

IMUN Research Report 2024

Economic and Social Council Issue #4: The question of preserving the Arctic as a global resource.

“Global resources are resources that are shared between all connected clusters” (“What Are Global Resources”).

“Global resources in the Arctic can include major reserves of oil and natural gas, large quantities of minerals including iron ore, copper, nickel, zinc phosphates and diamonds” (“Arctic Natural Resources”).

Resource geopolitics is the “study of the relationship between natural resources and international relations. It is concerned with how the control of resources can affect the power and influence of states, and how states can use resources to achieve their political goals” (“Resource Geopolitics| Class 12 Political Science Notes”).

The Arctic circle is a region divided amongst eight countries, passing through Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, the United States of America (USA) (Alaska), Canada, Denmark (Greenland), and Iceland (“Arctic Council”). Countries are permitted to manage their resources inside their exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

In 1962 major natural oil reserves were discovered in the Arctic. The Arctic region is estimated to hold about 13% of the world’s undiscovered oil and 30% of its undiscovered natural gas. Which is around ninety billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids (“Energy”). For these Nordic nations drilling in the Arctic would allow for a significant source of domestic energy and less reliance on foreign oil. This has caused geopolitical tension in regions surrounding the Arctic as they race to exploit its resources.

Countries are attempting to find loopholes to drill in the arctic. The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides international governance over the ocean floor. They state that anything beyond the continental shelf of a country is open water and cannot be exploited, which means much of the Arctic Ocean will remain out of bounds and unclaimed. However coastal state's sovereignty extends twelve nautical miles from the baseline along the coast, countries are free to do what they desire with this territory. However, Article 56 of UNCLOS outlines that a country can declare an EEZ that extends 200 nautical miles from its coastline, over its preexisting twelve nautical miles, this means they have rights of exploitation, exploration, and conservation of resources in that area (Rowe). Many costal states such as Norway, Canada, Denmark, the USA, and Russia have applied with sufficient evidence for the extension of their EEZs and been accepted. Anything out of the EEZs are supposed to be out of bounds and controlled by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), an intergovernmental body with 167 member states. However, members of the ISA have been developing a code permitting mining practice in these regions. Thirty contracts involving twenty-two different countries have been approved for exploration of the Arctic, covering more than 1.3 million square kilometers of the seabed. This will allow many more nations and companies to mine in the Arctic.

In most recent years exploitation of the Arctic has been on a rise as global warming has caused ice covering the northernmost region of the world to melt, making drilling easier. Countries currently drilling in the Arctic include Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the USA ("Energy").

The Arctic is vital to keep the world climate balanced. Drilling comes with extreme environmental risks. The Arctic has very fragile ecosystems, its climate is changing nearly three times more quickly than the rest of the planet. Offshore exploitation of oil and gas disturbs

ecosystems, endangers wildlife, and threatens the global climate system (WWF). Arctic drilling operations are highly risky due to high costs and challenging weather conditions. Drilling threatens marine mammals that Indigenous peoples in the Arctic rely on. The Arctic's marine ecosystems are vulnerable to oil spills from blowouts, pipeline leaks and shipping accidents. The remoteness of the area means it can take days or weeks to respond to a spill, and clean-up can also be ineffective (WWF). Local environments could be ruined for decades.

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