

II AASCA MUN

UN OCEANS

Topic 1: Sovereignty and Resource
Exploitation on International Waters

Topic 2: Balancing Economic Interests
with Environmental and Political

Letter From The Committee Leaders

My name is Saul Arita, and I will hopefully be voted best chair. I am 15 years old and I come from "Freedom High School" in Honduras. I've been to five local MUN conferences and one international, and as you could imagine, this is my first time being chair. It is an honor for me to do it in the II AASCA MUN.

Hello delegates, my name is Ava Thomas. I am 16 years old and a sophomore at The American International School of Costa Rica. This is my third year participating in MUN. Throughout the conferences I've been to, I have learned how to engage in conversation about uncomfortable topics, and also have tested myself with public speech and the research needed for my position. My hopes for this conference are for all delegates to engage in respectful, but also interesting debates, to solve problems, and to have a great overall experience.

Last but not least, my name is Alison Páez. I am a 17-year-old senior at Village School of Guatemala. This is my third year in MUN and my second time being a Chair. Hopefully, the delegates are as excited as I am for this AASCA MUN. I love watching delegates engage in debate, especially during a crisis, as I am sure we will have tons of fun with such a unique topic. Can't wait for this conference to begin!

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Introduction

Topic A

There are different maritime zones in the Arctic. Some of them are areas beyond national sovereignty, and other areas grant nations sovereign rights to explore and exploit natural resources. UNCLOS has established Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), Continental Shelf Claims, and Freedom of Navigation. Nevertheless, no country owns the North Pole or the surrounding oceanic areas. Instead, eight Arctic coastal states have jurisdiction: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. For this reason, several international agreements exist, such as the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic. Though these methods have proven effective, due to recent developments, the Arctic is increasingly difficult to manage with existing laws. Jurisdiction is being challenged as countries are seeking ways to make it part of their territory. Existing frameworks do not detail procedures that detail the procedures to take in case of a country's unilateral or aggressive actions in the Arctic.

Something to consider when talking about the Arctic splitting up is the significantly easier access to raw materials located in international waters. All countries have the right to navigate and use natural resources, but it's important to avoid unsustainable resource exploitation. Countries have control over 200 nautical miles of sea, which is called their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), where they are free to exploit resources and explore said waters. Now, with increased access to the

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Arctic, delegates must consider challenging concepts such as sovereignty in the high seas and the exploitation that will come with it. Countries will find ways to extract all natural resources for economic profit, and the world will experience a Tragedy of the Commons scenario, causing environmental and economic damage. In order to control the situation, countries must develop sustainable methods that regulate the amount of exploitation to protect these resource-rich waters.

A key challenge in the Arctic is: existing laws lag behind increasing competition for resources. UNCLOS outlines EEZs, continental shelves, and navigation rights, but it cannot fully resolve disputes or regulate exploitation. The pursuit of oil, gas, and minerals risks creating a Tragedy of the Commons, where short-term gain threatens long-term sustainability. Treaties such as the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement demonstrate cooperation but do not regulate extraction or prevent unilateral actions. Powerful states and corporations may push the limits of current law, increasing geopolitical and environmental risks. The region's fragility requires a balance between sovereignty, economic interests, and ecological protection. Effective governance requires stronger enforcement and clearer frameworks. Delegates must consider how the international community can prevent conflict and ensure sustainable use of the Arctic.

Key Terms

Topic A

1. **Arctic States:** Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States, also known as the Arctic 8.
2. **Continental Shelf:** It is a shallow underwater area that drops into the deep parts of the ocean. This is normally used to obtain natural resources.
3. **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** It is an area of the ocean where no nation has jurisdiction over all the resources in that area. It is about 200 nautical miles beyond any territory.
4. **Freedom of Navigation:** Every nation's ships have the freedom of navigation where there aren't any preestablished limitations by international law.
5. **High Seas:** Area in the ocean that isn't under any nation's jurisdiction.
6. **Maritime Boundary Disputes:** Disagreements between nations because of territory, resources, or laws.
7. **Rare Earth Elements (REE):** Extremely valuable materials due to their profound importance when it comes to high-tech applications.

Key Terms

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8. UNCLOS: Comprehensive international agreement that gives the legal framework for the regulation of all uses of the oceans and their resources, established by the UN.

9. Underwater Mining: Extracting minerals from the seabeds, which are located about 200 meters below the surface. It causes concern about environmental damage and jurisdiction.

