

55 MUN VI

NATO



STUDY GUIDE

Topic : NATO's strategic response to emerging threats in the Arctic

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MANDATE OF NATO

NATO, founded in 1949 with the signing of the Washington treaty, was a security alliance of 30 countries from North America and Europe. The core purpose of NATO is to ensure that the allies are protected through military and political cooperation. North American and European security is mainly safeguarded through NATO and its expansion has ensured US influence over Europe ensuring its peace and safety. NATO remains the principal security instrument of the transatlantic community and expression of its common democratic values.

Article 5: the fundamental principle of the NATO Charter, article 5 is the crux of NATO policy and is a key component of it. Its commitment clause defines the *casus foederis*. *“It commits each member state to consider an armed attack against one member state, in the areas defined by Article 6, to be an armed attack against them all.”*

Article 5 and 6 have a unique correlation and define the term “armed attack” as mentioned in article 5. It emphasises the significance of “mutual collective self-defence” under NATO’s supervision and where it when it needs to be applied and used.

Partnership frameworks are also an essential part of NATO, with specific ones including the PfP (Partnership for Peace) and the EAPC (Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council). These frameworks are essential in the outlining of NATO’s expansion and engagement beyond member countries.



Structure:

NATO has two major bases, firstly the political and secondly the military bases.

NATO Headquarters is the meeting place for representatives from all member states to reach decisions by consensus. NATO's key elements include:

The military committee: members include the chiefs of defence of NATO member countries, the executive body, the international military staff and the military command structure.

The military command structure is composed of the allied command operations, Allied command transformation which is headed by the Supreme allied commander Europe (SACEUR) and the supreme allied commander transformation (SACT)

A NATO Military Exercise is scheduled by a NATO Commander. It aims to establish, enhance and display NATO's Military Capability across the Alliance's full mission spectrum which is based on the three Alliance military missions:

- Article 5 Collective Defence;
- Non-Article 5 Crisis Response;
- Consultation and Cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

Emerging threats in the Arctic are a broad spectrum of issues that NATO has shown an interest in dealing with. The Arctic has become an area of interest for international powers due to the extent of untapped resources present there, alongside its environmental significance.

These threats range from the implications of climate change, to resource competition and the issue pertaining to the militarization of the Arctic. Other threats relate to resource exploitation and territorial disputes amongst countries who lay claim on a wide array of land within the Arctic, such as

the Lomonosov bridge, which is disputed over by Canada, Russia and Denmark. The opening up of new shipping routes, as a result of global warming, leads to risks related to shipping and transportation, and due to the lack of required infrastructure present within the Arctic, this could very easily become one of the most serious threats to this region.

The role of NATO is imperative to this topic as not only has the organisation increased its military exercises and naval operations in the Arctic, but it has also provided support to nations such as USA, Canada and Denmark, which have an active role in the current status-quo of the Arctic.



KEY DEFINITIONS

Key definitions in reference to this topic include the following;

- 1. Arctic sovereignty:** The rights and jurisdiction as well as the political authority established by the southern capitals of circumpolar nations including the Russian Federation, The USA, Canada, Denmark and Norway. This includes the rights they possess regarding their Arctic territories, resources and their exploration and exploitation.
- 2. Geo-political tensions:** Conflicts arising due to the Arctic's growing strategic importance. As ice melts, new sea routes and resource opportunities (oil, gas, minerals) have increased global competition, especially between Russia, China, and NATO nations. As the polar ice caps melt, so does the race among nations to capture the gold and resources in those areas.
- 3. Arctic militarisation:** refers to the deployment of military assets including but not limited to troops, bases, weapons and systems by Arctic nations including but not limited to the A-5 states to control Arctic resources and trade routes; The military buildup and purposeful basis of military operations of it
- 4. Northern Sea Route (NSR):** A strategically essential maritime sea route which is 5600 km lessens the distance between Eurasia and Asia-Pacific. It connects the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans through the Arctic and is a major trade route.



5. Resource competition: Competition exists over the entirety of the Arctic region due to the presence of Arctic oil, natural gas, rare earth metals and fisheries. These resources are becoming more accessible because of the melting of ice and permafrost making it a conflict point for both Arctic and non Arctic states.

