



# Political Committee

BCNMUN 2020

---

The Digital Revolution: Taking Action to Promote a Better World  
Through Technology

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Definition of Key Terms	4
Background Information	5
Major Countries and Organizations Involved	7
Timeline of Events	10
Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions	12
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	13
Possible Solutions	13
Bibliography	14

**Topic:** Addressing territorial disputes in the Arctic.

**Chair:** Advay Johary

**Position:** Chair

---

## Introduction

As global temperatures rise all over the world, the well known ice caps of our planet located on the southern and northern poles are melting at dramatic rates. As these ice caps melt it allows countries to gain access to were up to 30% of the world's natural gas reserves lay. While more and more territory is becoming available member states see the arctic as a place with geopolitical and economic importance, hence highlighting the disputes to claim this rich territory. Furthermore as more of the ice melts and sea waters are clear of obstacles, it opens the arctic as a zone for industrial fishing and transportation of huge amounts of goods via ships. This would make the travel of ships and goods faster than ever contributing to our ever growing network and population. In the 20th and 21st century this space became apparent to countries as a way to grow economically and gain access to such resources. In 1982, the United Nations created the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea creating exclusive economic zones and addressed certain rights that each state has. But although this convention can clearly mark the boundaries of certain countries, member states can claim more land if they can prove the continental shelf they are on exceeds the economical zone. The Arctic, due to it's harsh conditions, has still not been mapped yet and therefore there is a lot of territory that cannot be claimed yet by any country. Likewise this can create further tensions since these continental shelves can overlap each other in the Arctic. On account of the unknowing territorial boundaries countries like Russia have been claiming large amounts of territory and advancing further into the Arctic. Over the last 50 years about 21 more military bases have been established and the Russian Federation is currently in the process of rebuilding 9 other bases. Since no news is found about the continental shelves states have been

trying to get more and more involved with the Arctic to possess the land that is slowly becoming available, due to the extreme melting of the ice sheets. Member states have also been looking to have as much influence as they can onto the arctic territories, like Russia has done to Barentsburg. The topic at hand holds great importance to the growth and future of each member state as it has to deal with how member states can distribute and acquire new resources becoming available in the near future.

## **Definition of Key Terms.**

### **EEZ–Exclusive Economic Zone**

EEZ's are certain boundaries or borders created by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea stating that each state has full access for any resource and land 200 nautical miles off their shore. Each state is also responsible to manage and preserve these resources.

### **Territorial Claims**

As more of the ocean is becoming available to Arctic countries, each state is required to make claims to territory to the Commissions on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). The purpose of this is to apply and facilitate the UNCLS, a group entirely made up of UN selected scientists. Since geologists have not properly mapped the shelves and ocean floor in the Arctic, countries are sending scientists to prove where their own continental shelf truly ends so they can claim the territory as theirs. So far several territorial claims have been made on which parts of the arctic belong to whom, many of these claims overlap or contradict the ones of other member states. Although several countries have made several claims none of them have been able to pass the CLCS.

### **Military Exercises**

Most military exercises consist of the employment of military personnel and resources with the purpose of training for military operations. Generally they are used to test out new strategies and/or technologies without any actual combat.

## Background Information

### Military Presence in the Arctic

As most claims have not been passed through the committee each nation is working on “flexing”, asserting dominance and influence on the Arctic territory. Russia has emphasized its status by reopening about 50 previously closed military bases, 20 border outposts and 10 new airfields around the Arctic area. As the Northern Sea Route or NRS opens up and is more accessible, more member states located nearby worry about the safety from attacks from foreign forces and want to influence the land for economic growth. It's being more apparent as countries test and create weapons beforehand to demonstrate influence over certain regions. Russia's Poseidon 2M39 Torpedo, an unmanned nuclear based torpedo that can go undetected through US naval defenses, is a clear example of the developments countries are making to show power in the area. Several military exercises have been hosted by different nations, such as the USA, Denmark, Russia, Norway who are testing new nuclear powered submarines and other technology that can achieve its own goals even with the harsh arctic conditions. Hosting the biggest military exercises in the Arctic since the cold war, countries like Norway are hosting international military exercises to assure national security and a strong military in the arctic.

Additionally as the cold war progressed the threat of the Soviets on the Northern America mainland became an issue. As technology developed submarines and new technologies could better navigate undetected onto foreign territory. As the United States government realized attacks from the Arctic could be a major issue they needed to construct and create a new line of defense to repel any attack on the country. Since any attack on the United States would have to travel through Canadian Airspace the two member states collaborated to create a line of 63 radar stations armed and equipped with different military technologies. All these stations were built by the United States but since they are located in Canadian territory they needed approval from the Canadian government. The maintenance of these stations is handled by the Canadian government since they have the easiest access to the stations and these clean-ups of the radar stations can cost over 320 million dollars.

