

Houston Area Model United Nations Standard Committee

SPECPOL



Chair | Caroline Hsu

Topic B: Regulating the distribution of land in the
poles for territorial claim between countries

Houston Area Model United Nations 49
February 1 & 2, 2024

Note to Delegates

Delegates,

My name is Caroline Hsu and I'm a freshman at UT Austin! I'm majoring in Computer Science and Plan II and I'm so happy to be a part of HAMUN this year! I just graduated from The Village School and am a native Houstonian.

I've had much MUN experience, especially in high school. I've been a delegate at HAMUN quite a few times (4 times!) and have participated in other local conferences, such as CTMUN and even national and international conferences such as NHSMUN and ISRMUN. Over my career, I've amassed 7 BDs and 3 ODs and HMs! I'm so happy to be sharing my MUN experience with y'all. I love MUN because I get to engage in meaningful discussions about global issues, develop my public speaking and negotiation skills, and meet incredible people from all over the world who share my passion for making a positive impact.

Chairing the SPECPOL committee is an exciting opportunity for me because it allows me to engage with complex global issues and foster in-depth discussions among delegates. As a Computer Science and Plan II major, I bring problem-solving and critical-thinking skills that can guide delegates through these intricacies. My passion for international relations and the desire to facilitate productive discussions on these critical issues drive my interest in chairing SPECPOL.

To all delegates: my tip for you is to engage actively, collaborate passionately, and never hesitate to voice your unique perspectives and ideas. Remember that the power of MUN lies in the diversity of thought and the strength of diplomacy. Best of luck in your committee sessions, and may your experience at HAMUN be both enlightening and rewarding. Here's to a fantastic conference!

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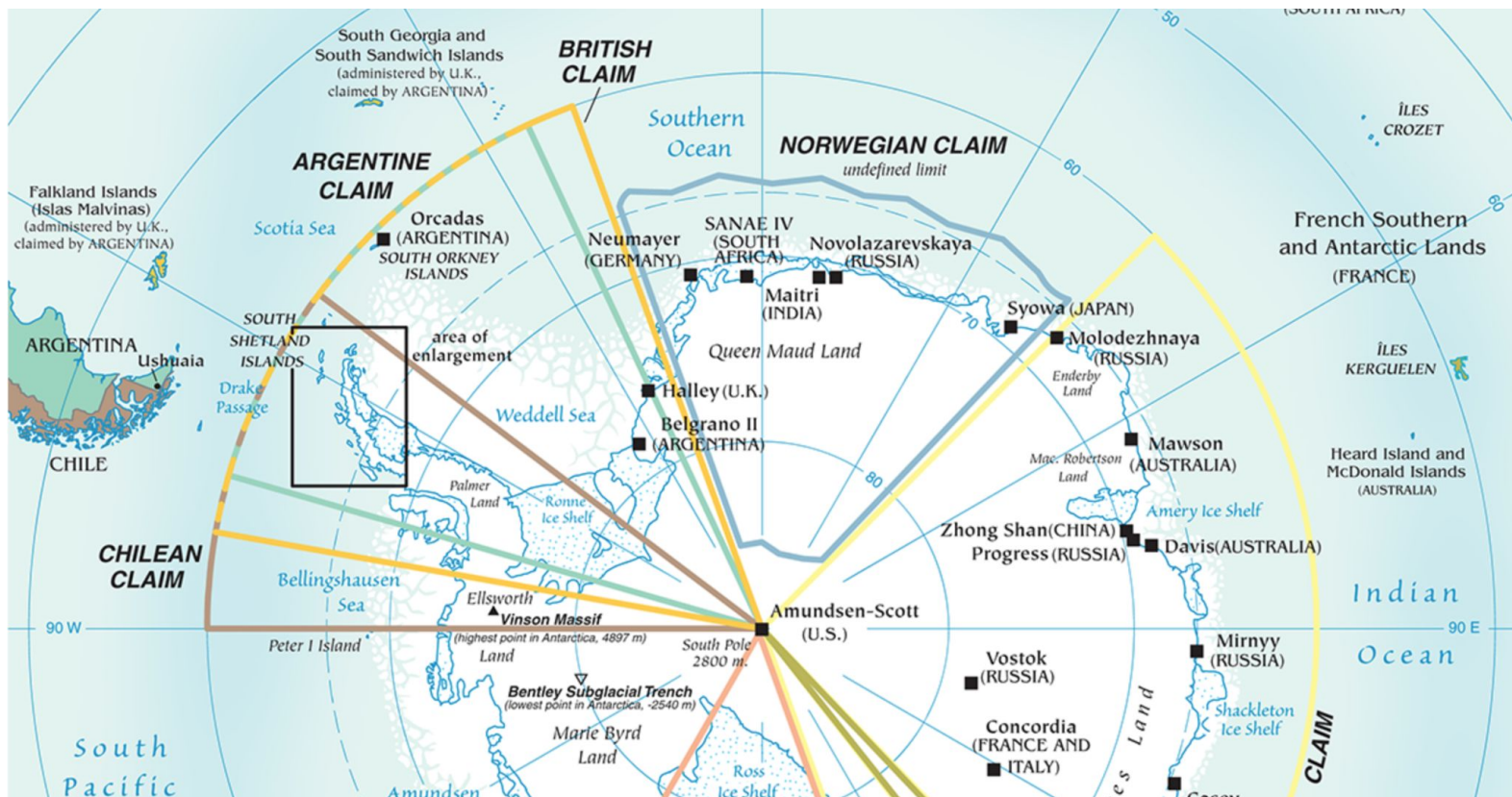
Regulating the distribution of land in the poles for territorial claim between countries

