

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Topic: The Demilitarisation of the Arctic Region

Student Officer: Alex Panaretos

Position: Co-chair

Topic Introduction

Situated at around 66°33'N, the Arctic area encircles the North Pole and is quickly emerging as a central hub for worldwide geopolitical and environmental issues. Nearly four million people live in the Arctic, which is shared by eight countries: Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States (via Alaska). Many of these people are Indigenous, including the Inuit and the Yupik. The Arctic, formerly thought to be a harsh and uninhabitable region, is currently receiving a lot of interest because of its abundant unexplored resources, which include minerals, oil, and gas. Global interest is further heightened by the emergence of new shipping routes brought about by the melting of Arctic ice due to climate change.

But because of this greater focus, conflicts over military posture, resource exploitation, and territorial claims have intensified. Concerns have been voiced about the Arctic turning into a new theater of international conflict as a result of these tensions, particularly as superpowers try to protect their economic and geopolitical interests there. The fundamental dilemma still stands: should the Arctic be permitted to militarize in the name of resource extraction and world dominance, or should it be maintained as a region of peace and scientific inquiry?

Definition of key concepts

Arctic region

The Arctic is a vast and varied region, whose annual cycle is influenced by the strong variation in the amount of light.



The right of passage

The right to occupy so much land belonging to another as may be necessary for or incidental to the passage of water.¹

GIUK Gap

The area of the Atlantic ocean bounded by Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom.²

Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)

An area of airspace over land or water, in which the ready identification, location, and control of all aircraft.³

Interoperability

The ability of military equipment or groups to operate in conjunction with each other.⁴

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

An area of the ocean, generally extending 200 nautical miles (230 miles) beyond a nation's territorial sea, within which a coastal nation has jurisdiction over both living and nonliving resources.⁵

¹Law Insider. "Right of Passage." *LawInsider.com*, www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/right-of-passage

² Oxford Reference. "Air Defense Identification Zone." *OxfordReference.com*, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105003542.

³ Federal Aviation Administration. "Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)." *FAA.gov*, www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/aip_html/part2_enr_section_1.12.html#:~:text=Air%20Defense%20Identification%20Zone.

⁴ <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>

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NOAA Ocean Exploration. "U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)." *OceanExplorer.noaa.gov*, oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/facts/useez.html#:~:text=An%20%E2%80%9Cexclusive%20economic%20zone%2C%E2%80%9D,both%20living%20and%20nonliving%20resources.



Background Information

Historical Background

Following World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States—two Arctic countries and then-global superpowers—engaged in fierce combat that characterized the Cold War. Both countries continued to have serious concerns about the demilitarization of the Arctic notwithstanding their involvement in foreign wars like the Vietnam War.

Soviet interest in the Arctic area was further sparked by the Winter War of 1939–1940 between Finland and the Soviet Union. A crisis in the region and increased internal tensions within the Soviet Union were caused by this conflict. In addition, the 1940 German invasion of Norway shaped the modern war by adding to the geopolitical instability of the Arctic area.

The Arctic's strategic location, combined with its vast wildlife and mineral resources, has made it an area of substantial economic, military, and social interest for superpowers looking to dominate global markets, particularly in oil extraction, as well as to establish military control. The region also holds significant shipping routes, such as the Northern Sea Route, which is vital for many countries. It is the shortest maritime route between the western part of Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific region. If this passage were to be blocked, it would severely disrupt global shipping and trade.

The Arctic area is now home to several military facilities and assets, mostly under the authority of the United States, Canada, and Russia. For example, Russia has been spending extensively in industrial infrastructure in the Arctic for more than 10 years, while Canada has a vast network of air surveillance radars in its northern provinces. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, has been working to establish his country as a major force in the Arctic and on the international scene. The region now faces a higher risk of armed confrontation as a result of resource rivalry heightened by melting sea ice.

The indigenous populations of the Arctic, numbering more than 4 million people, are severely affected by these geopolitical tensions. These indigenous groups, including the Yupik and Inuit peoples, have long-standing traditions, languages, and ways of life. However, they are increasingly suffering due to poor diplomatic decisions and the militarization of the region. Indigenous culture, both tangible and intangible, is at risk of being eroded as military postures and economic interests take precedence.

The key question remains: Should the Arctic be a zone of peace and scientific exploration, or will it become the stage for a new conflict among various nations? Is the Arctic truly an asset for global dominance, or are we witnessing the slow death of a unique and irreplaceable culture?



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Furthermore, the militarization of the Arctic is detrimental not only to the security of the region but also to its fragile environment. While economic powers seek to capitalize on the Arctic's resources, their environmental partners, such as the Green Party, advocate against the exploitation of native lands. They call for adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, ensuring that legal frameworks are upheld and environmental protections are in place to safeguard the future of this vital region.

