



VANCOUVER YOUTH MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2021

Arctic Council

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Dear Delegates,

On behalf of the dias team of the Arctic Council, I wish to extend a warm welcome to VYMUN 2021! Although the COVID-19 Pandemic has pushed the Model UN community online in previous years, it is my hope that this Iteration of Vancouver Youth Model United Nations will thoroughly impress you with this upcoming iteration.

My name is Shiwei Chen, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Arctic Council at VYMUN 2021 alongside your Chairs, Bruce and Kelly, and Assistant Directors, Cynthia and George. Not too long ago, I found myself in my first Model United Nations conference, surrounded by many delegates who were four years my senior. It was here that I learned the true value of Model UN. I learned to speak confidently about my beliefs, I learned to cooperate with fellow peers, and I honed my writing skills. Most importantly, I acquired great friends, advisors, and mentors. To delegates feeling nervous about speaking out amidst a crowd of many, I highly encourage you to make a substantive effort to express your thoughts in the upcoming weekend of debate. I sincerely hope that you will accrue the same kinds of experiences I have.

This year, this committee will be discussing two prevalent issues regarding the Arctic region: Threats to Indigenous Arctic Communities, and International Trade in the Arctic. Our first topic, Threats to Indigenous Arctic Communities, reflects a growing need to accommodate for the needs of native peoples in the Arctic. Out of the many inhabitants currently residing within the Arctic, an eighth of them are primarily indigenous, many of whom are living off of their environment through traditional subsistence hunting. Because of their vulnerable nature, the protection of such a community from the unique threats posed by climate change, modernization, and globalization, hold special importance in this committee. Our second topic, International Trade in the Arctic, reflects the changing nature of the Arctic environment. As global warming terraforms the harsh Arctic environment into a more temperate climate, massive economic opportunities present themselves in the form of shipping routes and oil. As stakeholders in each topic, I encourage you to research thoroughly and represent your countries accurately so as to build a high quality of debate.

On behalf of the Dais team, I once again welcome you to VYMUN 2021! Please direct all committee-related inquiries to ac@vymun.com and I will be happy to help you.

Sincerely,

Shiwei Chen

Director of the Arctic Council | VYMUN 2021

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Committee Description

The Arctic Council is a supranational organization which aims to address the needs of the nations and peoples possessing territory and residing within the Arctic region.¹ Such needs include topics pertaining to the Arctic peoples, biodiversity, climate, ocean, pollutants, and emergencies. The Arctic Council was formally established in the 1996 Ottawa Declaration, its goal being to promote cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States.² Membership in the Arctic Council is divided into three tiers: Arctic States, Permanent Participants, and Observers.³

Members of the Arctic Council include states which hold undisputed territory in the Arctic region.⁴ These nations are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.⁵ Permanent Participants include non-governmental organizations which advocate for Indigenous interests.⁶ As of 2021, six organizations are Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council: The Aleut International Organization, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council.⁷ Lastly, Observers include a wide variety of non-Arctic states, universities, and non-governmental organizations wishing to present their concerns to the Arctic Council.

Since its inception in 1996, the Arctic Council has drafted and signed multiple international agreements pertaining to the needs of Arctic residents.⁸ Most recently in 2017, the council signed the International Agreement on Arctic Scientific Cooperation, an agreement granting all Arctic nations mutual access to scientific tools, equipment, infrastructure, land, and research data.⁹

The Arctic Council is not so much a supranational organization as a high level governmental forum. While the council does draft agreements which theoretically restrict the sovereignty of member nations, the Arctic Council has limited jurisdiction over the affairs of other states.¹⁰ Should an Arctic State decide to violate a clause within an Arctic Council agreement, there is, on paper, no official punishment the Council can place upon the violating nation. While its resolutions are not considered legally binding, nations generally are expected to follow the the outlines and general guidelines set by the council.

¹arctic-council.org/en/about/timeline/25

²ibid.

³<https://arctic-council.org/en/>

⁴arctic-council.org/en/about/states

⁵ibid.

⁶arctic-council.org/www/www/en/about/permanent-participants

⁷ibid

⁸arctic-council.org/en/about/timeline/25

⁹ibid.

¹⁰en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic_Council

Threats to Indigenous Arctic Communities

Questions to Consider

1. How do globalization, modernization, and climate change affect the indigenous populations of members in the Arctic Council?
2. How can displaced citizens cope with the loss of their traditional, long-term occupations?
3. Does economic development and betterment outweigh the loss of culture for Arctic Communities?
4. To what extent does State Sovereignty matter to your delegation?
5. Given the increased importance of the Arctic region, how should we best reaffirm state sovereignty?

Overview

Indigenous peoples have inhabited the Arctic for thousands of years. Over 40 different ethnic groups currently reside within the Arctic.¹¹ These include, but are not limited to, the *Saami* in Finland, Sweden, and Norway; the *Nenets*, *Khanty*, *Evenk*, and *Chukchis* in Russia; and the *Inuit* in the United States and Canada and many more smaller communities. The proportion of Indigenous people is estimated to be about 10-12 percent of the total population living in Arctic Areas, amounting to roughly 500, 000 inhabitants.¹²

There is a great variance in the cultural, historic, and economic backgrounds of the ethnic groups of the Arctic. A common feature of all peoples, however, is that they have undergone substantial changes as a result of globalization, westernization, state politicization, modern transport, and the introduction of a mixed economy.¹³ While these changes have their historical roots in the forced relocation of indigenous groups, they have undoubtedly aided in the survival and adaptation of these communities to the modern world.

