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Forum: Executive Board 1

Issue: The question of the Arctic Seafloor

Student Officer: Selim Tara

Position: President Chair

Introduction

The Arctic has always been a question of concern for the countries bordering it as nearly all of them has claimed it as their territory in the past. Although it is mostly covered with ice, it is definitely an important destination and route for explorers and trade ships. The territorial claims regarding the Arctic Sea are also known as “fight over ice” due to the usual climate over there. Recently, this fight has turned to become a fight over oil and water; two very important liquids which are definitely vital for humanity and the future of our planet. Besides, the current and devastating changes in climate caused by global warming have also changed the stake of the renowned battle. Also, because of global warming, there has been another concern about the arctic sea: the seafloor itself. Like many other oceans or seas being polluted recently, the Arctic sea is currently facing huge amounts of litter polluting the seafloor. So much that one part of the ocean contains 20 times more litter than a decade ago, which is quite serious. With this being said, it may be accurate to state that all those countries claiming territory in the Arctic Sea and the rest of UN members are aiming to find a solution for these battles over dispute and seafloor pollution.

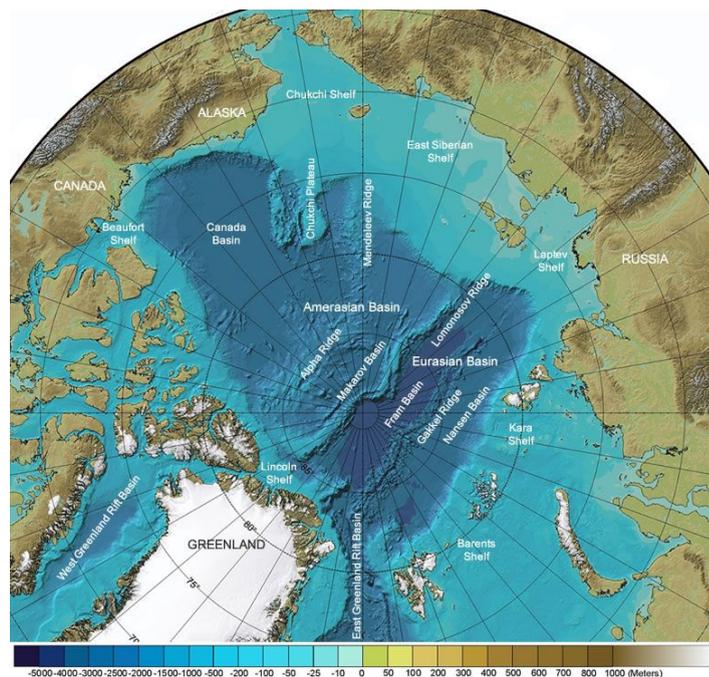


Image 1: A

map of the Arctic Seafloor



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Definition of Key Terms

Dispute: A disagreement or argument

The Northwest Passage: The sea route to the Pacific Ocean from the Atlantic Ocean through the Arctic Ocean

Seafloor: The bottom of a sea or ocean

UNCLOS: The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Ratify: Sign or give formal consent to an official treaty.

Background Information

Countries bordering the Arctic Sea have fought to claim territory over this area for almost 100 years. Before nations started claiming territories over this area, it was known as The Northwest Passage, a route that was defined as “mythic” since many European explorers had died here. Nevertheless, the first territorial claim came from Canada in 1925 as they seized to control a vast part of the area. Not much long after, in 1937, the Soviet Union laid down its own claim of territory over the Arctic Sea and the region gained importance throughout World War II and the Cold War. Countries signified the region as a strategic point during both wars since it provided access to and providence over air routes. It was also beneficial to control land in this region since it could serve as a base for submarine launched nuclear weapons. Other bordering countries such as Denmark, the U.S, Iceland and Norway later laid their claims over the territory soon after. Right now, Russia holds the largest land in total, followed by Canada. There is still a territory that is being oftenly disputed by Russia and Norway, as they continue to battle over it.

It is also said that currently, nearly a quarter of the world’s most important and left natural resources such as oil and gas lies below the Arctic Sea and its bordering region. Since nowadays these resources are becoming more important than ever, the issue also encourages countries to claim land in these territories which are rich in these resources.

Timeline of Major Events

1903	Canada establishes the North-West Mounted
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	Police Detachment on Herschel Island which is off the North Coast of Canada
1907	Canadian Senator Pascal Poirier urges the senate to declare possession of the lands and islands off the Canadian Coast in the North Pole
1914-1915	The Northern Sea Route is passed and traversed for the first time by Russian explorers
1925	Canada passes a law and claims its first territory over the Arctic Sea
1937	The Soviet Union claims its first territory in the region
28 September 1945	U.S President Harry S. Truman proclaims that the U.S has the right to sought natural resources of the subsoil nd seashelf of the area
22 December 1971	U.S President Richard Nixon announces the decision of the U.S administration to support the environmental sources in the Arctic Sea region and preserve it from any other interests
1982	The UN signs the Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) after long lasting negotiations. The U.S refuses to be a part of the treaty
1984	After Canadian troops plant a Canadian flag on Hans Island at the Arctic Sea and leave a bottle of whiskey, Danish troops officially show up a week later and replace the Canadian flag with also leaving a bottle of brandy
11 January 1988	The U.S and Canada establish an agreement on Arctic Cooperation. The agreement states the reaffirmation of Canada's position that the Northwest Passage lays within its internal waters
16 November 1994	The UNCLOS finally enters into force one year after its sixtieth signature
August 2007	Russian troops descend below the Arctic Sea by submarines and plant a Russian flag on the ocean floor. This action does not please other countries involved as they express their



