

# **Disarmament and International Security (DISC)**

Research Reports



**Forum:** Disarmament and International Security

**Issue:** Preventing the Militarization of the Arctic

**Student Officers:** Abdallah El Dessouky & Tarek Abdel Nasser

**Position:** Co-Chair(s)

---

## **Introduction**

For many years, the Arctic was seen as having little to no economic value. However, it has proved its true value through all the natural resources found such as Diamond, Gold, oil and Iron ore. The exploitation of the Arctic for each countries own benefit began as early as in the 1930s by the Soviet Union, which then attracted the attention of the United States, Denmark, Norway and Canada, which are now known as the 8 Arctic states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. Whilst these resources were in abundance previously, the sheer amount of countries wanting a part in the Arctic has caused many militaries to enter which mainly causes political instability, and may lead to arms races as seen previously in history. However and more importantly, these militarization projects are causing many other detrimental effects such as global warming and the displacement of locals in these regions due to pollution and destruction of land. This has also led to the destruction of habitats of animals living there such as seals and polar bears, as well as the direct killing of them. However, the militarization of the Arctic is not completely bad due to providing work to thousands, which if left unemployed in the event all Arctic operations are shut down, would create an unemployment crisis. This would also add onto the other social effects and would become a problem on its own, especially with other problems such as financial crises and increasing inflation which risk putting people under the poverty line where more money would be used for helping these people. This issue is not just a political issue, but also an economic, labour and social issue that would take decades to solve. And whilst many conventions and resolutions have been established through organisations such as the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea and private treaties between countries such as Russia and Norway. Whilst these treaties have

been utilised previously, they have not been effective yet may be amended to be improved to finally solve this issue.

The Arctic is becoming more accessible due to climate change-induced ice melt, which is making the region crucial for geopolitical strategy and economic opportunity. Large deposits of minerals, natural gas, and oil are among the untapped natural resources being made more widely accessible. Furthermore, new shipping routes like the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage are starting to make sense and are cutting down on the amount of time it takes to go by boat between important international markets.

Moreover, the interests of the Arctic Nations further inflame geopolitical tensions in the region. Russia has the longest coastline in the Arctic and has made significant investments there. It has invested heavily in both infrastructure and the armed forces, building up the Northern Fleet and establishing new bases. Strategic military location and resource extraction are the two main drivers of Russia's interest. Additionally, The United States considers the Arctic to be crucial for both economic and national security reasons. It has shifted its emphasis to Arctic policy, supporting unrestricted navigation and opposing territorial claims that would limit access.

Canada, by claiming the Northwest Passage as internal seas, is concentrating on demonstrating its control over the region. Additionally, it is spending money on search and rescue equipment and infrastructure in the Arctic.

Scandinavian countries also have key interests in the Arctic. Norway is worried about security and stability in the Arctic because it is a member of NATO. It encourages global collaboration and the creation of global legal structures that oversee the area. Denmark has a lot of interests in the Arctic through Greenland. It invests in regional military capabilities while simultaneously promoting international law and collaboration. Finland and Sweden, despite not having long coasts in the Arctic, are both nations that participate actively in Arctic affairs through the Arctic Council and have a strong interest in environmental preservation and sustainable development. With a focus on sustainable development and the effects of climate change, Iceland's interest in the Arctic is largely environmental and economic.

The Arctic has become more militarised as a result of countries strengthening their armed forces and holding drills there. The necessity to protect national interests and the geopolitical significance of the Arctic are the driving forces behind this buildup. Overlapping territory claims and the absence of comprehensive agreements on military activity increase the likelihood of conflict.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Militarization**

Militarization is the proceeding in which nations or groups arm themselves for conflict, war and violence.

### **Natural Resources**

Natural resources are resources that have been formed naturally, not synthetically. These include oil, gas, coal and more. These aforementioned resources were formed over the course of millions of years and are non-renewable.

### **Global warming**

Global Warming is the rapid increase in the world's temperatures. It is mainly caused by the release of greenhouse gasses as a result of burning fossil fuels.

### **Continental Shelf**

Continental Shelf is part of the continent which is submerged under an area of shallow seas.

### **Permafrost**

Permafrost is any surface/ground that has been at 0°C or colder for at least 2 consecutive years. Permafrost contains carbon-based remains of plants and animals that froze before they were able to decompose.

### **Exclusive Economic Zones**

Exclusive economic zones (EEZs) are the areas in which Arctic states have special rights over the natural resources found in them. These states have the jurisdiction to explore their desired marine sources and to extract the resources they wish to have as long as it is in their EEZ. The concept of EEZs was formed in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982.