During the 1940's and 1950's, the Arctic population exploded due to improvements in infrastructure, and health care combined with the discovery of a wealth of natural resources in the region.¹⁴ In Siberia and Alaska, for example, large oil deposits were discovered.¹⁵ Recently, however, this growth has begun to slow down in general, and in some cases, such as in the Russian North, the total population has been declining. Today, around two thirds of the total population lives in large, densely populated areas, compared to the relatively scattered settlements observed in the past.

¹¹en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_human_migrations

¹²ibid

¹³www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples

¹⁴www.windows2universe.org/earth/polar/inuit_culture.html#:~:text=Traditional%20Inuit%20way%20of%20life,the m%20survive%20in%20this%20environment

¹⁵ibid.

Recently, the increased political presence of indigenous peoples has led to international recognition regarding their rights.

Presently, the Arctic is an ever growing center of human activity. Regardless of underlying causes, the Arctic is undergoing significant changes. As the indigenous population continues to modernize and integrate into a westernized society, its presence on the world stage will continue to expand.¹⁶

Timeline

18000-13000 BC: Humans begin migration to America via the theorized Bering Ice Bridge, a sheet of ice which once connected Asia to America via the Bering Strait.¹⁷

~1000: Leif Erickson establishes the Viking settlement of Vinland in near the Canadian Maritimes (Newfoundland, New Brunswick) and is driven out shortly afterwards due to hostile relations with the Indigenous population.

October 12, 1492: Christophers Columbus discovers the Americas.

1733: John Kay invented the Flying Shuttle in England, kickstarting the Industrial Revolution.

29th August, 1758: The Brotherton Indian Reservation, the first Indian reservation, was established in Southern New Jersey, United States.¹⁸

April 19, 1775-September 3, 1783: The American Revolution occurs: Indigenous peoples are recruited to aid both the Americans and British, leading to internal division. The Iroquois Confederacy was shattered as a result of this war.¹⁹

1896: Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius brings forth the concept of 'global warming' to the scientific community.²⁰

1970s: As data proves the rise in Earth's temperature, the concept of Environmentalism begins to take form.

June 1991: The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) is signed by the eight arctic nations, forming the groundwork for what will later become the Arctic Council²¹

¹⁶www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples

¹⁷en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_reservation#:~:text=The%20first%20reservation%20was%20established,The%20area%20was%203284%20acres.

¹⁸en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_reservation#:~:text=The%20first%20reservation%20was%20established,The%20area%20was%203284%20acres

¹⁹en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War#American_Indians

²⁰www.scientificamerican.com/article/discovery-of-global-warming

²¹arctic-council.org/en/about/timeline/25

September 19th, 1996: The Arctic Council is founded in Ottawa.²²

May 24th, 2006: Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is published, garnering international attention on climate change.

June 2nd, 2008: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in Canada, with the purpose of documenting the history and lasting impacts of the Canadian Indian residential school system on indigenous communities.²³

2014: Interest in the Arctic continues to grow, with Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, stating that his country strives to be a 'Polar Great Power'²⁴

March 11th, 2019: Concerned by its rising number of cases of the Coronavirus, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 virus as a pandemic.

August 1st, 2019: Greenland loses 12.5 billion tonnes of ice in one day, a record-breaking number which would normally take the world's combined ice sheets six days to fully melt.

Historical Analysis

Some 20,000 years ago, when the ice caps were at their greatest extent, North Eurasian Homo Sapiens migrated to the Americas..²⁵ Modern Humans settled in Northern Eurasia about 12,000 years ago, becoming the modern Arctic Indigenous peoples today. In the beginning of the Holocene, about 4,000 years ago, Arctic Canada and Greenland were reached by modern humans through the Paleo-Eskimo expansion.²⁶

The Arctic environment is characterized by a harsh climate with extreme variation in light and temperature, short summers, extensive snow and ice cover in winter and expansive areas of permafrost.²⁷ The unique environment of the Arctic gives rise to unique challenges - challenges which have been overcome by the inhabitants of the region. Both plants and animals in the Arctic have developed unique ways of life to cope with their harsh environment, although this has rendered the same life forms more susceptible to environmental changes, and increased human activities.²⁸ In particular, some indigenous populations in less-affluent Arctic regions have historically relied upon subsistence hunting to survive the harsh Arctic climate. Since the Arctic region has not undergone substantial change since the Last Glacial Maximum, modern climate change poses a significant threat to those relying on the vulnerable lifeforms in the Arctic.²⁹

²²ibid

²³en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_of_Canada

²⁴www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24677.5?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

²⁵en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Glacial_Maximum

²⁶ibid.

²⁷www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples

²⁸ibid.

²⁹ibid.

The Arctic peoples have developed rich cultures rooted in long histories. Traditional Inuit way of life, for example, was influenced by the harsh climates and the stark landscapes of the Arctic tundra. The climate gave rise to other traditions, including igloos, dog sleds, and various other tools, traditions, and techniques essential for Arctic survival.³⁰ The Arctic peoples developed beliefs, inspired by natural Arctic phenomenon like the Auroras, and the polar day-night cycle.³¹ As the world continues to industrialize, the long term survival of such cultural practices may be called into question. Traditional Indigenous practices may become impossible to carry out.

When Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas in 1492, he brought with him a Pandora's box of European diseases, and colonial prejudices. In the years following Columbus' discoveries, Europeans tracing his journey brought with them a variety of diseases which the local population were not accustomed to. Following the introduction of smallpox, and other colonial diseases, approximately 90% of the Native population were killed by diseases which European Colonizers had unknowingly brought with them.³² When the Spanish accidentally introduced smallpox into South America, the disease was slow to spread northward due to the sparse population there, the Arctic included..³³

Only from the mid-20th century did Arctic life see major changes. Before the 1940s, the North American Arctic peoples had minimal contact with Europeans. Although colonists did launch a few trading expeditions before then, very few had interest in settling down on the frozen land of the Arctic.³⁴ As World War II ended, however, and the Cold War began, the Arctic transformed into a hotbed of international aggression and distrust. The largest landholders of the Arctic during that time were, and still are the United States and Russia. Following the Second World War, tensions between the United States and Russia increased in what is now known as the Cold War. Because the relative proximity of their Arctic territories posed a security threat to each respective nation, each country had the incentive to become more powerful than the other, and so the region quickly developed economically. The commercialization of air-flight helped further modernize the Arctic. In particular, the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, constructed in 1951, became a site with one of the most flights during its time.³⁵ This was partially due to the Soviet Union's policy forbidding foreign airlines to fly over their territory, prompting the necessity of a midway airport in the Arctic.³⁶

As Arctic nations strengthened their Arctic frontiers, the increased economic affluence gained from such preparation went back into the Arctic economy in the form of public services.³⁷ More schools, hospitals, and infrastructure. led to an increased standard of living, and so the Inuit population grew larger, in the

³⁰www.windows2universe.org/earth/polar/inuit_culture.html#:~:text=Traditional%20Inuit%20way%20of%20life,the m%20survive%20in%20this%20environment

³¹ibid.

³²<https://www.pbs.org/gunsgermssteel/variables/smallpox.html#:~:text=They%20had%20never%20experienced%20 smallpox,by%20an%20infected%20African%20slave.>

³³ibid.

³⁴ibid.

³⁵en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Stevens_Anchorage_International_Airport#History

³⁶ibid.

³⁷www.windows2universe.org/earth/polar/inuit_culture.html#:~:text=Traditional%20Inuit%20way%20of%20life,them%20survive%20in%20this%20environment

1940's and 1950s to a size too large to live solely off of subsistence hunting. By the 1960s, many Inuit were required to live in towns.³⁸

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Arctic remained a region worthy of international attention. As the world continues to experience the effects of climate change, new opportunities are being presented to those in the Arctic: Oil fields which were previously inaccessible are now open to development due to the warming Arctic climate, whose temperature is rising twice as fast as the global median. In addition, the melting ice sheets of the Arctic create new trading opportunities. Historically, the cold water ports native to the Arctic region proved unpopular due to their tendency to freeze over in the winter. This led to months of port inactivity due to the inability for ships to sail through ice. As the Arctic warms and ice-breaker technology continues to improve, however, more opportunities present themselves in the Arctic, and have attracted much international attention.

Past Action

The Arctic region has been accustomed to external threats posed by the many factors of the world, both political and environmental. The effects of global warming are not new. Indeed, its impacts upon the Arctic have been recorded for at least the last hundred years or so. As such, there has been past action from both international bodies like the Arctic Council and the United Nations as well as from other independent entities. Below is a list of the most prominent of such actions.

Arctic Council

Since its establishment in 1996, the Arctic Council has worked with 6 Working Groups, whose goal is to research topics of interest and report back the findings of said research, as well as advice pertaining to a course of action for the Council. One such group has been the *Sustainable Development Working Group*, which aims to improve the environmental, social, and economic conditions of Indigenous peoples and Arctic communities.³⁹ The group is currently chaired by Russia, which holds the position until 2023.⁴⁰

To date, the Working Group has published numerous studies and papers on the state of the Arctic, with topics ranging from economics to pre-school education.

United Nations

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded in Stockholm in June 1972, with its goal being to reduce pollution and conserve the Earth's standing environment.⁴¹ It is the highest level Inter-governmental form of environmental protection in the world. Since its founding, the committee has hosted numerous summits and meetings focusing on the intricate details of the climate.⁴² In 1974, the UNEP passed the first internationally binding resolution to protect the oceans, with regulations adapted for every region. Countries with waters in the Arctic region manage the sea collectively at a regional level. The UNEP gathered in 2019, in the fourth UN Environment Assembly to discuss possible solutions

³⁸ibid.

³⁹sdwg.org/what-we-do/how-we-work/business-economic

⁴⁰arctic-council.org/en/about/states

⁴¹en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Environment_Programme

⁴²ibid.

to the worsening climate crisis.⁴³ Amongst talks of sharing environmental data and reusing natural resources, the UNEP also recognized that the Arctic would be the region most affected by the effects of climate change.⁴⁴ The UNEP has found that glaciers are shrinking at record rates; On average, glaciers shrank by 4.9 feet in 2006, whilst glaciers lost an average of about 1 foot of ice in the years between 1980 and 1999. Since the turn of the millenium, the loss has increased to about 1.6 feet.⁴⁵

Current Situation

8 countries currently possess land in the Arctic.⁴⁶ The population in this region totals to 4 million, 500,000 of which identify as being a part of indigenous groups and peoples.⁴⁷ Since the Arctic Council's founding in 1996, the institution has established its vested interests in protecting the indigenous peoples who have lived for many years in the region.

Economic Ramifications

In the status quo, the world continues to globalize and modernize at an unprecedented rate. Such change poses a prominent threat to Indigenous Arctic communities around the world. While at first glance, the economic integration of the Arctic may seem to be a rational proposal, the reality is that such communities will also grow more susceptible to the whims of the wider economy. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has demonstrated the dangers of globalization. In March 2020, the Coronavirus was deemed to be an international pandemic by the Center for Disease Control. In the months following this announcement, a global recession occured, affecting every nation across the globe, with the United States' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropping nearly 33% during the beginning of the pandemic's crisis. The Arctic has fared just slightly better than the North American superpower. Most member states of the Arctic experienced spikes in unemployment, dips in their GDP, and had to increase government spending as a result.⁴⁸ As the economic ramifications of COVID-19 pandemic continue to unfold, tourism in the arctic region along with the yield of other native, naturalized industries, has declined severely. Following the global recession which occurred last year, many have been forced to turn elsewhere for employment opportunities.