10. Water Column Jurisdiction: Distinction between the rights of the water column and the seabed in legal terms. It is relevant in disputes over the EEZs and continental shelves.

Historical Background

Topic A

The constant battle for resources on land and in water has been prevalent throughout history since nations were established. Originally, a rule was developed to set boundaries around a nation's shoreline to limit unrestricted resource use in international waters. Due to this, the Ancient Maritime Dominion was abolished and replaced with the freedom of the seas doctrine and the cannon-shot rule. The cannon shot rule served as a way for countries to determine how far out they had control in the ocean. A cannon would be shot from shore, and it typically traveled about 3 nautical miles, which was used as the boundary, and this rule was used up until the mid-19th century. It had to be replaced, though, when cannons improved and could shoot farther than before. A new treaty was created, known as the UNCLOS, replaced the old rule and established a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, so that countries could use more of the resources in the ocean freely.

Though there has always been a maritime law has evolved over time. It began in the ancient Mediterranean with the expansion of commerce and trade. Nevertheless, the first major modern law of the sea emerged in the 17th century and was created during the 17th century with the rise of competition. Many new rules developed, including general maritime law; the Jones Act is U.S.-specific. It reached the point where nations saw it necessary to incorporate maritime rules into national laws, such as the U.S. Constitution. Since

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then, maritime disputes have often been a subject of trials in court. Before severe climate impacts affected the Arctic, maritime law addressed issues of piracy, cyber threats, security, and environmental protection. Since then, the law has proven inefficient in tackling sovereignty and exploitation disputes, given that the Arctic conditions change rapidly.

For hundreds of years, countries have fought for control of the ocean's many resources and the benefits they bring. It was about three nautical miles from shore, or about the distance a cannonball could fly. This old way of doing things didn't work anymore as time went on and technology got better. The world needed a better system. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was established. It made territorial waters twelve nautical miles wide and gave countries limited rights to explore and use marine resources.

Current Situation

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Maritime claims have increased gradually as the Arctic's melting has opened an increasingly contested territory. More nations are now requesting compensation or action from recurring disputes over resources, trading, and territory in the Arctic. Since many maritime existing laws have been challenged in light of the melting ice, there are no laws or frameworks that have been adapted to this situation. Countries have started to claim sovereignty over specific maritime areas or what's left of the dying Arctic. The same situation happens with the exploitation of resources. As there is no control over them, nations have begun disputes and legal actions when another country doesn't follow their protocol, even though it may not have been internationally approved. There has been a clear expansion of maritime claims, but there is no clear structure for applying them.

Before the destruction of the Arctic, it played a crucial role in shipping, resource extraction, fisheries, and tourism. Meaning that there were a lot of corporations and industries that clearly depended on the Arctic. When the Arctic declined severely, many corporations went bankrupt, and the economy shifted. Those that survived had to adapt their whole focus to maintain their profit. That means that instead of taking tourists to the Arctic, they have to find another way of entertaining, for example. Though feasible, it may raise ethical concerns because, once again, there will be a continued exploitation of the remaining Arctic resources. Many

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industries will find a way to continue using the territory and resources of the Arctic to their own advantage, and threaten many other sectors. So, the world fears severe loss of Arctic biodiversity of what was once known as the Arctic, all due to corporate influence.

Many nations are now increasing their strategic presence in the Arctic. Whether that is resource security, military surveillance, scientific research, or geopolitical signaling. Some are focusing on how the remaining Arctic territory aligns with the expansion of territory they are seeking for military strategic placement. Some others are focusing on how the new territory will provide enough scientific and technological advancements to create economic opportunities. There are many strategic goals in this new era. There truly is it is unclear how countries will act in order to ensure that the melting Arctic will be advantageous to them, without taking into consideration the harm that it may inflict on other nations or on the environment itself.

Now more than ever, the environment and its well-being have become a top priority to prevent further harm. Exploitation of rare earth metals, marine life, and non-renewable resources are all at risk of vanishing if exploitation continues. The ongoing exploitation causes ecosystem degradation through overfishing and habitat destruction. This is important to acknowledge because it can and will affect the food web if it continues to

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take place. Some countries have become dependent on the valuables that lie within international waters if their own EEZ's lack such resources. National competition will be a crucial factor when it comes to the increasing access to the resources in the Arctic, and could lead to disputes between nations.