As each day passes the Arctic is getting more and more accessible exposing countries to military threats from the Arctic, but at the same time increasing investment opportunities, especially for fossil fuels, and other natural gasses. Since the importance of the Arctic is growing, countries are

looking to hold as much influence to nearby regions or in the Arctic itself so they can control areas of the Arctic.. Each country wants to control the most territory they can for the huge economic advantageous and geopolitical advantages they could have. But since no official news of coastal shelves have been made the member states are building up military defenses and training soldiers for potential disputes. As the Arctic holds masses of natural resources the importance of control over the area increases since all nations want to gain control of these resources.

## The Northwest Passage and Lomonosov Ridge Dispute

The Northwest Passage is a sea route connecting the Atlantic ocean with the Pacific. The passage goes between Canada and Greenland creating a way that would cut distance and time for ships speeding up transportation between different states. As the Arctic ice thins out it becomes more accessible than ever opening up major investment and trade opportunities which is what adds so much value to this region. From the Canadian point of view, they argue this passage is strictly internal waters and claim that it is proved by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Based on article 7 and 8 the Canadian government claims it as internal waters therefore allowing them to have full control over the laws of this passage and what happens there. The Canadian government would be able to use this passage as a source of income and new investment opportunities. Researchers estimate about 5-6 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in the territory. Additionally the Canadian government sees this territory with the potential to add fishing activities to boost their fishing industry and grow it to provide for their economy. Furthermore, the Canadian government has historical claims over the islands and land surrounding the Northwest Passage therefore making it internal waters. Given the Inuits have inhabited the land for more than 4,000 years the Canadian government believes to have historical claims over the passage and allows Canada to exercise full sovereignty over the region. Likewise the Canadian government believes when they hold sovereignty they can take care of these waters controlling ocean life and preserving it. Opening it up and making it international waters can lead to the destruction of wildlife and their habitat and lead to oil spills. Most countries that border the North Pole use this argument since it helps them take over the areas they have claimed and allows them to control any trade going through the talked about territory.

Similarly located next to the North Pole is the Lomonosov Ridge, an underwater ridge that is desired by almost every Arctic country since claiming this underwater ridge would give significant

advantage to any country who does so. The Lomonosov Ridge is a major submarine ridge located in the Arctic ocean and spans over 1,800 kilometers across the ocean. Knowing the importance of this terrain in an economic and political manner several countries have claimed these disputed territories to be an extension of their own continental shelf giving them unfettered access to all the land between their shores and the Ridge itself. So far Canada, Russia and Denmark have laid out their claims throughout the last twenty years to the CLSC, but so far none of the countries have been able to provide sufficient evidence to recognize it as their territory. The region is known to have huge amounts of untapped natural resources that countries look forward to exploiting. All of the countries since then have been doing activities to show dominance or control in this area. Like Russia's well known military exercises and rapidly increasing arctic technologies have been scaring the western countries from attacks. Whereas Denmark located much further away than Russia or Canada to the Lomonosov Ridge is using Greenland as an extension of their country and claiming any small uninhabited island and trying to find their continental shelf. Likewise the Canadian government is using their Inuit population as a way to historically claim strategic islands located close to the ridge like the Ellesmere island. Furthermore, countries like China and the United States who have no way to claim territory located next to the North pole argue that the ridge is located in an oceanic shelf therefore making this valuable territory international waters. When it is international waters it will allow the movement of ships opening trade routes for countries making it much more efficient.

In 2007 Alaska contributed almost 20% of oil to the United States. Located at the end of the Northwest Passage researchers and member states can already feel the potential that the Arctic holds in the future of investment opportunities, trade, oil/gas reserves and fishing, which are the main motives that push countries to invest in new technologies to improve navigation and warfare in the Arctic

## **Major Countries and Organisations Involved**

### **Russian Federation**

As a member of the Arctic council and bordering the heavily disputed arctic territory the Russian federation has been very active in participating in discussions regarding the Arctic territorial

disputes. Russia was the first state to submit, under article 76 of the UNCLOS to the CLCS, to claim more than half of the Arctic region in 2001. Since Russia has had a long practice of development and research in the Arctic since early Soviet times they are one of the most developed states regarding research and development of new technologies for this icy region. The main interest for the Russian Federation is to prove that the Lomonosov and the Mendeleev ridge are an extension of their continental shelf to get full access and rights to all the land in between. The CLCS has neither rejected nor accepted any claims but has asked for further stronger evidence. With unconcluded answers countries like Russia have been developing military technologies and training their soldiers for the harsh conditions to already hold influence in the Arctic.