Climate Change

In a time where nations around the world are experiencing economic booms, and industrializing on a scale rarely seen before, there seems to be little hope in reversing, or even stopping the effects of climate change. The effects of this industrialization, however, pose the most threat to the indigenous living in the Arctic regions. Many natives, particularly the Inuit peoples residing in Greenland and Northern Canada, depend on their environment for subsistence hunting.⁴⁹ The vast, largely barren Arctic landscape provides ample opportunity for hunting and fishing. Indeed, in Greenland, fish, and other maritime products account for more than 90% of its exports, with its contributions to the nation's GDP totalling up to more

⁴³www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/world-pledges-protect-polluted-degraded-planet-it-adopts-blueprint

⁴⁴ibid.

⁴⁵ibid.

⁴⁶arctic-council.org/www/www/en/about/permanent-participants

⁴⁷www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples

⁴⁸datacommons.org/place/country/DNK?utm_medium=explore&mprop=amount&popt=EconomicActivity&cpv=activitySource%2CGrossDomesticProduction&hl=en

⁴⁹ www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples

than 20%.⁵⁰ In the near future, due to the inevitable warming, it may be impossible to live solely on hunting and fishing as many indigenous peoples in the Arctic currently do. In addition, the breaking up of ice sheets and warming of the climate creates a substantial amount of uncertainty regarding the Arctic's ecology, and thus the maritime industry's future. This could potentially lead to vast increases in the unemployment rate and decreases in the standard of living across the Arctic. At the same time, climate change may also force communities from their traditional ways of life into more modernized occupations in urban centers. Such increases in the quality of life, however, come at the cost of the cultural assimilation of local peoples and the merging of the arctic's unique culture into a haphazard imitation of Western customs.

Foreign Influence

As the Arctic opens up to increased economic opportunities due to the warming climate, foreign nations unrelated to the area are becoming interested. Worryingly, nations with little relation to the Arctic region have taken a seemingly obsessive interest in the area. China has, in the past, been willing to go as far as to claim parts of the Arctic. In 2014, just a year after the People's Republic was admitted into the Arctic Council as an observer, the nation's president Xi Jinping declared that he wished for 'China to become an arctic superpower'⁵¹ Such fierce competition for Arctic influence has never been seen before in the Arctic's history, and it certainly poses a large threat to the Indigenous communities of the Arctic. If tensions continue to rise, then it is likely that states with Arctic communities living within their borders will disregard such peoples when asserting their state sovereignty over other nations. States like Russia and the United States may begin construction programs without consulting the native communities in the area, or accidentally obstruct traditional hunting grounds if their primary aim is to protect the nation from foreign interests.

Possible Solutions

Infrastructure development

In the status quo, the infrastructure of the Arctic is quite lacking. This is because of two reasons: Firstly, there was historically little reason to financially invest in the Arctic as economic opportunity was limited. Secondly, it was near impossible to install infrastructure, and cost significantly more to do so while simultaneously yielding low results due to its harsh climate and low population. Improvements in technology and the new possibility of oil deposits within the Arctic have made both obstacles relatively obsolete. If the committee were to invest in infrastructure developments in the Arctic, the region would experience a significant boost to its economy; those who previously did not invest in the Arctic due to its weak economy would now do so given the better economic conditions. The profits of such a development could eventually go towards indigenous education programs or stimulus checks for not-so-well off members of the Arctic community.

Expanding the oil industry

As the Arctic ice sheet melts, more opportunities to improve the lives of Arctic citizens. In Arctic regions such as Norway and Russia, where nations are already exploiting the vast quantities of oil present within

⁵⁰ www.grida.no/resources/7001

⁵¹ www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24677.5?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

their territories, citizens tend to possess a much higher standard of living, quality of life, and GDP per capita. Numerous scientific studies conclude that a vast quantity of oil lies untapped in the Arctic. If the delegations present were to tap into such a resource, the lives of Arctic inhabitants, including the indigenous population, would improve. The profits from oil could be directed towards preserving the culture of the Arctic population, enforcing the sovereignty of the Arctic nations, or combatting the effects of Climate change.

Indigenous recognition

A major threat to the indigenous peoples and communities of the arctic is the threat of losing their native cultures and ways of life. While such problems may be brought up locally, or even at a national level, as seen with Canada's truth and reconciliation program, it is rarely brought up in supranational institutions such as the UN for the rest of the world to recognize. States could sponsor, subsidize, or give grants to programs dedicated to spreading and maintaining indigenous culture around the world.

Asserting State Sovereignty

One of the problems currently facing the Arctic Council is the growing international interest surrounding their region. Foreign observers don't look upon the area with interest, but instead with greed, eyeing potential opportunities to secure an undiscovered oil field, or more Arctic shipping rights. By reaffirming the sovereignty of the region and ensuring it's imperviousness against foreign political pressure through solidifying laws, policies, and restrictions, it is possible to reduce unwanted foreign intervention. All delegations, but particularly Sweden, would support this solution.

Bloc Positions

Rights and Freedoms

This bloc consists of those in the Arctic Council who advocate for the rights, freedoms, and the physical and mental wellbeing of those living in the arctic. Nations here believe that industrialization, modernization, and the monetary growth of the Arctic comes second to fundamentally raising the quality of life in such areas. Furthermore, nations whose foreign policy aligns with this bloc have a high likelihood to be wealthy and affluent enough to support such programs. Additionally, members of this bloc stress the importance of maintaining the unique culture of the Arctic's inhabitants, and of the preservation of the region's wildlife and sea life. Such delegations are very concerned with the changing climate and its implications upon the various Arctic communities and ecosystems. Delegations such as Canada, Finland, and Sweden would be in this bloc.

