

Background Information

With the rising global temperatures, the Arctic ice cap is melting which creates new ways to use the Arctic for economic growth. Most notably it opens up the Northwest Passage. A route through Canadian archipelago that can shorten the distance for ships between Eastern Asia and Europe or US East Coast. First large cargo ship to ever make this journey was MS Nordic Orion that travelled from Vancouver, Canada to Port of Pori, Finland and was loaded with 73,500 tons of coal. It is estimated that MS Nordic Orion saved \$80,000 in fuel savings and was able to carry extra 15,000 tons of coal. This is obviously a significant improvement which can reduce shipping costs almost in half. However, there is a dispute whether Northwest Passage should be recognised as an International Waterway. International Waterways are natural bodies of water that are geographically in a country's National Waters but because they are crucial for some other countries shipping route, that country cannot collect fees for crossing their National Waters. For example, Turkey cannot collect fees for ships crossing Bosphorus or Dardanelles because this is the only trading route for countries in Black sea. Canada is obviously not in favour of recognising Northwest Passage as an International Waterway. Their justification is that they have to put in extra money to keep Northwest Passage safe which means building infrastructure in remote northern territories of Canada to keep Canadian Coast Guard active in this region.

Other economic potential of Arctic lays in mineral resources such as oil, gas and minerals. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) has estimated that the Arctic may hold a majority of the world's remaining untapped oil and gas reserves, and predicts the majority of these to be located offshore. The USGS released the first wide-ranging assessment of Arctic oil and gas resources in 2008, estimating the quantity of undiscovered and technically recoverable conventional oil and natural gas resources in the region. Of the 33 Arctic sedimentary "provinces" evaluated, 25 had a greater than 10% probability of having oil or gas deposits larger than 50 million barrels of oil equivalent. The USGS assessment concluded that approximately 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids may be in the Arctic. Of the total 412 billion barrels of oil equivalent, approximately 84% is probably offshore, and that about two-thirds (67%) of the total is natural gas. Because there is currently no clean-up technology or methods for this environment, any attempted response to a spill would be far too little, too late. A spill would put critical high value marine life, currently on the edge from changes

underway, at high risk. In addition, noise from drilling could potentially injure many marine mammals that use sound to navigate, find mates and find food. Of the eight Arctic Council nations, Russia is by far the most deeply invested in Arctic ocean petroleum exploration and drilling. Oil and gas account for over 50% of Russian federal budget revenues.

UN Involvement

In 1991 eight Arctic countries (USA, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden) adopted an Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). It deals with issues such as protection of Arctic environment, pollution caused by human activities in the region, monitoring and assessment program, and utilizing Arctic resources. Later in 1996 these countries formed the Arctic Council (mentioned before in background information) in the Ottawa declaration to further cooperate on the issues regarding the Arctic. However, the question of militarisation in the Arctic had not been tackled. This leads to military actions in the area especially by the Russian Federation and USA. Russia had also presented a 1.2 million km² Arctic claim to the UN. Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a Coastal state may claim rights to the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles by presenting scientific proof that it is a natural prolongation of its continental margin.

Bloc Positions

The biggest players in here are obviously the countries of Arctic Council, especially Russia, USA, Canada and Denmark because of EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) disputes in the Arctic. As those countries you should try to get the largest EEZ possible. When it comes to the Northwest Passage of course Canada is against making it an International Waterway, you should think about your country's position, whether it will bring you profit or not and what's your country's relationship with Canada like.

Questions to consider

- 1) Will my country profit from new shipping routes?
- 2) What countries from Arctic Council are my biggest allies?
- 3) Is my country for or against militarisation of the Arctic?
- 4) Should Arctic be treated just like Antarctica is?

5) Should UN intervene more than it does?

Sources

Journey of MS Nordic Orion

<https://web.archive.org/web/20151016014656/http://www.safety4sea.com/nordic-bulk-vessel-plans-historic-northwest-passage-transit-17577>

National ocean economics program

<https://www.oceaneconomics.org/>

Arctic Council official website

<https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/>

AEPS (PDF file)

http://library.arcticportal.org/1542/1/artic_environment.pdf

Article about militarisation of the Arctic

<https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2018/10/24/militarization-arctic-issue-incredible-importance-not-given-due-attention-to/>

UN environment programme article about the protection of Arctic

<https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/what-we-do/working-regional-seas/regional-seas-programmes/arctic-region>

YT video explaining the importance of Northwest Passage

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcDwtO4RWmo>

NASA article about Arctic ice cap melting

<https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2019-arctic-sea-ice-extent-fourth-lowest-on-record>