## United States of America

Another member of the Arctic council with Alaska bordering the Arctic, the United States has always been included in the discussion for the Arctic. The region's resources are immense but the region not only holds value to its resources but also the trade routes that would be more accessible as the ice melts. The United States is mostly interested in the Northwest Passage creating a dispute between Canada and the United States. As Canada claims full sovereignty the US doesn't counter the claim instead argues the Northwest Passage is international water therefore should be open for international navigation. Since the passage would cut trade time by weeks, the US is looking for a way to open the passage to the world and invest in trading opportunities. The European Union completely supports the United States since European countries could use the passage for more efficient trading while on the other hand, the Russian Federation completely supports Canada's claim. Countries involved in the Arctic dispute don't only want to get as much territory but also want to limit their competitors' territory like Russia taking Canada's side in the conflict as it would limit the US and EU's access into the area.

## Canada

Canada being another country geographically positioned to border the other side of the Arctic has made several claims and actions to ensure influence and territory in the Area. The Canadian government has already made claims to the CLCS of the Lomonosov ridge and is arguing under the UNCLOS that the Northwest passage and the Hans islands are places where they should have full sovereignty. Claiming the Lomonosov ridge would obviously give a huge advantage to

Canada but the Hans island and Northwest passage hold a lot of potential and investment opportunities. The Northwest Passage is claimed to be Canadian territory and they want full unfettered access to the area to claim all resources and laws in the area. Another island that holds trading opportunities is the Hans island due to its geographic position it is known to be sitting above an oil reserve making it valuable. Additionally it's located within the Kennedy channel which may become an important shipping route. The Canadians argue using historical claims that the British were the ones to discover the island and that the Inuits have had the territory for centuries but other research says otherwise. The island is heavily disputed by the Danish.

## Denmark

The Danes have been well involved in the discussion over the territories in the Arctic but have been increasingly interested in the Hans Island and Lomonosov Ridge. The Danes have claimed Hans Island due to "effective population" by making several visits to the Island and planting their flag on it. Although the island is disputed by Canada the Inuits have never historically hunted the area unlike the native populations of Greenland who have used this area to hunt and monitor ice floes. Denmark also argues that under the UNCLOS it has the right to all the territory to the Lomonosov ridge giving the country an extension of 370 km from it's shoreline. This would legally entitle Denmark to have complete access to all resources located within those 370 kilometers. They claim it's an extension of the landmass of Greenland and if it passes the Danes would also have complete control over the North Pole.

## Norway

The Norwegian government has always had a neutral sort of stance with this topic and is calling for collaboration. The Norwegian government has submitted claims to the CLCS claiming that they're continental shelf extends 41 kilometers outside the shoreline. Norway has always had a presence and influence in the Arctic since they were a few of the first nations to explore the deserted region. The Norwegian government demands not a new set of laws for the arctic but believes a better application of the existing international laws like the ones in the UNCLOS and cooperation could help each country reach their goals and demands. Norway has always been looking for a secure and stable way to explore the Arctic and has called out for international cooperation to avoid the escalation of any situation.

## China

The Chinese government's interest in the Arctic area arose in the 1990's where several scientific expeditions and different types of ships were taken and tested in the Arctic. As years went by the Chinese attention in the Arctic grew majorly with funding in new ice-breaker ships and military development. The Chinese stance on the issue favors the idea of opening up the Arctic for all member states to use as trade routes. This would majorly benefit China if routes through the Arctic are stated as international waters and not belong to one or two member states. But as of 2013 Chinese-Russian relations have been growing in talks about creating and providing sufficient resources and tools to create a new trade route and work together to extract and sell the natural gas reserves. If the claims of the Russian Federation pass it would boost the Chinese and Russian economies since they plan on creating and supplying natural gas and other resources together. But even if Russia's claims don't pass the CLCS the same places would open up as international water allowing the Chinese government to still benefit via the new trade route. The basis of the Chinese involvement was made clear in 2011 when the Chinese government declared their interests under four main areas: participation in the development of Arctic shipping routes; the exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and other non-living resources; conservation and utilisation of fisheries and other living resources; and developing tourism resources. Admiral Yin Zhou of the People's Liberation Army Navy stated, "the North Pole and its surrounding area do not belong to any state but the commonwealth of the world people," clearly expressing China's intentions and interests in the Arctic

## Timeline of Events

### Date

June, 1, 1925

### Description of event

Based on the sector principle, Canada was the first country to extend its maritime boundaries all the way to the North Pole. To make this happen the Canadian government issued an amendment to the North-Western Territories Act (NWT). The act called for the formation of a government that enforces all territorial ordinances.