Industrialization and Development

This bloc consists of those in the Arctic Council who are more focused on increasing the economic growth and capacity for those in the Arctic. Nations within this bloc believe the Arctic to be an untapped wealth of natural resources and economic opportunities, and believe that it is fundamentally infeasible to aim for the programs of the Rights and Freedoms bloc without first focusing upon the Arctic's underdeveloped economy. Members within this bloc prefer economic solutions to the problems of the Arctic. Such solutions can include, but are not limited to expanding the oil industry, or improving the neglected and underdeveloped infrastructure of the area. In many cases, they have committed to

developing infrastructure in the Arctic region or industrializing their Arctic communities. Delegations such as Iceland, Russia, and Norway would be a part of this bloc.

Neutrality

This bloc has a variety of its own interests, and is free to put forth issues to the committee as they see fit, pushing for clauses in resolution papers regarding the issues that their delegations care about. Such topics vary from the health of Arctic citizens to Arctic fisheries. While many nations share a variety of overlapping ideals with the other blocs in this committee, what sets them apart is the policies they share with *every* bloc. Nations who are neutral have policies which align with both bloc's interests, and are thus free to commit to any particular bloc of their choosing. Members of this bloc could include the US, and Denmark. Note, however, that bloc positions are a recommendation, and delegates can reasonably identify with more than one bloc listed on this background guide.

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International Trade in the Arctic

Questions to Consider

1. How can delegates take advantage of the changing Arctic environment for their benefit?
2. How can we cope with the aftermath of environmental disasters, such as oil spills? How can we stop such spills from occurring in the first place?
3. What are the various challenges associated with Arctic shipping routes?
4. How can Arctic States reduce the environmental impact of international trade?
5. What does your delegation consider more important: economic prosperity, or environmental preservation?

Overview

The Arctic is the northernmost region of the Earth, centered on the North Pole, and containing regions controlled by Russia, Canada, Denmark, United States, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), countries are allowed to explore up to 370 kilometres past their shoreline and can expand further if they can prove seabeds outside of their current range have similar geological features as their continental landmass.

Since the 19th century, the Arctic region has become increasingly important due to the growing international demand for resources, such as rare metals and fish in the area. In the 1960s, various oil fields were discovered in the Arctic regions, sparking a second wave of interest in the barren land.⁵² Following this, the Arctic Council was established in 1996 with Arctic landholders being granted membership in the council.⁵³ These nations collaborate and work with NGOs, non-Arctic states, and indigenous groups to promote cooperation and peace within the region.⁵⁴

⁵²<https://www.stimson.org/2013/evolution-arctic-energy-development-timeline-1962-present/>

⁵³<https://arctic-council.org/en/about/timeline/25/>

⁵⁴ibid.

As the Arctic region continues to warm, more resources will become available in the Arctic. It is certainly not a coincidence that major oil field discoveries occurred after the globe had already warmed significantly.⁵⁵ Not only will the costs of oil drilling and other economic activities decrease due to the warming Arctic, the rising sea temperatures also allow for Arctic shipping routes to continuously operate, even in the winter months.

Members of the Arctic Council should strive to reduce the harsh effects of climate change and set a policy which aims to reduce the harmful impact of oil spills.

Timeline

15000 BCE: The Barents Sea ice sheet, stretching from northern England to Siberia, disintegrates in a period less than 1000 years, likely due to warming sea temperatures.⁵⁶

982 CE: Erik the Red discovers Greenland, engaging in trans-Arctic trade for the first time in recorded human history.⁵⁷

~1000: Leif Erikson discovers the coast of North America, nearly five centuries before the journeys of Christopher Columbus. He names the land 'Vinland' after the plentiful grapes which were discovered there. Unfortunately, Leif Erikson's settlement was abandoned due to rising hostilities with the Indigenous population in the area.

1962: The Tazovskoye Oil Field, the first major Arctic oil field is discovered in Russia. Following this discovery, the Prudhoe Bay Oil Field in Alaska was also discovered in 1967.⁵⁸

1970-1979: Major discoveries were made in the Mackenzie Delta region, and more than 250 million barrels of oil and eleven trillion cubic feet of natural gas have been discovered in Canada. Exploratory offshore drilling in the region began in 1972. To date, about 90 oil wells have been drilled in the Beaufort Sea.⁵⁹

1980-1989: Norway opened the Barents Sea in the Arctic for energy exploration and Statoil, a Norwegian state-owned oil company, discovers the Snøhvit gas fields. After this discovery, Statoil and other international corporations drilled more than 80 exploratory wells in the Norwegian North.⁶⁰

1998: Canada hosts the inaugural meeting of the Arctic Council in Iqaluit. This first meeting established the Sustainable Development Program, which emphasizes the importance of sustainably cultivating the resources, culture, and economies of the Arctic.⁶¹

⁵⁵<https://www.stimson.org/2013/evolution-arctic-energy-development-timeline-1962-present/>

⁵⁶<https://www.timelines.ws/countries/ARCTIC.HTML>

⁵⁷<https://americanpolar.org/about/arctic-exploration-timeline/>

⁵⁸<http://www.arctis-search.com/Arctic+Oil+and+Gas#:~:text=Large%20discoveries%20of%20oil%20and,territories%20of%20these%20four%20countries.>

⁵⁹<https://www.stimson.org/2013/evolution-arctic-energy-development-timeline-1962-present/>

⁶⁰ibid.

⁶¹ibid.

