

**Forum:** Disarmament Commission  
**Issue:** Preventing the militarization of the Arctic Circle  
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## Introduction

Due to their rich resources, the Polar Regions are attractive to countries. In order to maintain peace and security, the international community monitors the resources of Antarctica. The resources of Antarctica are protected under the Antarctic Treaty. Antarctica is one of the territories on earth that is not part of any recognized government. Antarctica is a continent that does not have permanent residents, as most of the people in Antarctica are part of a research mission or are tourists.

In 1959, the Arctic Treaty System was established in order to prevent any wars from happening due to territorial disputes between countries. After this treaty was signed, there have not been any new claims when it came to the land in the Antarctic continent. The treaty states that Antarctica can only be used for peaceful and scientific purposes, not military purposes.

One of the main facets that the treaty focuses on is the prohibition of military uses of the continent. This includes means such as prohibiting the testing of arms in Antarctica. The treaty system also makes sure that the objectives of the Arctic Treaty are met. Although this treaty has achieved many of its objectives, there are still many factors causing territorial disputes in the Antarctic Region.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Militarization

The process of which a society organizes itself for conflict and violence.

### Arctic Circle

The region on earth that includes the Arctic Ocean, Norway, Sweden, Russia, United States, Canada, Greenland and Iceland.

### Territorial claim

When two or more countries claim the possession of a piece of land. Territorial disputes can happen due to two or more countries disagreeing over the possession of a piece of land (territory).

### Territorial Dispute

This happens when certain countries disagree of territorial claims. They fight over a certain territory.

## General Overview



*This is a map of countries encompassing the Arctic Circle (Norway, Sweden, Russia, United States, Canada, Greenland and Iceland).*

In the past few years, due to technological advances, a great deal of countries has gained interest in the Arctic Circle. These countries include China and Russia. Due to the fact that many resources are said to be present in the Arctic region, nations want to claim pieces of land in the Arctic in order to use these resources to make profit. It is said that the Arctic may contain “one fifths of the world’s yet-to-be discovered oil and natural gas reserves”. Not only does the Arctic hold these gas reserves, it is said to hold other forms of wealth such as gold and silver. Due to the amount of resources that can be found in the Arctic, many countries want territorial claim. Due to the masses of countries wanting to claim territory in order to gain profit, disputes have emerged.



*The extraction of oil in the Arctic (a main resource valued by countries), done by Russia.*

## History

During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, European empires began exploring in order to find a suitable trading route connecting the east and the west. These expeditions included moving through the Arctic Ocean and within this period, more routes were eventually discovered. In the 1900s, due to an industrial revolution prior to WWI, many European Nations required raw materials to meet the demand of factories and consumers. As a result, countries raced to colonize and expand themselves to take control of these resources, which was one of the major causes of WWI. During the war, tension was high, because even with battles ongoing, exploration within the arctic continued in order to attempt to

take control of new areas with raw materials. Leading to World War II, the Arctic region remained to be a key factor to the US and USSR, who kept supply routes in the Arctic. Many weapons were transported through these routes, making the Arctic region an important place for the two countries.

In September of 1996, the Arctic council was established. Members of this council included Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and USA. This council worked on the prevention of disputes caused by territorial claims in the Arctic Circle. In 2004, oil was discovered 200 miles from the North Pole, which was a notable event because the Arctic Circle is already being fought over due to the abundance of natural resources. Upon finding this oil, more countries took interest in land in the Arctic region. In 2010, China became involved with the Arctic as Admiral Yin Zhuo said that the Arctic belongs to all people around the world and china covers 1/5 of the world's population. This being said, China is now involved in territorial claims regarding the Arctic Circle. Finally, in 2013, Russia made the Arctic region a priority for its Navy. They built military bases and performed military exercises in the area. Such behavior has been rejected by Nato.

### **Actions to Prevent Conflict**

Actions have been taken in order to prevent conflict when dealing with territorial claims in the Arctic Circle. The UNCLOS (United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea) outlines many different protocols for the claiming of the land and sea by member states, but not all states have signed it. Furthermore, only some uses of the Arctic are permitted by the Arctic Council. For example, scientific exploration is permitted; however, the exploitation of natural resources is not. In some cases, a country claims a piece of land in the Arctic, saying that they will use it for scientific purposes; however, the real intention may be different. With so many countries seeking for economic benefits, this could lead to more territorial disputes and possibly even heighten the risk of war.

### **Actions of Countries Involved**

In recent years, Russia has made largely controversial territorial claims to areas of the Arctic Circle, alarming other nations (particularly the USA, during an incident wherein Russian bombers allegedly entered Alaska's defense identification zone). Many nations bordering the Arctic Circle, including Denmark and Norway, have since followed suit and made claims to the undersea Lomonosov Ridge as a result of the Arctic's immense potential as a resource for gold, oil and other valuable materials. Moreover, its location - right between some of the most powerful countries in the world - has secured the Arctic as a potential source of disaster if left unchecked.