April 15, 1926	The USSR claims all land, islands and resources from its shores to the North Pole. Claiming about 2 million km <sup>2</sup> of land this was the reaction of the USSR after Canada's claims
July 19, 1926	The Canadian government established the Arctic Island Game Preserve. The preserve was originally created to address population problems of musk-ox for the Inuit population. This was also used for political reasons, since Canada used this as a way to assert dominance and sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago.
September 28, 1945	President Truman establishes proclamation 2667 claiming the right to utilize and preserve the sea bed of their continental shelf that goes beyond the 3-mile limit off of the United States shores.
July 28, 1986	The Danish flag rises on Hans Island located in between mainland Canada and Denmark. This inhabited island is claimed by both countries that it lies in their own continental shelves.
16 November, 1994	The UN Conventions of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) comes into force as it receives its sixtieth signature. This convention defines the world maritime boundaries and establishes a guideline for control over business, the environment, and natural resources. It established the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) which is highly pertinent to the Arctic since the conditions complicate any research of the land.
20 December, 2001	The Russian Federation claims the Lomonosov Ridge located in the middle of the Arctic. Declaring that their continental shelf extends till the ridge, if this passed the CLCS it would give Russia access to half of the Arctic region including the North Pole.
2 August, 2007	Russia plants a titanium based flag at the bottom of the Arctic ocean at the North Pole. The Russian Federation used this action as a way to claim sovereignty.

2013

Canada claims all territory and the Lomonosov ridge as the extension of their continental shelf. Due to the estimated resources available it's a highly economical and profitable area for any country. If the CLCS passes any of the claims the country would have unfettered access to all resources and fish available in the area.

December 16, 2014

Denmark joins the competition to claim the Lomonosov Ridge and declares it as their continental shelf. The conditions make it very hard for scientists to get enough data to claim the land as theirs. Several different types of evidence and data are required. Denmark argues that the continental shelf of Greenland extends into the Ridge therefore claiming it as theirs. Other countries like the United States and Republic of China claim the Lomonosov ridge to be an oceanic ridge therefore making it international waters and accessible for trade for everyone.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

### December 10, 1982 - United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

The international agreement put into effect in 1994 has been used as a legal guideline for all marine and maritime activities. Since the treaty is concerning maritime borders and the conservation and usage of ocean resources, these laws are always heavily debated and are of utmost importance for certain issues. Having huge significance in certain territorial disputes like the one in the Arctic and South China Sea, countries are basing and building arguments based on certain statements mentioned in the UNCLOS. The UNCLOS has also created several committees or commissions such as the CLCS mentioned in Article 76 section 8 of the UNCLOS. These committees are made to facilitate the implementation of the UNCLOS and is where most of the debate occurs.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As territorial claims increase in the Arctic region countries look to hold influence over the Arctic so that the territory can eventually become theirs. They do this by sending in ships and creating oil rigs to show their influence and role in the Arctic. Additionally, while the debates are happening about each country's claims, the countries with oil rigs present are allowed to extract the oil and use it in their own country. This is because the territories aren't officially recognized as international waters or a part of any country. This gave reason for countries to create oil rigs and push into the ice sheets of the arctic causing the destruction of kilometers of habitat and the pollution by waste products and emitted toxins. Furthermore, several complicated problems, like oil spills, could compromise the health of the Arctic ocean and its animals. As this is the current case in the fight for the Arctic territory the NRDC has been vocally trying to change this scenario and change each countries view on using the Arctic for exploitation. In 2016 itself they had a major effect on the USA while Barack Obama was the president. He permanently ended oil and gas leasing and drilling in parts of the Arctic ocean to try and improve the environmental situation, but as soon his term ended Donald Trump pushed and restarted the leasing of Arctic territories for oil rigs.