Nov 20th, 1999: A report by *Science Daily* reports that the Arctic average ice thickness had declined by 4.25 feet since the 1960s, a 40% reduction.^{62 63}

Sep 13th, 2006: NASA scientists state that the ice in the Arctic Sea is melting in winter as well as in summer. The ice was reportedly melting at 9% a decade.⁶⁴

June 1st, 2007: The Norwegian environmental group Bellona warns that a nuclear waste dump near the Arctic region in Russia may be in danger of exploding. This is, in part, due to the militarization in the region.⁶⁵

April 20th, 2010: BP's Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig explodes off the coast of Louisiana, killing eleven workers. Oil starts leaking from the rig at a rate of 5 000 barrels a day, causing the worst oil spill in US history. Shortly after the BP oil spill, the White House temporarily halts expansion of offshore drilling.⁶⁶

2013: The Arctic Council ratifies the *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic*, a legally binding agreement between the Arctic states detailing protocol in the event of oil spills and other oil related pollution.⁶⁷

2017: Studies conclude that the Arctic Ocean is expected to be largely free of ice by 2035.⁶⁸

2019: Fires this year in the Arctic melted some 182 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Fires in June, July, and August accounted for 173 million tons.⁶⁹

May 29th, 2020: After years of corrosion, a Russian tanker spills 21 000 tons of oil in the Russian Arctic, near the Ambarnaya.⁷⁰

Historical Analysis

The economic benefit of Arctic shipping routes lies in the shorter distances which trading vessels need to travel. By passing through the Arctic, a vessel travelling from Northern Europe to Shanghai can reduce its travel distance by up to 3000 nautical miles when compared to travelling via the Suez Canal.⁷¹ However, a reduced distance sometimes does not equate to time saved, nor does it always reduce monetary costs. Depending on the conditions of the Arctic Sea, the time taken for a ship to travel through the Arctic ice may end up increasing the total time taken for maritime travel, rather than reducing it. Thus, the viability of Arctic shipping routes largely depends on whether the ice conditions of any particular year are good or

⁶²<https://www.timelines.ws/countries/ARCTIC.HTML>

⁶³<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/1999/11/991115145020.htm>

⁶⁴ibid.

⁶⁵<https://www.timelines.ws/countries/ARCTIC.HTML>

⁶⁶<https://www.britannica.com/list/9-of-the-biggest-oil-spills-in-history>

⁶⁷<https://oarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/529>

⁶⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2020/oct/13/arctic-ice-melting-climate-change-global-warming>

⁶⁹<https://www.timelines.ws/countries/ARCTIC.HTML>

⁷⁰<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52977740>

⁷¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic_shipping_routes

not. If Arctic shipping routes are open for only three months of the year, then conditions are considered 'bad' and a trip from Northern Europe to Shanghai can take up to three more days than the more straightforward trip through the Suez Canal.⁷² Conversely, if shipping routes happen to run all-year round, which implies perfect ice conditions, then trading vessels can expect to reduce their estimated shipping time by up to 16 days.⁷³

Time reductions, while large, were not the sole considerations which must be considered to determine the viability of Arctic Shipping routes: a review commissioned by the UK government recently points out that there are many additional costs to be considered.⁷⁴ Firstly, Russia imposes tariffs on those using the Northern Sea Route (NSR): an Arctic shipping route controlled by the Russian Federation.⁷⁵ The NSR is most widely used due to its favourable ice conditions.⁷⁶ This stands in stark contrast with Canada's route, the Northwest Passage, which imposes no tariffs. Canada's route, however, remains largely unmaintained in comparison to that of Russia due to the fact that it does not generate revenue from tariffs.⁷⁷ Thus, those sailing in the Arctic have a decision to make: whether to sacrifice monetary gains to reach a destination faster, or whether to sacrifice time to earn more profit per shipment. In the future, however, this is likely to change. The Transpolar Route (TSR) is a shipping route which further reduces the shipping distance compared to the routes mentioned previously. This is because it cuts directly through the Arctic, ignoring the coastline of Arctic states.⁷⁸ The TSR can be considered as an attractive prospect in the future. For now, thick ice sheets in the region prevent the TSR from being economically viable as a shipping route for trading vessels.⁷⁹

While shipping routes due are indeed an important problem to discuss, oil spills will inevitably occur. Historically, oil spills are caused mostly by human error, natural disasters, technical failures, and rarely, deliberate releases. Accidental oil tank vessel spills account for roughly 8-13% of all oil spilled into the oceans. They are considered extreme ecological threats due to the amount of oil being released during such spills. Notably, the *Amoco Cadiz* oil spill, which occurred in 1978, spilled an estimated 69 million gallons of crude oil, and polluted around 200 miles of the French coast, as well as killing an estimated 20 000 birds. In the aftermath, the corporation was forced to pay \$120 million in damages to the French Government and French claimants.⁸⁰ Indeed, oil spills have thus proven to be extremely dangerous and damaging over the past few decades.

Past Action

Arctic Council

⁷²ibid.

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-the-sea-implications-from-opening-arctic-sea-routes>

⁷⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic_shipping_routes

⁷⁶ibid.

⁷⁷ibid.

⁷⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transpolar_Sea_Route

⁷⁹ibid.

