

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Specialized Committee**



Arctic Council

**Chair | Nhu Nguyen
Specialized Committee Background Guide
Houston Area Model United Nations 47
January 27-28, 2022**

Copyright Notice

The contents of this document and any supplementary material are the sole intellectual property of Houston Area Model United Nations.

It may not be reproduced, republished, or used without the express written permission of Houston Area Model United Nations. Please email staff@houstonareamun.org with any questions.

Note to Delegates

Dear Delegates,

My name is Nhu Nguyen, and I am currently a fourth-year undergraduate at UT pursuing a dual degree in Plan II Honors and Biology. I am thrilled to have been selected as this conference's Chair for The Arctic Council! This is my fourth year moderating at a Model UN conference and I have been able to learn and grow so much through this organization. I hope this will be a great learning experience for all of us.

As the only council within the United Nations that addresses issues faced by the Arctic governments and advocates for the rights of the indigenous people of the Arctic, the Arctic Council is one of the most creative committees where your actions demonstrate a will to change the world. Throughout this committee, you will be aiming to resolve a myriad of urgent issues intertwining with the nations' competing interests to exploit the Arctic's largely untapped natural resources and the Arctic's various Indigenous populations. As delegates, you have the significant task of tackling the existential threat of climate change, protecting the interests of the Indigenous population, and balancing the web of competing maritime claims that present numerous political, economic, and security obstacles to an already embattled region.

Our session will address two key issues. Firstly, this body will work to address the situation of mining and resource extraction in the Arctic. Secondly, this committee will address and work to protect endangered Arctic species and ecosystems.

I am excited to see how this year's delegates rise to the challenge. If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to reach out to me via email. We are excited to see you soon!



Nhu Nguyen

Arctic Council - Chair

nhunguyen@utexas.edu



Arctic Council

Chair | Nhu Nguyen

Houston Area Model United Nations 47

January 27-28, 2022

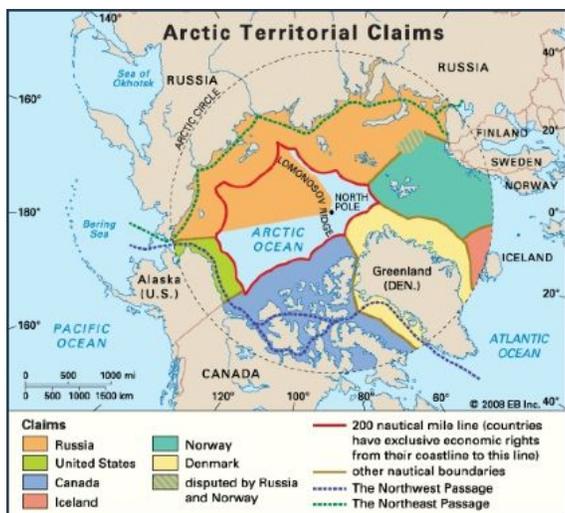
Background Information

Statement of the Problem

The Arctic is a region with distinct social and ecological significance. Unfortunately, it is also one of the world's global change hotspots. The extractive industry in the Arctic is controversial due to the high sensitivity of the ecosystems and communities in this region to natural and anthropogenic disturbances.

Throughout history, territorial dispute has been a major discussion topic between the nations of the Arctic Council. Fortunately, considerable progress has been achieved in the resolution of overlapping maritime claims between adjacent Arctic States. Some examples include the 1973 agreement between Canada and Denmark or the more recent 2001 agreement between Norway and Russia.¹

History of the Problem



Perhaps most famously is the 2001 Russian territorial claim. During the 2001 Russian territorial claim, Russia proposed to establish new outer limits of the continental shelf of Russia to include a large portion of the Arctic, claiming that the Lomonosov Ridge and the Mendeleev Ridge are extensions of the Eurasian continent.² In response, the UN Commission requested that Russia submit additional scientific evidence in

¹ https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2021/Scholarly-Papers/1_AY2021_Osthagen_Schofield.pdf

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_shelf_of_Russia#2001_extension_claim

support of its claim. In response, a Russian expedition known as Arktika 2007 in which the first crewed descent to the ocean bottom at the North Pole was performed. During the Arktika 2007 expedition, the explorers took some geological samples from the seabed that they hoped would provide convincing evidence that the region belongs to Russia.³ This expedition highlights the uncertain legal status of the Arctic region. Other nations not within the Arctic Circle that has shown interest include Norway and China.

