on offer there and you can even contact the team and request a topic. Smart Women

Smart Power and Energy 360 are my top two picks. Recently, my go-to is the original CSIS Podcast. They cover in depth a global security issues – all in 22 minutes. As a busy mum, I find some days that is all I have time to commit to podcasts!

Finally, who inspires you?

All the women who do the juggle. They juggle wearing the mum hat with the researcher and practitioner hats in the public and private spheres. Many of which have paved the way for the next generation of jugglers to follow. It is so important that young women interested in strategic studies realise they are capable, required and welcomed!

Updated: 18 Dec 2018

Content

**WOMEN IN DEFENCE AND SECURITY
NETWORK**



ABOUT

MEET THE TEAM

IN THE WORKS

WDSN PROFILES

CATHERINE MCGREGOR AM

COLONEL (RET'D) PAMELA MELROY

DONNA LAWLER

DR ELIZABETH BUCHANAN

ELISE STEPHENSON

EVELYN NORDHOFF

JACQUELINE WESTERMANN

MADELEINE NYST

MIKAELA VERHOOSEL

SOLANGE CUNIN

DR ANU MUNDKUR

WDSN BLOG

ASPI'S WORK ON WOMEN, PEACE
AND SECURITY

CONNECT WITH US

Topics