Introduction

The distribution of land in the polar regions, the Arctic in the north and the Antarctic in the south, has become a pressing global issue in recent years. These regions are home to vital ecosystems and abundant natural resources, making them a subject of increasing interest to nations seeking to secure territorial claims for various economic, strategic, and environmental reasons. The international community has recognized the need to establish a regulatory framework for the distribution of land in the poles to address these territorial claims and their implications. This topic is of great significance in addressing questions of sovereignty, environmental preservation, scientific research, and sustainable resource management.

History of The Problem

In response to American disputes in the Arctic, Canada passed a 1925 law that was in effect as a declaration of sovereignty over parts of the North Pole. Canada, rather than putting a flag on an ice shelf, insisted to extend northward. The Soviet Union did the same. Hans Island, which is a small piece of land with very minimal natural resources lies on the Canada - Denmark border, which both have been fighting over it for more than 30 yrs. In 1982, the United Nations signed the Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) opening up for ratification. This treaty clarified how, and to what degree, a country can claim its sovereignty over the poles (the U.S was not a part of this treaty).



Visualizing Territorial Claims in Antarctica. Source: [Visual Capitalist](#)

In August 2007, two of Russian submarines descended below to the North Pole ice and planted a flag on the ocean floor. The Russian explorers also collected water and sediment samples for analysis to prove the pole is an extension of Russian land.

In December 2014, Denmark wanted 900,000 square kilometers beyond the coast of Greenland. What is important in this area are shipping routes, but it is also home to up to 22% of the world's undiscovered oil & natural gas.

Antarctic continent is immense, embracing the South pole with complete ice and snow. The high altitude increases the air to extremes, which its downward to sea level across a moving ice sheet produces the world's strongest winds. Only 2% of the continent is free of ice.⁵ With all these vast inhospitable weather conditions, why would the world be fighting over its territory can be slightly unclear at times. Improved technology over the past several 100 years has allowed greater access to research, which opened way to gradual discoveries. By mid-century, permanent stations where being set up and the International Geophysical Year (IGY) in 1957-58 (the first multi-nation research program in Antarctica) paved way.

During this time was when, territorial positions had been distributed, however never fully agreed, which arises to the problem we have today. The twelve nations active in Antarctica, nine of which made territorial claims or reserved the right to do so, agreed that their political and legal differences should not interfere with the research program. The creation of the Antarctic Treaty emerged right after the IGY.



Oil and Gas Reserves in the Arctic Ocean. Source: [Medium](#)

The Antarctic Treaty was signed in “Washington on 1 December 1959 by the twelve nations that had been active during the IGY.” The countries involved include: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia (or better known as the USSR, at the time). The Treaty applies to the south area of 60 degrees South latitude.

Antarctic Treaty

In its fourteen articles of the Treaty:

- stipulates that Antarctica should be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, military activities, such as the establishment of military bases or weapons testing, are specifically prohibited;
- guarantees continued freedom to conduct scientific research, as enjoyed during the IGY;

- promotes international scientific cooperation including the exchange of research plans and personnel, and requires that results of research be made freely available;
- sets aside the potential for sovereignty disputes between Treaty parties by providing that no activities will enhance or diminish previously asserted positions with respect to territorial claims, provides that no new or enlarged claims can be made, and makes rules relating to jurisdiction;
- prohibits nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste;
- provides for inspection by observers, designated by any party, of ships, stations and equipment in Antarctica to ensure the observance of, and compliance with, the Treaty;
- requires parties to give advance notice of their expeditions; provides for the parties to meet periodically to discuss measures to further the objectives of the Treaty; and
- puts in place a dispute settlement procedure and a mechanism by which the Treaty can be modified.

One important thing to remember is that the Antarctic Treaty gives access to any member of the United Nations.