More on this:

<https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019/2019-commentaries/324-between-militarization-and-disarmament-constructing-peace-in-the-arctic>

<https://arctic-council.org/explore/work/cooperation/>

<https://www.spsnavalforces.com/story/?id=227&h=Militarisation-of-the-Arctic-Region>

Timeline of Events

<u>30/11/1939</u>	Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union starts, heightening tensions in the Arctic.
<u>1945-1991</u>	Cold War leads to increased military presence from both the USA and USSR in the Arctic region.
<u>01/12/1982</u>	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) signed, establishing maritime sovereignty claims.
<u>11/05/1996</u>	Arctic Council is established to promote cooperation and demilitarization.
<u>28/05/2008</u>	Ilulissat Declaration signed by five Arctic states, committing to peaceful resolution of Arctic disputes.



<u>2010s-Present</u>	Russia and NATO increase military activities, with renewed focus on resource extraction and strategic positioning.
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Major countries/ organizations and alliances

Russia

The Arctic has long been seen by Russia as a strategically significant area. Russia had ambitions to dominate Arctic lands even before the Cold War, especially in wars like the 1939–1940 Winter War with Finland. Russia has greatly increased its military presence in the Arctic today, adding more nuclear-powered icebreakers to its fleet, rebuilding sites from the Soviet period, and installing cutting-edge missile systems. As the ice continues to melt, Russia's strategic objective is to maintain control over the Northern Sea Route and establish its claims over the Arctic (Russian Arctic Military Bases).

<https://www.americansecurityproject.org/russian-arctic-military-bases/>

United States of America (USA)

In terms of national security and resource exploitation, the United States has equal stakes in the Arctic. The key objectives of US strategy are to prevent Russia from gaining more power in the Arctic, guarantee access to energy resources, and preserve freedom of passage across Arctic seas. In addition, the United States has stepped up military operations in the Arctic, conducting naval drills and keeping watch over vital regions. The United States' official authority to assert claims under international law is limited since it has not yet ratified UNCLOS ("U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone").

[https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/eez.html#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Exclusive%20Economic%20Zone%20\(EEZ\)%20extends%20no%20more%20than,of%20the%20Northern%20Mariana%20Islands](https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/eez.html#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Exclusive%20Economic%20Zone%20(EEZ)%20extends%20no%20more%20than,of%20the%20Northern%20Mariana%20Islands)

NATO

In the Arctic, NATO is very important, especially when it comes to supporting American policy on resource exploration and freedom of passage. NATO has stressed the need of protecting Arctic shipping channels and making sure the area stays accessible to international trade as the region's



waters grow more navigable. In order to offset Russian operations in the Arctic, NATO nations—especially Norway and Canada—are likewise attempting to update their military prowess ("NATO and the Arctic").

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/no-26-nato-arctic-75-years-security-cooperation-and-adaptation>

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is an international organization that was founded in 1996 with the goal of fostering collaboration between Indigenous groups and Arctic governments on problems including environmental preservation and sustainable development. Even though the council doesn't deal with military issues directly, it has proven crucial in promoting communication and lowering tensions in the area. Advocating for the preservation of their traditions and traditional ways of life, indigenous groups are also important to the council ("Arctic Council Formation").

<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org>

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The Ilulissat Declaration

The Ilulissat Declaration, signed by the five Arctic coastal governments (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States), reiterated these countries' commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and cooperative resource management in the Arctic. The proclamation did not completely address the increasing militarization of the area, while being a major step toward maintaining calm in that area.

Arctic Council Formation

The Arctic Council promotes collaboration on shared concerns including sustainable development and environmental preservation. Even while the council doesn't deal directly with security matters, its establishment was a crucial step in encouraging communication between Indigenous people and Arctic states and preventing hostilities from getting worse.



The Polar Code

To improve ship safety and environmental protection in Arctic and Antarctic seas, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) created the Polar Code. In order to reduce danger in these delicate circumstances, the Polar Code establishes guidelines for ship design, building, and operation. It does not, however, address the region's more significant geopolitical or military issues.

Possible solutions

Expansion of the Arctic Treaty to the Arctic

The Arctic Treaty System (ATS) expansion is one possible countermeasure against the militarization of the region. With the successful designation of Antarctica as a zone of peace and scientific collaboration, the ATS has outlawed resource extraction and military operations. An international agreement that places a high priority on scientific research, environmental preservation, and amicable conflict settlement may be established for the Arctic using a similar structure. To create a legal framework that takes precedence above national interests, both Arctic and non-Arctic countries would need to make a significant diplomatic effort.

Establishment of an International Court on Marine Crimes

It may be possible to establish an international court on maritime crimes to handle conflicts involving territorial claims and resource exploitation. This court would offer an impartial forum for settling disputes including unlawful fishing, harm to the environment, and unpermitted military operations in the Arctic. In order to guarantee just and open administration of the Arctic, the court would have the power to enforce international maritime law and punish offenders.

Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement and Indigenous Representation

To maintain peace in the Arctic, diplomatic engagement must get fresh attention. This should include providing Indigenous peoples a bigger role in decisions that impact their lands and means of subsistence and better participation in international bodies like the Arctic Council. In order to promote sustainable development and environmental stewardship that benefits both local people and the global ecosystem, indigenous knowledge systems should be included into Arctic governance.



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