In a crisis like this, rules and laws are key to maintaining order. With how easy access to the Arctic has become and its contents, rules and regulations are bound to be ignored, and nations will use the resources as they feel is necessary. Weak laws, like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), don't put a stop to a lot. Non-polar countries and major corporations are now moving quickly to access vast resources, typically operating with little regard for environmental treaties. The vastness and remoteness of the region, along without a solid global enforcement mechanism, creates a jurisdictional vacuum. This means no specific court or government agency has the authority to act on this, leaving a gap in legal accountability. The chance of instantaneous monitoring and enforcement of transgression in the high seas is nearly impossible, with no real way to constantly monitor the use of such a vast area.

Block Positions

Topic A

The Conservation and Sustainable Development Bloc:

All signatories and/or major parties in the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA), the goal of the agreement is to prevent unregulated fishing in the high-seas portion of the Central Arctic Ocean. Over half of the members consist of the few that border the arctic ocean, who are more focused on the preservation of the water mass due to the fact that it can directly affect them economically, and environmentally. These issues only become more dire because of climate change. Members in this bloc, specifically the ones located in North America, must help conserve these waters for the sake of the indigenous population, who heavily rely on the pristine conditions of these waters to maintain hunting and cultural traditions.

The Resource Expansion and Sovereignty Bloc:

This bloc prioritizes national sovereignty, especially given the numerous economic and resource opportunities that the increasing Arctic access offers economic opportunities. They advocate for the use of technology for resource extraction and expansion. Given their strategic location, they seek to extend their continental shelf and are seeking to expand their jurisdiction to create new international frameworks that adapt to the new event and their interests.

Block Positions

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They cooperate to resist limitations proposed by other nations, which could limit their sovereignty or commercial opportunities. They often favor regional agreements and bilateral deals for them to have more freedom in maritime zones.

The Emerging Economies and Access Equity Bloc:

This bloc focuses on how developing and middle-income nations see opportunities in a warming Arctic. They seek a more equitable access to opportunities in politics and the economy. They argue that the Arctic should be used as a global opportunity and shouldn't be monopolized by a specific country. They would want to emphasize participation, communication, and international benefits in the resource and environmental aspects of the Arctic. If they succeed, they would no longer have an economy at risk, and they would be able to rise through international trade. They would likely support a multilateral governance system for the Arctic, rather than unilateral frameworks imposed on others.

Guiding Questions

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1. To what extent exactly does the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) address the challenges that come with EEZs in the rapidly changing arctic?
2. Considering how easy it is to access many materials now, how can nations set up cooperative mechanisms, which prevents countries from maximizing their profit off of these waters?
3. How can the international community implement environmental safeguards and liability frameworks for resource exploitation in the unprotected Arctic?
4. What new mechanisms are to be required when talking about the extraction of oil, gas, and rare earth metals to avoid manipulation of these resources?
5. What are some legal and political consequences when or if non-Arctic States increase their presence and investment in the Arctic?
6. How do countries implement confidence-building measures when it comes to evading militarization of the easily accessible Arctic?

Guiding Questions

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7. How should traditional hunting rights and cultural heritage of indigenous people be well balanced with commercial interests of global organizations?
8. As corporations begin to fund private expeditions, what legal and ethical checks may be implemented to ensure their activities are safe?
9. Should the Arctic Council be reconstructed so that non-arctic countries are included and gain power or enforcement authority over security and environmental agreements?
10. If an international court rules on a territorial dispute, how can others ensure that they follow this ruling?

Introduction

Topic B

Four Arctic Council working groups deal with environmental protection. Whether that is reducing emissions of pollution, monitoring the environment, conserving biodiversity, or maintaining marine habitats. Arctic states have passed laws that protect the environment within their territory or up to 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone. In fact, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) supports the ArcNet framework; it identifies the key areas for conservation across the Arctic, all with the intention to protect 30% of the region through a protected network. Although the efforts have been clear, the accelerating climate change effects have severely harmed the region and its biodiversity. One major effect is the accumulation of toxic substances due to local mining and oil development from increased shipping. Water quality issues, coastal erosion, and wildfires are only a few of the many impacts that the Arctic has experienced and continues to experience.

Despite these efforts to protect the Arctic, economic interests often clash with environmental priorities. Arctic Council working groups, national laws, and initiatives like WWF's ArcNet aim to conserve biodiversity and marine habitats, yet enforcement remains limited. Pollution from mining, oil extraction, and shipping continues to harm ecosystems, causing water contamination, coastal erosion, and wildfires. Climate change worsens these impacts, threatening fragile ecosystems and indigenous communities. The conflict

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between resource use and conservation highlights the need for sustainable management. Without stronger regulation, short-term economic gain could harm long-term regional stability. Delegates must weigh national, corporate, and strategic interests against ecological protection. The key question is whether existing agreements are sufficient, or if new frameworks are needed to secure the Arctic's future.