Since the first Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), which took place in 1961, the parties that have been involved have met several times to discuss the territorial distribution, which from this the ATCM is better known as the “The Antarctic Treaty System” today.



Economic and Strategic Implications:

Resource Exploitation: The polar regions are estimated to hold vast reserves of oil, natural gas, and minerals, making them a potential source of economic prosperity for nations. As territorial claims are staked and resource extraction accelerates, questions arise regarding how these resources will be divided and the potential for disputes over ownership and access.

Trade Routes: The receding polar ice caps due to climate change have opened up new maritime routes, such as the Northwest Passage in the Arctic. These routes can significantly shorten shipping distances and reduce transportation costs, offering economic advantages to nations that can control or utilize them. The issue of territorial claims becomes intertwined with the competition for control over these vital trade routes.

National Security: The polar regions have assumed growing importance in national security considerations. As the Arctic becomes more accessible, nations are jockeying for strategic positions in the region.

This includes the establishment of military bases and the monitoring of potential threats. The distribution of land and territorial claims in the poles can have direct implications for national security interests and military presence.

Environmental Preservation:

Climate Regulation: The polar regions play a crucial role in regulating the Earth's climate. They act as "cooling systems" for the planet, reflecting sunlight and maintaining global temperatures. Melting ice in the Arctic and Antarctic threatens this delicate balance and can lead to accelerated global warming. Territorial claims and resource exploitation need to be carefully managed to minimize the environmental impact and ensure the preservation of these crucial ecosystems.

Biodiversity: Despite the harsh conditions, polar regions are home to unique and resilient species of flora and fauna. These ecosystems are especially vulnerable to disturbances caused by human activities, such as oil spills, pollution, and habitat destruction. Balancing economic interests with the need to protect biodiversity is a central challenge in addressing territorial claims in the polar regions.

Environmental Accords: Existing international agreements, such as the Antarctic Treaty System and the Arctic Council, emphasize the importance of environmental protection in the polar regions. This topic will explore how nations can strengthen and expand these accords to better address environmental preservation concerns in the face of territorial disputes.

Scientific Research:

Unique Research Opportunities: The extreme conditions and isolation of the polar regions provide an ideal setting for scientific study. Climate scientists, biologists, geologists, and other researchers have conducted vital experiments and observations in these regions, contributing to our understanding of Earth's systems and the impacts of climate change.

International Collaboration: Scientific research in the polar regions often relies on international cooperation due to the logistical challenges and high costs involved. Territorial disputes can disrupt collaborative efforts and impede the progress of scientific discoveries. The topic will consider how to ensure that territorial claims

do not hinder the important work of researchers in these areas.

Data Sharing and Access: Ensuring equitable access to data and research opportunities for all nations, regardless of their territorial claims, is a key aspect of the scientific research dimension. The topic will address the need for transparency and information sharing to advance global scientific knowledge about the polar regions.

Current Situation:

There are currently seven sovereign states who have territorial claims in Antarctica: Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom. A number of facilities in the area are located outside the claimed countries, and the ones without claims but still have involvement include: Russia and the United States, in which they have constructed research and scientific countries within the area. Russia and the United States have reserved the right to make claims, and currently there also has been speculation on Brazil making a claim bounded by 53 degrees West and 28 degrees West (overlapping Argentine & British Claims). Peru recently made a reservation of its territory rights under the Principle of Antarctic Deformation.

Potential Questions

Here are some questions to potentially think about as you do your research and formulate your country's position on this topic. You do not need to address them all in your paper, if any at all. These are just some starting points for debate in committee and your own position and agenda:

1. How should nations define their territorial claims in the polar regions? What criteria should be used to justify these claims?
2. What measures can be taken to prevent territorial disputes and conflicts in the polar regions as they become more accessible due to climate change?
3. How can economic interests, such as resource extraction, be balanced with the need for environmental preservation in the polar regions?
4. What role can international organizations and treaties, such as the Antarctic Treaty System and the Arctic Council, play in regulating territorial claims and promoting cooperation?
5. How can nations ensure equitable access to scientific research opportunities in the polar regions, especially in areas with territorial disputes?
6. What steps can be taken to safeguard the unique biodiversity and fragile ecosystems of the polar regions in the face of increasing human activity and territorial claims?
7. How should trade routes through the polar regions be regulated to ensure safety, security, and fair access for all nations?
8. What are the potential national security concerns in the polar regions, and how can they be addressed within the framework of territorial claims and international cooperation?
9. What mechanisms can be established for dispute resolution and conflict prevention in the event of conflicting territorial claims in the polar regions?
10. How can the historical context of exploration and territorial claims in the polar regions inform the development of a regulatory framework for the future?



Sources

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