

## **CLEIMUN19**

“Collaboration in a Polarized World: Hope for the Future?”

A Research Report

COMMITTEE: Security Council

QUESTION OF: The Question of Potential Conflict in the Arctic Ocean.

AUTHOR: Natalie Surdy

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### **Introduction & Background**

Tension among the bordering countries of the arctic ocean, Russia, Canada, the U.S.A. (Alaska), Denmark (Greenland), and Norway, have existed since the beginnings of arctic exploration centuries ago. Territorial disputes between these countries have heightened since the cold war due to economic and militaristic factors. Economically, competition for natural resources, especially natural gas, and shipping routes have increased due to the effects of global warming. Furthermore, the arctic ocean and the arctic itself are strategic places for the placement of military bases.

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### **Why Global Warming Intensifies Potential Arctic Conflict**

With extreme weather changes becoming more and more commonplace due to global warming, stress on critical ecosystems are leading to direct and indirect social, economic, political, and

security effects. Long term, global climate change will change food production, inhabitable areas, and diseases as it causes crop failures, wildfires, energy blackouts, infrastructure breakdown, supply-chain breakdowns, migration, and infectious disease outbreaks, among others. Not only does this affect the 4 million people residing in the arctic circle but it gives their governments access to new possibilities in the arctic. With climate change comes change in shipping routes through the arctic, creating potential competition to secure access to new ones that may crop up. Additionally, natural resources within the arctic become more easily accessible as global warming changes landscapes. With the arctic holding an eighth of the world's oil reserves and a quarter of gas reserves, competition for access to these is increasing.

### What Territory In the Arctic Ocean Is Disputable?



With the expansion of resource-rich land due to climate change, territorial disputes have arisen within the arctic circle. According to The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), each country within the arctic circle has a 200-nautical-mile limit on what natural resources they can exploit from the arctic circle and a 12-nautical-mile limit on law enforcement. The limits leave a portion of land and sea unclaimed however. It is this area that is mainly disputed and has the most potential to cause conflict over. Russia, Denmark and Greenland have the most disagreements about this area due to the Lomonosov Ridge that connects them. Furthermore, recent arguments have surfaced over usage of the Northwest Passage and if it should be considered an internal Canadian route or an international one.

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### **Why Has the Cold War Escalated Potential Arctic Conflict?**

The arctic has been of high strategic military importance since the moment it was explored. Military activity in the area expanded with the start of the Cold War. The Iron Curtain created during the cold war crossed the arctic twice between the western hemisphere and the Soviet Union causing alarm concerning potential nuclear conflict which would have destroyed large areas of the Arctic. Therefore, nuclear non-proliferation treaties were established to keep the Arctic free of nuclear armament. Furthermore, a broad disarmament of both Russia and the U.S.A. was observed in the area. Recent tensions have re-increased military activity in the Arctic however, driving primarily Russia to invest heavily in the creation and maintenance of its military bases in the Arctic. Because of Russia's dominance in the area and the reluctance of

many other nations to increase their own military spending in the arctic, has lead to a large military disbalance in the area.

Although currently this is not seen as a direct threat to peace in the area, growing tensions surrounding territorial claims, shipping routes, and natural resources may erupt and give advantage to Russia.

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### **Past Efforts To Solve This Problem**

There are few instances of past efforts to remedy potential arctic circle conflict by the UN. One, The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) is a convention aimed at settling arctic disputes, defining Territorial Waters and the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). It is ratified by all countries within the arctic circle, except the U.S.A. Another effort, the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, defines the arctic as a Nuclear-weapon-free zone with quite successful results; No nuclear weaponry has been placed within the arctic, however, Russia has placed several nuclear submarine wreckages in their territorial Arctic waters. Lastly, the Arctic council was created as an intergovernmental forum with aims to promote cooperation and interaction between Arctic states to diplomatically deal with issues within the Arctic Circle. The permanent members of the Arctic Council are: the Russian Federation, Norway, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Denmark (with representation of Faroe Islands and Greenland), and the USA. The non-permanent members include: Poland, France, Germany, Spain, UK, the Netherlands, and multiple international organizations and non-governmental organizations. The Arctic council is considered relatively weak however as it has failed to bring constructive

resolutions and suffers from lack of support while fielding an increasing number of countries aspiring to gain more access to the Arctic region, such as China.

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### **Possible Solutions**

Possible conflict in the Arctic needs to be squashed before it has begun to take form to avoid unnecessary conflict. A new Arctic treaty may be a sound possibility. The committee should address the pressing topics of natural resource access, obtination, and distribution, military base regulation, access and ownership of land, and environmental security within the arctic circle. Definition of who can have access to these items and when is of importance. In a polarized world, collaboration and compromise between all nations is of the utmost eminence.

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