Finding a balance is now more important than ever between using resources that come from the high seas but not exploiting them is becoming increasingly important. In order to reassure that countries minimize environmental harm when the inevitable extraction of materials begins, innovative technologies must be created. An estimated 30% of undiscovered gas and 13% of undiscovered oil lie in the marine areas north of the Arctic Circle, so creating and advancing technology for clean extraction is key to minimizing future environmental risk. A major step that needs to be taken is for countries to come to a consensus on international agreements, which compel said countries to utilize innovations like satellite-guided oil spill prevention technology and so much more. Failure to create a balance between extracting and protecting may lead to disputes over appropriate extraction and protection measures.

Key Terms

Topic B

- 1. Arctic Shipping Routes:** Given the melting ice, more opportunities for international transportation networks appear. Some routes are the Northwest Sea Route and the Central Arctic shipping route.
- 2. Sustainable Development:** A development that seeks to solve the needs of people without compromising the needs of future generations.
- 3. Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC):** This treaty established an international framework, so that countries would be prepared to prevent marine oil spills and minimize heavy pollution.
- 4. Waste Dumping:** Disposal of industrial, nuclear, or hazardous waste into the ocean. It is often regulated by international environmental agreements.
- 5. Whaling Moratorium:** A global ban on commercial whaling, the killing of whales for meat or oil, to protect endangered whale species and marine biodiversity.
- 6. Indigenous Peoples:** Cultural groups that descended from the original inhabitants of a territory. Specifically, Arctic indigenous peoples are constantly fighting for their rights and cultural survival, which is dying out slowly.

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7. Tipping Point (climate): A critical point that the ecosystem crosses where the damage to the climate is irreparable.

8. Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS): It is a tracking system based on satellites to monitor fishing and shipping activities. It helps to enforce maritime laws and control any illegal activities.

9. Underwater Cultural Heritage: Refers to archaeological sites, shipwrecks, and artifacts found beneath the sea, protected under international law, such as the UNESCO Convention.

10. Treaty of Commons: A Hypothetical economic scenario in which individuals exploit a certain resource out of self-interest and benefit, therefore harming many others in the process.

Historical Background

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Over the past few centuries, the environment has started its rapid decline. Pollution and environmental decline began over thousands of years ago though, when humans shifted away from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and began to practice agriculture but it most notably started around the industrial revolution. Countries also began exploiting international waters, which led to treaties intended to regulate resource use, which limited the amount of resources a single nation could extract. While a nation has complete authority over their EEZs, international waters may only be used for navigation, fishing, and scientific research, but all must adhere to international maritime laws. As for resources policies, they aim to conserve marine biodiversity in the high seas. A legal framework has been created to provide Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) where this biodiverse life will be protected from human activities, which was not previously possible.

International agreements and policies for environmental protection have always been a topic of discussion. Consequently, throughout history, there have been many treaties and organizations that have tackled specific issues on these matters. Before severe Arctic environmental decline, the most recent protocols dated back to 1992. This year, the Rio Earth Summit was held which affirmed the right to sustainable development worldwide. Similarly, in the following couple of

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years, the Marrakesh Agreement, an economic treaty, recognized the need for sustainable development and environmental protection. In 1997, the first international agreement was created, in which countries had the required emission reductions. In the 21st century, only two protocols were created. The first one, the 2015 Paris Agreement, discussed how climate targets of each country became legally binding under international law. And the second one, the 2023 Global Framework on Chemicals, aimed to protect people against chemical pollution in the environment. Clearly, all of them were eventually proven a not long-term solution since the collapse of parts of the Arctic ecosystem.

Finding balance between economic growth and protecting the environment has always been a struggle, especially when it comes to the oceans. Human impact began long ago, but industrialization and mass production made things much worse, leading to pollution and overexploitation of natural resources. In response, nations started signing treaties to protect international waters, setting boundaries for how much a single country could take and creating Marine Protected Areas to preserve marine life. Major global agreements like the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and the Paris Agreement in 2015 all aimed to promote sustainable development and reduce environmental damage. Despite these efforts, problems like chemical pollution and

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ecosystem collapse—especially in places like the Arctic—prove that current measures remain insufficient. The ongoing challenge is to ensure that political and economic ambitions do not come at the cost of the planet’s health and future.

