

BOMUN

Militarization of the Arctic

The growing militarization of the Arctic is related to the numerous economic opportunities allowed by the melting of ice. Thus, we cannot understand States' military activities in the Arctic without taking in account the economic challenges in the region.

➤ Disputes

The natural resources and the new commercial routes present in the Arctic can lead to intense territorial disputes between Arctic States: Denmark (via Greenland), Canada, United States, Russia and Norway, all those countries have claims over the Arctic regions. Among those disputes, we can distinguish:

- The boundaries in the Beaufort Sea and the status of the Northwest Passage between the U.S. and Canada
- The dispute over the Hans Island between Canada and Denmark
- The disputes regarding the Lomonosov Ridge between Canada, Russia and Denmark
- The disagreement between the US and Russia about the maritime border from the Bearing sea into the region

Along with these countries, China and the UK are also involved in the dispute through their claims over the Svalbard archipelago, which happens to be within the region.

In order to come to a solution, some countries that are claimant to the disputes are willing to pass by multilateralism and international forums, such as the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, due to the lack of an appropriate mandate (that would be recognize by the countries around the world), these two organisms are unfit to impose «legally binding» decisions for any dispute that would bind all claimants to abide by them. Therefore, the absence of a binding legal regime creates scopes for intense territorial and maritime disputes, which can lead to an increase militarization of the Arctic.

➤ Militarization

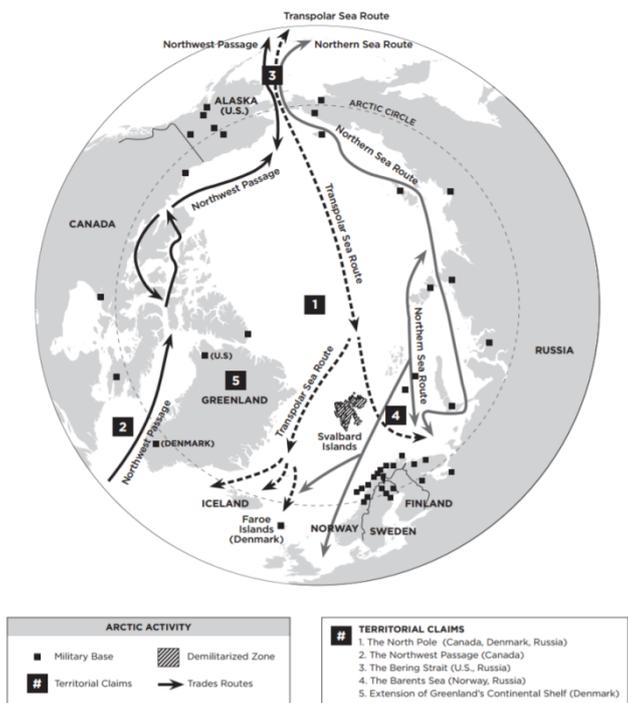
In the prevailing scenario, Arctic countries have been moving towards a militarization, in order to preserve and reaffirm their objectives in the regions. This militarization is being deployed as both a technique of surveillance and a means of protection. And so, Arctic countries have been proceeding to more and more military actions for the last few years.

In August 2015, the U.S. permitted Shell to drill for oil in the Chukchi Sea. The U.S. "Coast Guard" has already deployed "sophisticated ships, aircrafts and other maritime assets" in the Alaskan Arctic for the duration of Shell's drilling in the Arctic. Through such presence, the U.S. is not only trying to exploit energy resources of the Arctic region, but also trying to keep its "military presence" deep inside the region.

On the other side, in 2007, Russian scientists dived to the seabed in the Arctic Ocean and planted a titanium Russian flag (Russia claimed that it was flag of Russia's ruling party) in order to beef up their claims. Russia has already moved to restore a Soviet-era "military base" and other "military outposts" in the Arctic. In early 2015, Russia exercised Arctic "military patrols" from its Northern Fleet, involving "38,000 servicemen, more

than 50 surface ships and submarines and 110 aircrafts". Moreover, Russia strategy over the arctic may include China, a growing military power and an economic giant. Through such move, Russia is trying to make sure it has an important ally to make sure that it is favored in case of any military conflict.

Other countries also have military weigh in the region. It is the case of Norway or even Finland with their numerous military bases. Canada may also have a word to say: Canada promised (under former PM Stephen Harper's administration) to build armed ice-breakers, several patrol ships and several vessels in order to proceed towards gripping the Arctic. In 2011, Canada conducted large-scale "military exercises" in the region.



➤ What can we do?

The prospect of a conflict in the Arctic remains unlikely, as the Arctic Council, provides an integral means for cooperation, coordination, and interaction among Arctic states. States should avoid an increasing militarization of the Arctic and therefore chose to negotiate peacefully their disagreements. As for the militarization of the Arctic, delegates should discuss about:

- Peaceful settlements of the territorial and maritime disputes;
- Possible demilitarized zones in the Arctic.