## **Major Countries and Organisations Involved**

### **Arctic States**

The Arctic States are a group of 8 member states: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. All of these nations have an upper hand in regards to the new shipping routes as they are relatively close to them. They all also have a similar aim which is to maintain peace in the region. In addition, a few of the states have submitted their requests to expand their EEZs. In addition several of these nations such as Canada and Denmark have been involved in conflict and are working on their military.

### **UNCLOS**

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides a legal framework for maritime activities in the Arctic, promoting stability through guidelines on territorial claims, dispute resolution, and freedom of navigation. While UNCLOS lacks explicit provisions on demilitarization, it indirectly supports peace by encouraging cooperation and legal clarity, reducing the need for military presence. Environmental protection measures within UNCLOS further mitigate non-military threats that could lead to militarization. Despite these contributions, compliance challenges and the absence of direct military regulations limit its effectiveness in fully demilitarizing the Arctic .

### **China**

Since 1999, China has conducted many expeditions in the Arctic. Currently, the nation does not have any territorial claims in the Arctic, however, considering that they are one of the world's economic giants, the nation is an important stakeholder in regards to the shipping routes. The formation of new and improved shipping routes has given China the opportunity

to increase their global infrastructure projects. The nations are tirelessly and actively trying to expand its power in the Arctic region and are increasing investments in some of Antarctica's key areas including Iceland and Greenland. In fact, they have now claimed themselves as a 'near-Arctic state'.

## Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
April 29th, 1958	A United Nations conference approves of the Convention on the Continental Shelf. This treaty grants sovereignty over continental shelf resources up to a depth at which the extraction of natural resources is technically feasible. All Arctic states except for Iceland have ratified the convention.
December 10 <sup>th</sup> , 1982	The UN completes its development of the Convention on the Law of the Sea. This treaty grants coastal states 200 nautical miles of EEZs. The convention was implemented in the year 1994 and all nations have accepted it except for the USA.
July 28th 1984	A Danish flag is raised on a small island that lies on both sides of the border between Canada and Denmark in 1973, named Hans island. This incident ignited conflict in regards to the national sovereignty of the island which until August 2019, had been unresolved.
December 10th,1991	Russia claims over 1.2 million square kilometres of land.
November 1992	Russian President Boris Yeltsin awards a subsidiary of oil giant Gazprom the right to develop Prirazlomnoye, an offshore oil field south of Novaya Zemlya, an Arctic archipelago. The field is thought to contain some 610 million barrels of oil, but numerous delays and technical setbacks plague the project. Finally, in 2013, Gazprom became the first company to pump crude from beneath Arctic waters.

- September 19th 1996 The Arctic Council is formed. This is an 'intergovernmental forum' which is promoting cooperation between all 8 Arctic states. All 8 states are part of the council.
- July 13th 2005 Canada replaced the Danish flag on Hans island with the Canadian one. This ignites more tension between the two nations.
- August 7-17, 2007 The Canadian army holds its first military exercises in the Arctic. These included: naval and army training as well as training regarding the response to oil spills or drug busts.
- May 2008 American scientists find out that there are approximately 90 billion barrels of undiscovered crude oil in the Arctic region, which is about 14% of the global amount. This does not include the gas resources
- December 31st 2012 An oil drilling unit goes adrift in Ocean Bay Alaska. Fortunately, no hazardous substances were released into the environment or waters but this event showed the great dangers that can arise due to the slow response to the workers of the catastrophe.
- May 15th 2013 China starts shifting its attention towards the region. The nation does not have any territory in the area but is an economic giant, the trade routes have been watched closely by China. In addition, they have sent an icebreaker ship through the Northern Sea Route.
- December 10, 2013 The president of Russia Vladimir Putin informs the members of his Defense Ministry Board to keep a close eye; there is development of infrastructure and armed forces in the Arctic. He has stated that he needs a high level of protection for the Arctic's security due to the changes happening.

April 20th 2016

China announces plans to send ships through the Northwest Passage, which connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean via the Canadian Arctic archipelago. This causes conflict with Canada, who claims sovereignty over the route.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

1. UNCLOS: Exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and territorial seas are included in the legal framework for marine operations provided by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Arctic governments assert their claims to enlarged continental shelves under UNCLOS.
2. Arctic Council: It was formed in 1996 and comprises six indigenous organisations in addition to the eight Arctic states. emphasises protecting the environment and sustainable development. Military security is not a topic directly addressed by the Arctic Council.
3. The Ilulissat Declaration (2008): signed by the United States, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and other five coastal Arctic states. reasserts the commitment to using international law and peaceful means to settle issues.
4. Polar Code: The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has created a global code of safety for ships that operate in polar waters. focusses more on environmental and safety laws than on military matters.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The Comprehensive Arctic Treaty attempts to create a comparable all-encompassing treaty for the Arctic have been unsuccessful, in contrast to the Antarctic, which is governed by the Antarctic Treaty System, which forbids military operations. Reaching an agreement is challenging due to the geopolitical interests of Arctic nations and their claims to sovereignty.