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	concerns
December 2014	Denmark presents the UN with its own claim over the Arctic Sea region. They take control of an area about 900,000 square kilometres beyond the coast of Greenland



Image 2: The Arctic

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Canada: Canada is the first country to claim territory over the Arctic Sea region. They have the second largest area, following Russia. Throughout the years, they have aimed to expand their northern borders more and more by taking control of more land every year. They are also the main opponent of Russia in regards to claiming land. They have expressed their concern openly after Russia's plantation of a flag under the ocean. They ratified the UNCLOS in 2003.

Russia: Currently, Russia holds the largest territory over the Arctic Sea. They have been pointed out after their threatening actions to claim more land throughout the years. Since the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Russians have paid much interest in this region due to military and economical purposes. Exploration ships, researches and military interventions have been part of Russia's interest for this area. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly established Russian Federation reclaimed its territories off the north coast of the country. Recently, there has been a quarrel between Russia and other claiming countries due to the incident which Russia has planted a flag on the seafloor. Plus, in the past few years, Russia delivered a submission to the CLCS (Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf) stating that they had the right to claim nearly one half of the Arctic Ocean, however; the commission recommended further research on the topic. The Russian Federation finally ratified the UNCLOS in 1997.



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Denmark: Denmark is one of the countries who claims to obtain part of the Arctic Sea region. Greenland has a vast coastline bordering the Arctic Sea and that is why the Kingdom of Denmark is also involved in this situation. Denmark signed its first agreement on the issue with Canada in 1973. The purpose of this agreement was to delimitate the continental shelf between Greenland and Canada. This agreement entered into force a year later it was signed however the agreement left a final question on everyone's minds: the situation of the Hans Island. This was a question regarding sovereignty over the island, since it was a small and uninhabited place. The question did not bother both countries until 1984 when Canadian and Danish troops started planting their own flags and removing the others' oftenly. Luckily, the situation did not cause any further fight or quarrel.

The U.S: Even though the U.S is not involved as much as Canada or Russia in this situation due to land, it still has interests on the economic natural resources of the area. While it has been known that the region now hosts a large oil resource, the U.S has especially emphasised economic matters rather than military purposes for this area. The Nixon administration has supported environmental sources of the are and later on, under the Bush administration nearly 80 million acres of water in the sea have been opened to energy development. It is recently known that the U.S government still invests a lot in this region as there are also numerous oil vessels and tankers crossing through the area currently.

Norway: Just like other countries bordering the region, Norway has also showed specific interest for territories surrounding the country in the Arctic. Norway has ratified the UNCLOS in 1996 and since then the government has planned to take further actions on the situation. While the Norwegian government has submitted claims to the CLCS, it has also released a programme called the "High North Strategy" in 2006. The programme suggests that the Arctic is now Norway's main concern for foreign policy for the upcoming years. Initially, they too seek to secure economic resources and gain power in the region for the following years.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The U.S Government, Proclamation 2667: Policy of the U.S with Respect to the Natural Resources of the Subsoil and Sea Bed of the Continental Shelf, 1945



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This agreement by the U.S Government was proclaimed under the administration of president Harry S. Truman. It aimed to give an end to quarrels regarding environmental resources of the region. The proclamation sought to the protection and utilization of the natural resources in the Arctic Sea region by the U.S. Besides, it assured that the U.S has exclusive rights of jurisdiction over the designated area.

The U.S Government, National Security Decision Memorandum 144, 1971

This memorandum signed under the Nixon administration specifies and reviews the U.S's policy about the Arctic region. According to the memorandum, the government has decided to support the development of the Arctic economically. Likewise, the memorandum encourages international cooperation between the countries in the Arctic and provides security for the region.

UN General Assembly, The Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982

This treaty signed by the UN General Assembly in 1982 states the degrees and matters of a country claiming territory and control over waters extending its shores. In other words, it concerned all those countries bordering the Arctic Sea. The U.S never signed the treaty. According to the treaty, member states only have the right to utilise natural resources in waters within 200 miles of their coastlines. In the past few years, countries such as Canada, Russia, Denmark etc. have ratified the treaty.

Possible Solutions

Even though they are not always dependable yet limited, there are some possible solutions to solve this issue in unity. These possible solutions are:

- Countries should unite together and negotiate on terms about the territorial disputes in the Arctic Sea. These negotiations should specifically emphasize on the UNCLOS, signed by the member states of the UN.
- Countries could establish an international organization that will be specifically about this issue. With this newly established organization, bordering and claiming countries could provide financial support to the region for further economic purposes in the future such as environmental resources.
- The Arctic sea region could be proclaimed as an international area belonging to no specific country with an agreement signed by member states of the UN.



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Useful Links For Further Research

[https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/EPRS/BRI\(2017\)595870_EN.pdf](https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/EPRS/BRI(2017)595870_EN.pdf)

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