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Due to the melting of the Arctic, predetermined routes no longer exist for shipping. Nations that used the EEZ or any other shipping routes no longer have the system they used in the past. In this new era, though many new shipping routes have opened, no order has been put in place. The Arctic has now become a crowded maritime corridor. Now, the Arctic is capable of accommodating large-scale ships. Though it might seem great at first glance, in reality, the expansion of these shipping routes has vast consequences. First, international conflicts are bound to surge given the newly opened territory for resource exploitation and sovereignty claims. Second, the Arctic ecosystem will face severe damage. And third, there will likely be investment in Arctic infrastructure, putting into question sustainable development.

Similarly, the loss of Arctic stability means that there will be damage to infrastructure, water security issues, and slower economic growth in many industries. Before the Arctic completely melted, UNEP estimated a loss of \$30 billion due to the melting ice. Many nations may be uncertain about the implications of this event. Though it may seem like a great opportunity for them, it could cost them a lot before they even get a chance to seek their own goals. Not only that, many countries now have to consider the possibility of investing in the new Arctic territory, whether it is for their own exploitation of resources or to repair the ecosystem that is dying. Now, monitoring efforts are no longer effective and

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warning systems. Hydropower plants in glacier-dependent areas are no longer working, and restoration programs are unlikely. The economy of the world has completely shifted, and not in a good sense.

Since the melting ice began, the Arctic has become one of the most contested parts of the world, especially due to its immense resources. It has now become easier to access said resources: minerals, oils, and gas reserves are now Arctic-based. In fact, many nations have developed a 'Polar Silk Road' plan for this very same reason. Countries with borders near the Arctic are seeking the possibility of being trading ports designed based on the Arctic's resources. Meaning that markets may increasingly depend on Arctic resources and how effectively people can extract it to sell it. Though there were certain laws put in place due to this reason, the Arctic has expanded so much that nations have not found a way to enforce these laws correctly. Nations that have a growing dependence could threaten market stability. And with the rising competition among countries, the growing dependence could be the doom of certain markets. Not only will people be ruining the Arctic ecosystem, but they are now placing themselves in danger of being dependent on somewhere else's resources.

The melting of the Arctic has made the average sea level rise, endangering the local coastal cities and small islands nearby.

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Similarly, the ice loss has damaged a large portion of crops and has completely shifted and ruined global food systems. That means that many animals that live in the sea or depend on these crops have largely died. Polar bears, walruses, Arctic foxes, and many other species are threatened with extinction. As more nations travel to the Arctic region in search of resources or trading, human contact has also contributed to the loss of wildlife. The great loss of ice has released previously stored methane into the atmosphere. So, not only is the Arctic ecosystem dying, but posing risks to human societies, all because climate change destroyed one of Earth's most important environments. There is less food available, the global temperatures are rising rapidly seen before, and insufficient action has been taken.

It is because of all these issues that there has been a conflict over whether to choose: conservation or development. Should the national resources go into trying to conserve the Arctic wildlife and restore it, or use this moment to create routes and gain territory? Every country has its own agenda, meaning that unless every single country comes into an agreement, which is unlikely, instability will increase. Whether more ecosystems are destroyed or some nations gain economically. Outcomes remain uncertain, as the destruction of the Arctic has already already caused significant instability. The world expects many conflicts and disputes to arise, given the

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diversity of opinions that each nation holds regarding the newly opened territory on Earth.

Guiding Questions

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1. Given the difficulty of cleaning up an oil spill in remote waters, what financial liability and coverage must corporations have before being able to do high-risk drilling?
2. What is the necessary carbon budget or maximum amount of black carbon to be released from shipping and resource activities and how can this be enforced well?
3. How do you compare short term profit from the Arctics rich materials against the long term, which are no longer based on profit but instead the environment?
4. How can free, prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for Arctic indigenous people be upheld and implemented when extraction is necessary for some of the coastal countries?
5. What must be created to make sure that all revenue doesn't just go to large corporations but also the indigenous?
6. Should IMO's polar code be strengthened to not permit heavy fuel oil to avoid incidents?
7. How can the world's need for rare earth metals be balanced with the desperation and need for said products?

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8. What tool can be used to prove long term environmental support?
9. To what extent should non-Arctic countries use these waters and pay for them for transportation and such?
10. Should we label unused zones of the Arctic waters as “Global Commons” and stop further exploration of the area till international treaties are in place?

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