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Crisis of the Arctic

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Topic: Crisis of the Arctic

Chair: Advay Johary

Position: President 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 where 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.

The Arctic, due to its harsh conditions, has still not been mapped yet and therefore there is a lot of territory that cannot be claimed yet by any country. 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. Testing intercontinental missiles and developing nuclear powered submarines and ships that can carry and launch nuclear warheads. On the other hand, NATO countries have deployed the largest military drill ever in the Arctic with troops from every major NATO country in a display of security. In this scenario, Russia has officially advanced and sent its 9 nuclear icebreakers along with thousands of troops into the Arctic. It's a power play made

by the Russian state with backing from China to forcefully dominate almost half the Arctic, exploit its resources and build bases ever closer to the United States. The Arctic has a major geopolitical importance as it is closer to the US mainland and western Europe. The topic at hand holds great importance to the growth and future of each member state as it has to deal with the increasing military presence and tensions arising in the Arctic, and needs to find ways to de-escalate the situation as both the United States and Russia get more aggressive.

Definition of Key Terms, Countries, and Organizations Involved

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 Exercise

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.

Russia

Russia has been the country with arguably the most influence in the Arctic region. Their expansionist behaviors as seen with its invasion of Ukraine are also reflected by expanding into the Arctic in an attempt to increase state protection. Russia has invested heavily in new technologies ranging from weapons, to nuclear powered icebreakers and submarines specifically accustomed to the Arctic. Early November 2023, they launched an intercontinental missile launched from the White Sea to hit targets all the way in the far eastern region of Kamtchka. Russia has always had deep interest in the Arctic and now has started advancing aggressively posing a threat to other Arctic countries, especially the US

United States

The United States, Russia's main threat, is a part of the Arctic council although its mainland is further away. Their increased collaboration with other NATO countries is another factor in the rising tensions and militarism in the Arctic. With the collaboration of Canada they have developed several strategic outposts to possibly intercept and defend against Russian attacks. In addition to that, the economic prospect is enormous and a major incentive for US influence in the Arctic. The major investment of the government and the private sector in projects like the Willow Project, are in an attempt to extract vast amounts of resources, but have received a lot of pushback from environmental protection agencies and organizations.

China

Similar to the US, China is relatively distant from the Arctic, yet is an observing member state of the Arctic Council. China mostly views the Arctic as an economic opportunity and sided with Russia since they believe Russia has most control over the Arctic. Additionally, heavy funding from Chinese elites and the government have reached Russia to develop weapons and infrastructure for the extraction of resources. To add on, the North Sea is a proposed future trading route connecting Beijing to the ports in Europe, instead of traveling around India and through the Mediterranean Sea. This route cuts shipping costs and time by about 30% and China relies on Russia to create the right technology, and maintain this route for them.

Arctic Council

General Information

Russia's tests for their new intercontinental missiles were the final checks to finally deploy their new submarine named The Emperor Alexander III. This submarine is of Borei Class and meant to carry up to 16 of these missiles and nuclear warheads. After the success of these tests, Russia has officially started an expansion into the Arctic claiming these barren grounds.

They've increased funding and moved thousands of troops from their western borders up north. With their arsenal of nuclear powered icebreakers and submarines, their troops have reached well into the Arctic to set up military bases. In addition, several Russian companies have sent equipment and started building infrastructure to extract natural gasses and other resources.

China's increased funding has helped Russia set up this expansion into the Arctic, as Chinese energy companies have also sent developed technology to help extract and distribute the resources. To add on, China has just started sending ships along the Northern Sea into European ports, and are pushing for economic deals with the European Union.

The increased tensions and severe economic consequences of increased military build up and extraction of resources has worried several NGOs and countries located away from the Arctic. As a result, extreme melting in the Arctic will mostly impact equatorial regions and have drastic environmental consequences.

Other oil exporters feel threatened, as Russia and China plan to use the fossil fuels found in the Arctic. There is an estimated 30% of all the oil, and natural gas on Earth located in the Arctic. This means that countries whose main exports are energy would have increased competition, and thus profit less.

The US and NATO have responded with military cooperation with other NATO and Arctic countries. Canada, Norway, US, Finland have all decided to cooperate with each other to ensure their nations security, and have sent troops to strategic locations into the Arctic as well as a response to Russia's expansion.

As the members in BRICs have now expanded, all the members have decided to cooperate with Russia and China solely on economic development and cooperation. They have no stance and did not agree to supply weapons, but desperately want to increase economic ties with China and Russia. Additionally, this corresponds and builds upon China's new Silk Road Initiative, which is an attempt to connect and globalize third world countries to eventually dethrone the US as a major world power.

Possible Solution

Arctic Treaty

As the countries start ignoring international law and acting out of their own interests, a new middleground should be reached. An intricate and extensive set of ground rules should be agreed to at least protect the Arctic environment or civilians from any casualties

Peacekeeping Arctic Organization

Creating a more aggressive third party organization could also help de-escalate the situation. As countries are ignoring messages from the UN and the Arctic council a new peacekeeping armed force could be deployed around the Arctic to ensure that no country is exploiting their Arctic coastlines.

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