⁸⁰<https://www.britannica.com/list/9-of-the-biggest-oil-spills-in-history>

Since its founding, the Arctic Council was meant to address the issues faced by the Arctic governments and solve them cooperatively. As such, the emergence of Arctic shipping routes along with the threat of oil spills has prompted the council to write a legally binding article. The Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic attempts to reduce the frequency of spills, as well as the damage created.⁸¹

United Nations

Since its inception in 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has developed a vested interest in preserving the global environment. Although this resolution does not concern the Arctic, the Protocol Concerning Co-Operation and Development in Combating Oil Spills in the Wider Caribbean region was adopted by Member states of the UN in 1983.⁸² The objectives of the Protocol are to strengthen government preparedness and encourage cooperation to prevent and control pollution incidents.⁸³

European Union

The Baltic region has experienced a sharp decline in the number of oil spills in the region over the past few years. This is a result of various authoritative, anti-oil spill legislation adopted by the member states of the European Union. In 2001, a record breaking 107 spills were recorded in the Baltic region by the Finnish Environment Institute.⁸⁴ This stands in stark contrast with the nine oil spills which occurred in 2013, and the one oil spill in 2014. Efforts were led by the European Maritime Safety Agency, established by the European Union in 2002, which was charged with reducing the risks of maritime pollution and accidents.⁸⁵

Individual Arctic States

A variety of separate legally binding legislation aimed to reduce the damage and scale of oil spills has been enacted by the individual states which comprise the Arctic Council. An example of such legislation is the 'Canada Shipping Act' and 'Marine Liability Act' of Canada. These two pieces of legislation outline those liable for damages in the aftermath of an oil spill, and regulations to reduce the frequency and scale of such an incident. Russia too recently drafted new legislation addressing oil spills.⁸⁶ Such legislation requires all projects involving the oil industry on Russian land and waters to include plans for the prevention and elimination of oil related spills and any other negative environmental impacts.⁸⁷

Current Situation

⁸¹<https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/529>

⁸²<https://www.unep.org/cep/oil-spills-protocol>

⁸³ibid.

⁸⁴<https://www.offshore-technology.com/features/featurelessons-learnt-the-remarkable-decline-of-oil-spills-in-the-baltic-sea-4379564/>

⁸⁵ibid.

⁸⁶<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/spills-environmental-emergencies/environmental-emergency-legislation/federal-spills-related-legislation>

⁸⁷ibid.

Home to lucrative shipping routes, and vast amounts of oil, coal, and other highly contested resources, the true value of the Arctic were only observed recently, as advancements in technology, environmental factors, and scarcity of resources caused the Arctic states to develop the region.⁸⁸ On the topic of international trade in the Arctic, three major aspects concern the Arctic Council.

Climate Change

The rapid change the Arctic climate is undergoing will pose a threat to its inhabitants in the near future. As has been reiterated many times throughout this background, the number of damaging natural events such as floods are predicted to increase in the coming decades following further degradation of the ice caps.⁸⁹ Economic losses are to be sustained as a direct result of such natural events. Additionally, many coastal cities upon which nations have invested trillions in will be at risk of being submerged. The global average sea level has risen about 7 to 8 inches since 1900.⁹⁰ Currently, Arctic Sea ice is lost at a rate of 13% per year, with 95% of the oldest sheets completely melting away in the past 30 years.⁹¹ If the Greenland ice sheet alone were to melt, global sea levels could rise up to 20 feet more than its current state.⁹²

The problems, however, do not stop there. Arctic ice and permafrost, ground that is frozen due to the low temperatures in the region, store large amounts of methane and greenhouse gases, which will eventually be released after the Arctic thaws.⁹³ Estimates suggest that permafrost covers nearly 24% of all Arctic land and accounts for nearly half of all carbon stored within the world's soil.⁹⁴ If even a small percentage of these greenhouse gases are emitted from the thawing, the consequences would be significant. Ecological damage, rising sea levels, and billions in potential economic losses would come as a result, affecting not only coastal cities but entire nations.

Oil Spills

Oil spills are generally regarded as economically disastrous, and negatively impact the marine life. As more and more ships and oil tankers sail through the Arctic, the chance of oil spills will increase exponentially. This is especially detrimental due to the large, thriving ecosystems in the region. If such ecosystems were to be affected by an oil spill, evidence suggests that much of the wildlife would be severely threatened, due to the unique adaptations which Arctic life were required to develop to cope with their environment. Thus, the topic of preventing oil spills before they happen is of great importance in this committee.

⁸⁸<https://www.gao.gov/u.s.-arctic-interests>

⁸⁹<https://www.gao.gov/u.s.-arctic-interests>

⁹⁰<https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/six-ways-loss-of-arctic-ice-impacts-everyone>

⁹¹ibid.

⁹²ibid.

⁹³ibid.

⁹⁴<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/permafrost-thaw-warming-world-arctic-institute-permafrost-series-fall-winter-2020/>

A topic of equal importance is that of cleaning up such spills. Given the amount of trade projected to pass between Arctic waters in the coming decades, some amount of accidents involving oil, petroleum, and other potentially damaging substances are more or less guaranteed. Thus, the wisest action one can take is to attempt to mitigate the harms which the spills cause. To this end, the topic of mitigating the harms of oil spills once they occur is also of great importance in this committee.

A large problem regarding oil spills however, is the difficulty of accessing the Arctic in the event of an oil spill due to its harsh conditions. Rescue crews or cleanup crews have an incredibly hard time completing their assigned tasks in the Arctic environment. This is especially true if the accidents occur in remote, non-coastal areas such as on the Transpolar route..^{95 96}

International Trade

Given the inevitability of melting Arctic ice, and thus the increasing viability of trade, economic activity will continue to grow throughout the 21st century. Multiple Arctic Sea routes have been developed throughout the past 50 years. Currently, Russia's Northern Sea Route (NSR) has proven itself to be the most popular route, although a faster, more convenient route is projected to become viable in the near future. As ice sheets and ice caps in the Arctic continue to melt, the annual downtime of cold water ports will eventually decrease, leading to more active ports in the Arctic. As mentioned before, the Arctic shipping routes of the NSR and NWP will continue to attract more trade through its routes, and the TSR may end up opening continuously throughout the year. The weakened ice in the Arctic will prove vital to the quickly growing shipping business; more products will travel through the Arctic's straits than ever.