Current Situation

Over the past decade, governments, private investors, and mining companies have begun to regard the Arctic as a promising source of mineral wealth with significant deposits of gold, diamonds, platinum, nickel kimberlite, and other precious stones.⁴ According to a 4-year-long report done by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Arctic houses 13% of the world's remaining deposits of oil.⁵ Mining has the

potential to not only spur economic development but also to harm the environment and irrevocably shape the social dynamics of Arctic communities and indigenous population. Mining development in the Arctic is further complicated by its extreme climate, remote locations, lack of infrastructure as well as limited labor supply.⁶

Environmental

There are various impacts of mining on the local aquatic ecosystems. The deposition of submarine tailings is a major source of impact which was observed to cause long-term accumulation of metals in sediments and biota, or all living organisms within a biome.⁷ Another impact is the change in distribution and colonization of the biota. On the other hand, the terrestrial ecosystems are also impacted with the effects of acid mine drainage. This runoff waters show a high concentrations of heavy metals, which can reach plants.⁸ For example, in the Yukon, the Faro Mine has contaminated an estimated 64,000 hectares of soil and groundwater.⁹ Altogether, despite

³ Roger Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow's Natural Resources*

⁴ Roger Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow's Natural Resources*, p. 63.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Tiainen et al., "Governance of Sustainable Mining in Arctic Countries: Finland, Sweden, Greenland & Russia."

⁷ <https://www-sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/science/article/pii/S0301479718313896>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-s-four-most-expensive-contaminated-sites-1.1218168>

evolving governance, mines continue to leach toxic waste into the environment and threaten water resources. As water stresses in the Arctic continue to increase, mining is particularly concerning.

Economic

New mining developments could negatively impact the already established economy of this region which consists of subsistence hunting, fishing, and herding.¹⁰ As sea ice retreats, new opportunities for high sea fisheries emerge. However, this industry is further complicated by climate change which could result in some species disappearing while many others appearing in different areas.¹¹ This could lead to unregulated fisheries in some of the Arctic high seas waters where there is not yet an international conservation and management regime in place. Amongst all the valuable resources that were discovered in the Arctic is oil and natural gases. Any government with control over the oil resource would in turn gain security of supply and export

revenues. Currently, most oil-rich areas of the Arctic are widely considered to be in Russia and Greenland.¹²

Social

Arctic peoples, such as Indigenous groups, pastoralists, and fishermen rely on the land and its natural resources. Therefore, large-scale extractive efforts, as well as climate change, pose great threats to the communities' livelihood and cultural well-being. The threats result in the inability of communities "to access their land, their loss of territorial rights, adverse effect on their health, biodiversity loss, as well as the loss of culture and identity linked to changes in their surrounding icescapes."¹³

Political

The eight countries claiming Arctic territory include Russia, Canada, the United States (via Alaska), Denmark, Greenland (via Denmark), Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.¹⁴ Each of these nations have their own unique system of central administration and therefore administer their Arctic territories in different ways. One of the most unique aspects of Arctic

¹⁰ Tiainen et al., "Governance of Sustainable Mining in Arctic Countries: Finland, Sweden, Greenland & Russia."

¹¹ <https://www.oceaneconomics.org/arctic/fisheries/>

¹² Roger Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow's Natural Resources*, p. 70.

¹³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800921003062>

¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Arctic/Political-and-environmental-issues#ref57890>

governance is the role that the epistemic community play in policy development and decision-making.¹⁵ The Arctic epistemic community includes scientists, academics, environmentalists, and NGOs, all brought together by common values around sustainable development and conservation.

International Legal Framework/Timeline

The Arctic is governed with a greater emphasis on the regional and national level. Legal framework should be explored through each nation's policy.

- **International Agreements Regarding the Arctic Region:** https://arcticportal.org/images/intl_treaties_overview.jpg
- **1982:** The creation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). According to this, states are entitled to an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 320 nautical km (200 nautical miles) beyond their coastline in which the state has the

has the exclusive right to exploit all natural resources.

Possible Bloc Positions

- **Some Key Nations and Their Policies:** <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/environmental-policy-integration-existing-arctic-strategies/>
- **Russia:** Traditional mining country with a socialist-state ideology and a mining industry still dominated by state-owned companies. Russia struggles with a lack of institutional capacities for governance.¹⁶
- **Finland and Sweden:** Nordic welfare states with strong state institutions that have experienced a mining boom, mostly dominated by international companies, and have had to adjust with extensive regulatory changes.¹⁷
- **Greenland:** Some history of mining, mostly controlled by Denmark, but now is an emerging mining country that recently received larger resource management autonomy and has had to develop its own governance framework.¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2015/12-yearbook/2015-arctic-governance-and-governing/121-governance-governance-in-the-arctic-an-introduction-to-arctic-yearbook-2015>

¹⁶ Tiainen et al., "Governance of Sustainable Mining in Arctic Countries: Finland, Sweden, Greenland & Russia."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Key Terms/Abbreviations

- **Arctic Five:** A group of the 5 Arctic littoral states (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and U.S.)
- **EEZ:** Exclusive Economic Zone
- **UNCLOS:** United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Useful Resources

- Arctic Council Official Website: <https://arctic-council.org/>
 - Who we are Section provides facts about each Arctic states
- Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow's Natural Resources by Roger Howard
- The Arctic Yearbook (<https://arcticyearbook.com/>): Compilation of scholarly articles on the region
- United Nations Oceans & Law of the Sea Legal and policy framework: https://www.un.org/depts/los/biodiversityworkinggroup/webpage_legal_and_policy.pdf