*A Russian military submarine cutting through ice in the Arctic.*

Other countries involved in territorial disputes of the Arctic Circle include East Asian nations, the EU and the United States. In the United States, George W. Bush emphasized the significance of the use of the Arctic Circle by the United States when it came to missile defense and early warning systems. The US is also entering the scientific and military race for the sovereignty over certain parts of the Arctic. The EU plays a big part in this because three of its member states (Sweden, Finland and Denmark) are Arctic States. The EU claims a permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. The EU opposes the concept of the Arctic Treaty, claiming that “the full implementation of already existing obligations, rather than proposing new instruments should be avoided.” The EU is interested in keeping the balance of preservation and sustainability of resources in the Arctic. Certain East Asian nations have been active in Arctic affairs. States in East Asia depend on Arctic resources, scientific research and shipping routes. They also want to enhance their access to the natural resources available in the Arctic.

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

### The Antarctic Treaty

Towards the end of 1959, twelve countries, whose scientists have been working in the Antarctic, signed the [Antarctic Treaty](#). Entering fully into force in 1961, this treaty has now been signed by multiple nations and other relevant parties. The UN was a vital force in bringing this treaty to light. Key provisions of the treaty include, but aren't limited to:

1. “Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only;
2. “Freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end ... shall continue.
3. “Scientific observations and results from Antarctica shall be exchanged and made freely available”

### Related Documents

- [Compilation of the Key Documents of Antarctic Treaty System](#)

### UNCLOS

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is a statement of the UN regarding a member state's sovereignty over parts of the sea. Key provisions include:

1. “The sovereignty of a coastal State extends, beyond its land territory and internal waters and, in the case of an archipelagic State, its archipelagic waters, to an adjacent belt of sea, described as the territorial sea.
2. “This sovereignty extends to the air space over the territorial sea as well as to its bed and subsoil.
3. “The sovereignty over the territorial sea is exercised subject to this Convention and to other rules of international law.”

### Related Documents

- [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#)

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
12th Century	European empires gained interest in colonization of Eastern nations.
1914-1918	During World War I, tension was high as even with battles ongoing, exploration within the arctic continued in order to attempt to take control of new areas with raw materials.
1939-1945	The arctic region remained a key factor to the US and USSR during WWII as it contained key supply routes between the two allied nations where many weapons were loaned from the US to the USSR.
November 1994	UNCLOS, Exclusive Economic Zones set 200 nautical miles beyond a nation’s baseline.
September 1996	Arctic council is established.
March 1997	Russia ratifies the UNCLOS
2004	Oil is discovered 200 miles from the North Pole
2007	Russia places flag at the base of the North pole and has maintained military presence in the area ever since
May 2008	Ilulissat Declaration Signed
2009	US argued against Canada’s claim for area over the Beaufort Sea

March 2010	China becomes involved in affairs regarding the Arctic Circle.
May 2013	Arctic Council admits China, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Singapore as ‘observer nations’ to help oversee proceedings of the council
December 2013	Russia makes Arctic a priority region for its Navy and builds up military bases and performs military exercises throughout 2014 in the Arctic.

## Possible Solutions

The main difficulty that arises when one attempts to solve this issue is the lack of legal framework for a region without an official governing body. Therefore, nations and nonpartisan bodies alike must first agree on fair, strict international standards for arms limitation, territorial claims and the extraction of materials. Existing sovereignty rights in the area should be made clearer, if not limited or more closely scrutinized, in order to prevent tension from rising in the area. Furthermore, greater surveillance from international bodies could help ensure that such regulations are adhered to. Meanwhile, nations must also ensure that the environmental situation in the Arctic does not worsen with further exploitation or even the implementation of potential solutions. Given recent claims to such a valuable, potentially dangerous resource, action must be taken quickly in order to maintain peace and stability for all.

Another solution is the increased presence and involvement of the United Nations. As of now, the only presence the UN has in the Arctic Region is UNCLOS. This is the only presence that speaks about the legislation and rights of states involved in the Arctic Region. Beyond this however, the UN has not made many resolutions regarding the militarization of the Arctic Circle. Having a greater presence when looking at issues concerning the Arctic Circle could enable the UN to act upon issues faster and create better legislation regarding territory in the Arctic. A new committee can be formed that looks at issues solely to do with territorial claims and militarization in the Arctic. Having this committee will enable member states to peacefully compromise on any territorial disputes and also discuss means to further protect the natural resources found in the Arctic and also prevent militarization.

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