Possible Solutions

Developing an emergency protocol

Given the future trade which is projected to flow through the Arctic oceans following the continued melting of ice caps, the inevitability of oil spills within the region is likely. Indeed, Canada's last intact ice sheet broke down just last year in October and Greenland's ice sheets had melted at a record breaking pace of one million metric tonnes per minute.⁹⁷ Given this fact, developing a protocol regarding the actions which are needed to be taken in cases of oil spills is recommended. This would include factors such as who shall be contacted and who shall be responsible, most likely clarified through legislation. Delegates should note, however, that the Arctic Council has developed legally binding legislation regarding protocols in such an event.⁹⁸ Any resolution involving such a solution should aim to build upon the *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic*, detailing specific numbers and quotas for oil pollution preparedness, and not simply to replace it with another piece of bureaucracy.⁹⁹ Additionally, any resolution adopting this solution should ensure that a state is held accountable should they violate the resolutions passed in the Arctic Council.

⁹⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic_shipping_routes

⁹⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transpolar_Sea_Route

⁹⁷<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2020/oct/13/arctic-ice-melting-climate-change-global-warming>

⁹⁸<https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/529>

⁹⁹ibid.

Restricting the possibility of oil spills

While oil spills may be inevitable, the frequency of which they occur may be reduced through the proper actions and measures. It is obviously not wise for trading vessels and oil tankers to access the Arctic Straits unguarded, unchecked, and unregulated. Thus, it may be in the best interests of the Arctic Council to require shipping companies to have certain qualifications which reduce the probability and impact of oil spills before entering Arctic waters. Those who violate such restrictions could, upon entering Arctic waters, could be subject to fines, item confiscations, or other mechanisms of punishment. Note, delegates, that enforcement mechanisms must be implemented should this solution be pursued. Delegates in the Arctic Council cannot simply expect the businesses and corporations of the world to comply with the regulations set forth by the Council.

Increasing international trade

While the above solutions would work in a vacuum, they are often impractical, given the financial, political, and logistical restraints of governments. Oftentimes it is costly to enforce regulations and oil preparedness protocols. Thus, this solution offers a more practical solution to the problem of oil spills for nations who tend to be more stringent with their budgets, or those who cannot afford such direct solutions. When more trade flows through the Arctic, there will be a natural tendency for infrastructure, buildings, workers, resources, and industry to grow inside the Arctic. Therefore, there would be more resources to clean up and prevent oil spills invested in the areas and routes naturally in need, reducing the need for specific, targeted action towards the problems regarding trade. Nations who tend to focus on the incredible economic capacity of the Arctic would probably prioritize the implementation of this solution above others.

Bloc Positions

United States, Russia, and Norway

This bloc consists of those in the Arctic Council more likely to prioritize legislation focusing on economic growth and long term productivity, as compared to quality of life changes like increasing regulations and other equity based improvements. Typically, such nations either see, or have seen the potential of exploiting the abundant natural resources found within the Arctic, the most prominent of which being coal and oil. It contains an estimated 13% of the world's undiscovered oil, 30% of undiscovered gas, and some \$1 trillion worth of raw minerals like gold, zinc, nickel, and platinum.¹⁰⁰ Thus, they are painfully aware of the inconvenient position which the Arctic finds itself in: protecting the Arctic climate will lead to long term harm mitigation for the Arctic states, yet the protection and maintenance of such an environment actively hampers economic efforts and opportunity within the region. Degradation of the Arctic can also lead to profits for them in the future, although the situation is not as clear cut as it has thus been presented. Recent environmental changes have created challenges for those living within the Arctic. The increasing frequency of natural events like coastal flooding damages Arctic assets at a consistent rate, and are

¹⁰⁰<https://www.gao.gov/u.s.-arctic-interests>

projected to increase over time.¹⁰¹ Thus, these countries would prioritize increased trade through the Arctic Straits above the insurance of environmental sustainability within this region.

Iceland, Finland, and Sweden

This bloc consists of those in the Arctic Council more likely to prioritize the standard of living in the region. While every bloc hopes to give the Arctic region a better quality of life, the means by which these blocs wish to achieve such a goal differ. The former bloc wishes to raise the income per capita of these nations, and thus improve living standards. This bloc would prefer to instate regulations and laws to protect the quality of life of the status quo instead. As has been stated before, recent changes in the Arctic climate have brought an increasing frequency of undesirable natural events like coastal flooding.¹⁰²

Unmonitored and unregulated human activity through the region is likely to only exacerbate such events. Thus, this group of nations would potentially prioritize a policy of tighter regulations and taxation upon Arctic shipping routes in lieu of a policy like outright developing the shipping routes.

Canada and Denmark

Members of this particular position are relatively specialized in their interests. Although they do share some similarity to both groups mentioned above in terms of foreign policy, none of such similarities merit these nations to outright join a bloc. Canada itself recognizes its precarious position: on the official Government of Canada's website, their Arctic Foreign Policy notes 'New opportunities and challenges are emerging across the Arctic, in part as a result of climate change ... While the opportunities are great, there are also important social, economic and environmental challenges.'¹⁰³ Greenland too, stresses both the challenges and unique opportunities which come with climate change, stating on their official website that 'the effects of global warming are very visible in Greenland, where both new threats and opportunities emerge with the rise in temperatures.'¹⁰⁴ Thus in theory, they should enter whichever bloc better accommodates their interests.

¹⁰¹ibid.

¹⁰²<https://www.gao.gov/u.s.-arctic-interests>

¹⁰³https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/arctic-arctique/arctic_policy-canada-politique_arctique.aspx?lang=eng

¹⁰⁴[https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/denmark/#:~:text=The%20Kingdom%20of%20Denmark%20Strategy,%3B%20and%204\)%20international%20cooperation.](https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/denmark/#:~:text=The%20Kingdom%20of%20Denmark%20Strategy,%3B%20and%204)%20international%20cooperation.)

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