Demilitarisation Proposals: There have been a number of unsuccessful attempts to demilitarise the Arctic. Demilitarisation attempts are complicated by the region's geopolitical significance, particularly for Russia and the United States.



## Possible Solutions

1. **Strengthening Current Frameworks:** Expand the Arctic Council's role in handling security-related matters, maybe by establishing a new working group or forum to address military issues inside the Council. Promote greater adherence to UNCLOS and make advantage of its dispute resolution procedures.
2. **Self-Assurance-Inducing Activities:** Sign agreements pertaining to military transparency, such as announcing military drills in advance and setting up hotlines for communication amongst Arctic governments. Demilitarised zones should be established in very delicate places.
3. **Cooperation on the environment:** This can help to ease military tensions by providing a common foundation for cooperation on environmental protection. Encourage cooperative research and rescue efforts to foster trust among Arctic countries.
4. **Economic Cooperation:** To generate interdependencies that lessen the possibility of conflict, construct shared economic projects, such as collaborative partnerships in resource exploitation and infrastructure development. Increase financial rewards for amicable collaboration.
5. **Diplomatic and Legal Initiatives:** Seek new international accords with the express purpose of halting militarisation; these should be modelled after the Antarctic Treaty but customised for the particular circumstances of the Arctic. To mediate and settle disagreements, use diplomatic channels and international organisations like the UN.

## Bibliography

*Arctic Council - Arctic States*. [Arctic-council.org/en/about/states/](https://arctic-council.org/en/about/states/).

Bryce, Emma. "Who Owns the Arctic?" *LiveScience*, Purch, 13 Oct. 2019, [www.livescience.com/who-owns-the-Arctic.html](https://www.livescience.com/who-owns-the-Arctic.html).

"CLCS - HOME PAGE." *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/clcs\\_home.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/clcs_home.htm).

"Climate Change For Indigenous Peoples." *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html).

"Effects of Oil Spills in Arctic Waters." *ARCTIS*, [www.arctis-search.com/Effects of Oil Spills in Arctic Waters#:~:text=Drilling activity causes long-term,cause severe damage locally1 .&text=Oil spills in ice are,oil spills in open waters](https://www.arctis-search.com/Effects%20of%20Oil%20Spills%20in%20Arctic%20Waters#:~:text=Drilling%20activity%20causes%20long-term,cause%20severe%20damage%20locally1.&text=Oil%20spills%20in%20ice%20are,oil%20spills%20in%20open%20waters).

"How Would Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling in the Arctic Impact Wildlife?" *WWF*, World Wildlife Fund, [www.worldwildlife.org/stories/how-would-offshore-oil-and-gas-drilling-in-the-Arctic-impact-wildlife](https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/how-would-offshore-oil-and-gas-drilling-in-the-Arctic-impact-wildlife)

Koh, Swee Lean Collin. "China's Strategic Interest in the Arctic Goes beyond Economics." *Defense News*, Defense News, 11 May 2020, [www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/05/11/chinas-strategic-interest-in-the-Arctic-goes-beyond-economics/](https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/05/11/chinas-strategic-interest-in-the-Arctic-goes-beyond-economics/).

McCormick, Ty. "Arctic Sovereignty: A Short History." *Foreign Policy*, 7 May 2014, [foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/07/Arctic-sovereignty-a-short-history/](https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/07/Arctic-sovereignty-a-short-history/).

“Overview - Convention & Related Agreements.” *United Nations*, United Nations,  
[www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_overview\\_convention.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm).

“See Which Nations Are Claiming Parts of the Melting Arctic.” *National Geographic*, 15 Aug. 2019,  
[www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/2019/08/map-shows-eight-nations-projecting-power-over-Arctic-assets-feature/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/2019/08/map-shows-eight-nations-projecting-power-over-Arctic-assets-feature/)

User, Super. “International Agreements.” *Arctic Portal*,  
[Arcticportal.org/Arctic-governance/international-agreements](http://Arcticportal.org/Arctic-governance/international-agreements).

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Lomonosov-Ridge>

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/05/europe/russia-arctic-nato-military-intl-cmd/index.html>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30481309>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-denmark-defence-arctic-idUSKBN2AB1VR>