



## SECTION 6. COMMITTEES AND TOPICS

### 6.3 GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY (DISEC)

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#### Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) was created as the first of the Main Committees in the General Assembly when the charter of the United Nations was signed in 1945. Because of this, DISEC is often referred to as the First Committee. The birth of DISEC responded to the call for an international forum to discuss issues of peace and security among countries around the globe. This was deemed necessary after the atomic bomb usage in World War II. According to the UN Charter, the purpose of DISEC in the General Assembly is to establish “general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments”. Membership in DISEC is extended to all 193 members of the UN, in accordance with its mission to have purposeful conversations and resolutions. Each member of DISEC, as with the other committees in the General Assembly, has one vote in decisions made by the committee. Often times, discussions in DISEC focus on making recommendations for peace and security. This then requires that a two-thirds majority of voters to pass any resolution.

#### Topics:

*Militarization of the Arctic*

*The Exploitation and Defense of Arctic Resources*

#### Militarization of the Arctic

As global warming continues to melt the polar ice caps and uncover valuable natural resources, Arctic militarization is becoming an increasingly salient issue. The Arctic is not yet a privately owned region by any particular state. Currently, all territorial claims to the Arctic region are regulated through the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) under international law. The UNCLOS mandates that each of the five major Arctic countries, the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, and Denmark, possesses an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles adjacent to its Arctic coast. Due to its great economic, environmental and military value, several countries have already announced claim over the Arctic, with nations readying their military advances to defend their claims in the Arctic Region.

Russia has established a foothold in the arctic other nations have begun to feel threatened by. Since their creation of several new bases in 2017, the U.S. in particular has been increasingly concerned with the strengthening of Russia’s offensive capabilities due to their arctic development considerably more advanced than those of the U.S.. Norway has military bases to keep watch on their arctic neighbor. The European Union has expressed interest in research posts in the arctic.

## **The Exploitation and Defense of Arctic Resources**

Arctic sea ice usually varies in quantity, depending on the season. Every winter, the ocean is completely covered with ice. It starts to melt in the late spring, and by September about half that ice has melted away. Yet, rising global temperatures are causing the quantity of Arctic ice to melt at a faster rate, and prevents it from refreezing. Roughly one third of the Arctic coastline is comprised of permafrost- an environment that is extremely susceptible to warming temperatures. As a result of accelerated climate change, whole sections of coastline rapidly thaw, and recede into the Arctic Ocean. A recent report says erosion is causing these coastlines to erode by an average of 1.5 feet per year<sup>1</sup>.

Temperatures in the Arctic are rising faster than anywhere else in the world, and the melting ice will open strategic waterways for shipping. This will spur a rush to claim rights to the wealth of natural resources that lie beneath. The melting of the sea ice and an increase in temperature of the Arctic will have a significant impact on the area's economy and environment. The Arctic Council<sup>2</sup>, formed in 1996, is a high-level intergovernmental forum created with a focus on issues related to environmental protection and sustainable development of the Arctic region. Since the founding of the Arctic Council, six Arctic countries (Canada; Denmark; Finland; Iceland; Norway; Russia; Sweden; United States) have been active on holding discussions on issues facing the untapped resources within the Arctic and the living standards of indigenous people living there.

The region's economic viability and trading potential has inspired countries to compete for its increasingly readily accessible underwater resources. The Arctic Council has worked closely with the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), a non-binding environmental protection agreement between the eight arctic regions, in an effort to protect the Arctic's fragile environment.

As global warming changes the Arctic, Russia is leading the rush to gain access to the region's resources. In the Pechora Sea in 2013, the Russian company Gazprom became the first company to produce oil offshore in the Arctic. Greenpeace protesters attempted to dissuade this due to the detrimental impact on the environment, but were arrested at gunpoint as their ship was confiscated. On the east side of Yamal, Russia, a partnership led by another Russian company, Novatek, is building a giant terminal to liquefy gas and export it to East Asia and Europe via ice-breaking tanker as the exploitation of these natural resources is made easier by the thawing of Arctic ice. However, Russia is not the only country seeking out these resources. More than a fifth of the world's conventional oil and gas that has yet to be discovered lies above the Arctic Circle, according to a 2008 estimate by the U.S. Geological Survey. In 2018, Norway anchored an oil platform in the Barents Sea, even farther north than Gazprom's platform. However, cleanup procedures that are standard in warmer climates, including containment booms and chemical dispersants, are challenging to deploy in Arctic waters. Both governments and industries have tested to determine the consequences, but have not yet confronted a major offshore spill.

The region is rich in other minerals too. Canada is mining diamonds, gold, and iron in the Northwest Territories. With the Siberian coast now ice free for several months each year, cargo

ships have begun navigating along the Northern Sea Route between Europe and East Asia. In the summer of 2016, a large cruise ship, the Crystal Serenity, carried tourists through Canada's legendary Northwest Passage. The cruise line company, Crystal Cruises, has since been condemned for its voyages and subsequent negative impacts upon the environment, but Vice President John Stoll says the company plans to continue trips in the region.

As the northernmost region of the Earth continues to melt due to climate change, nations are given an opportunity to access to valuable economic resources. As a result, interest in the Arctic region has grown significantly in the past decade, and competition for resources between states will continue to increase. While some member states are eager to take advantage of these new economic activities, others will urge full awareness of the environmental impacts of their actions on the ecosystems and local populations.

As global warming continues to melt the polar ice caps and uncover valuable natural resources, Arctic militarization is becoming an increasingly salient issue. Under present international law, no single country monopolizes the Arctic region. Instead, the international treaty that regulates Arctic territorial claims, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, mandates that each of the five major Arctic countries, the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, and Denmark, possesses an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles adjacent to its Arctic coast. Yet, the United States and seventeen other nations have refused to sign the Convention, which they view as a threat to their national economic and security interests. Meanwhile, world powers are clamoring to defend and even extend their territorial claims in the region. This issue not only poses a threat not only to regional and global security, but also to northern indigenous communities, sustainable development, and the environment

***General Questions to Consider:***

- 1) How can the UN control the resource rush?
- 2) To whom do the resources of the Arctic belong to?
- 3) What countries and industries, if any, should be allowed access to the Arctic's resources, and what are permissible means for the countries to protect said resources?
- 4) How can the Arctic's contested sovereignty be protected knowing that it isn't a state?
- 5) How can the Territorial Disputes be settled in Arctic?

***Questions on Country-Specific Policy:***

- 6) How does your country perceive the rapid changes in the Arctic and the threat it faces?
- 7) What is your country's view on climate change, and what expertise can your country bring forward?
- 8) What past resolutions have been created on this matter, internationally and within your own country?
- 9) What specific resource would your country have a particular interest in (oil, iron, or even just the land and waterways)?