## Possible Solutions

Leaving the Arctic as International Waters could be a possible solution. Although very hard to enforce, it's the option that would give all countries equal access to navigate the Arctic and use it for trade. The major flaw in this alternative is that tons of natural resources and food like fish are sitting there and making it part of international waters would not make it accessible to any country at all. While all the countries would benefit from unrestricted trade in the area they would lose out in the available resources. This solution would put to waste a huge amount of the world's natural resources since most offshore rigs (rigs located in international waters) are rarely used and can operate under minimal standards and frequent maritime inspections.

The creation of an Arctic treaty could be the most efficient way to provide a more optimal solution rather than countries claiming vast masses of lands on a regular basis. A treaty inspired by the Antarctic treaty could solve the territorial and resource competition and other problems unique to the Arctic region.

## Bibliography

"Arctic Military Bases." *Google My Maps*, Google,

[www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1hPIgAKoZoUMaWqAq-b8qmwjGHbmxdjn6&ll=67.37991367413474%2C82.81750596572464&z=3](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1hPIgAKoZoUMaWqAq-b8qmwjGHbmxdjn6&ll=67.37991367413474%2C82.81750596572464&z=3).

*An Arctic Treaty: A Solution to the International Dispute ...*

[digitalcommons.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1100&context=oclj](https://digitalcommons.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1100&context=oclj).

"Chapter 8: The Arctic & the LOSC." *Law of the Sea*, [sites.tufts.edu/lawofthesea/chapter-eight/](https://sites.tufts.edu/lawofthesea/chapter-eight/).

Cordell, Jake. "Arctic Oil Spill: Nornickel FAILURES, TANK Flaws Caused Catastrophe – Report." *The*

*Moscow Times*, The Moscow Times, 31 Aug. 2021,

[www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/11/26/arctic-oil-spill-nornickel-failures-tank-flaws-caused-catastrophe-report-a72156](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/11/26/arctic-oil-spill-nornickel-failures-tank-flaws-caused-catastrophe-report-a72156).

Evans, Jen, and Jen Evans. "The History and Future of Arctic STATE Conflict: The ARCTIC INSTITUTE

CONFLICT SERIES." *The Arctic Institute*, 29 June 2021,

[www.thearcticinstitute.org/the-history-and-future-of-arctic-state-conflict-the-arctic-institute-conflict-series/](https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/the-history-and-future-of-arctic-state-conflict-the-arctic-institute-conflict-series/).

"Evolution of Arctic Territorial Claims and Agreements: A Timeline (1903-PRESENT) • Stimson Center."

*Stimson Center*, 2 Feb. 2020,

[www.stimson.org/2013/evolution-arctic-territorial-claims-and-agreements-timeline-1903-present/](https://www.stimson.org/2013/evolution-arctic-territorial-claims-and-agreements-timeline-1903-present/).

MilcomVids. "14: Is the Us Losing the Fight for Arctic Dominance?" *YouTube*, YouTube, 4 Jan. 2021,

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAN2LTDuB2g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAN2LTDuB2g).

"Norway to Host Biggest Exercise Inside Arctic Circle since Cold War." *The Independent Barents*

*Observer*,

thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/04/norway-host-biggest-exercise-inside-arctic-circle-cold-war.

The Organization for World Peace. "Arctic Circle Territorial Conflicts." *The Organization for World Peace*, 24 May 2021, [theowp.org/crisis\\_index/arctic-circle-territorial-conflicts/](https://theowp.org/crisis_index/arctic-circle-territorial-conflicts/).

Person. "Canada's Sovereignty over the Northwest Passage." *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, Esri, 5 Jan. 2020, [storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f2e7934cab2148da8400af23021f0fa9](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f2e7934cab2148da8400af23021f0fa9).

Rfe/rl. "Russia Announces Arctic Military Drills in Further Sign of Increasing Presence." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Russia Announces Arctic Military Drills In Further Sign Of Increasing Presence, 1 June 2021, [www.rferl.org/a/russia-arctic-military-drills-northern-sea-route/31284092.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-arctic-military-drills-northern-sea-route/31284092.html).

voxdotcom. "It's Time to Draw Borders on the Arctic Ocean." *YouTube*, YouTube, 24 Oct. 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx\\_2SVm9Jgo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx_2SVm9Jgo).

Walsh, Nick Paton. "Satellite Images Show Huge Russian Military Buildup in the Arctic." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 5 Apr. 2021, [edition.cnn.com/2021/04/05/europe/russia-arctic-nato-military-intl-cmd/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/05/europe/russia-arctic-nato-military-intl-cmd/index.html).

"Who Owns the Arctic Ocean?" *YouTube*, YouTube, 18 Mar. 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pk9Z7xrRCRY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pk9Z7xrRCRY).