6. UNCLOS: The primary treaty and/or convention governing all water bodies including the Arctic. Provides rules concerning “maritime boundaries, claims to an outer continental shelf, sovereign rights over resources and the protection of the marine environment.” Recognises three major categories of states; coastal, port and flag.

7. The Arctic Council: refers to the “primary intergovernmental forum” responsible for ensuring peace and cooperation within the Arctic region. It has 6 permanent participants representing the indigenous community of the arctic and 6 working groups responsible for conducting council activities.

IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDERS

1. The United States of America: The US stronghold over Alaska and Greenland act as a basis for the nation to assert its power throughout the entirety of the Arctic. Alaska contains some of the largest gas and oil reserves (which fall into US territory) which the US government has expressed desire to explore further as well. Another major cause of US involvement within the Arctic region is due to the stronghold of Russia in this location already. The US government has also previously shown its interest in working towards the perseverance of Arctic ecosystems while also working with the indigenous population to ensure their economic protection.



2. Canada: Canada is internationally recognised to have the longest coastline that connects to the Arctic, and the nation claims that the Northwest Passage falls within their borders, which is contested by international powers such as the US. Canada has proposed many projects such as the Mackenzie Gas Project to develop resources found within their Arctic borders, however they have faced issues due to logistical problems and also because of Canada's goal to minimise environmental impacts and preserve the culture of the indigenous community.

3. Denmark: Denmark claims control over Greenland and also considers the Lomonosov bridge to be an extension of Greenland, and hence a part of Denmark. The government of Denmark has also submitted numerous reports to UNCLCS in regards to their stake over these territories. They are adamant about enforcing their sovereignty and hence have engaged in partnerships with fellow Arctic nations and have invested in a plethora of research studies to determine factors such as the effect of climate change in the Arctic. Denmark is a key stakeholder in this region due to its linkages with Greenland and the disputes with the US over this area.

4. Russia: Russia was the first country to reach the sea-bed of the north pole as a result of expeditions backed by extensive research pertaining to the Arctic region. This area holds immense importance to the Russian Federation as its resources are to help Russia broaden its export diversification plans and allow for the nation to receive oil and natural gas. Russia stretches over 53% of the Arctic coastline and half of the inhabitants of the Arctic are Russian citizens. Russia is also one of few nations which has heavily invested in developing infrastructure in the Arctic, but that may also be linked to the fact that the Russian Arctic is rich in minerals as well, which could prove beneficial for the nation if mined.



5. Indigenous communities: The indigenous communities of the Arctic are arguably the most significant stakeholders due to the fact that their cooperation is necessary for any form of Arctic development. Their culture, heritage and practices hold utmost importance to them and due to this, they have established their own 'Arctic Council:Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat'. They advocate for the protection of the environment and for the prevention of global warming as their lives depend upon the climate and living conditions of the Arctic, and such adaptations will be hard to shift.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE OF THREATS IN THE ARCTIC

Cold War rivalry:

The Arctic became the primary frontline in fighting and discussions between NATO and The Soviet Union during the Cold War. The unique Arctic landscape, including the strategically significant Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap, created ideal conditions for

intelligence operations and the positioning of military assets. The Arctic Ocean was also a potential pathway for Soviet submarines and bombers, amplifying NATO's security concerns. In response to rising military activity and perceived threats, NATO built a strong defensive presence in the region. During the Cold War, this involved deploying early warning systems, establishing military bases, and enhancing surveillance capabilities, all aimed at deterring Soviet forces and protecting NATO's interests in the Arctic while ensuring the security of vital transatlantic supply routes critical to Western defence. The US and Canada also established countless radar and air defence networks like the DEW (Distant Early Warning) for the detection of soviet aircraft and missile launches from the North.



Svalbard treaty:

Svalbard is a Norwegian archipelago that spans an area roughly twice the size of Belgium. It lies approximately 650 kilometres north of mainland Norway and about 1,000 kilometres from the North Pole. The treaty, signed in 1920 although acknowledged the Svalbard as Norwegian territory, allowed all signatory nations to have access to the archipelago for economic and exploitative purposes. This led to competing interests in both mining and fisheries. Moreover, Norway also claims the 200 nautical mile EEZ around the archipelago but nations dispute that claiming that the treaty only applied to the archipelago itself and not the waters surrounding it.

Russia's presence in the island increases day by day as they plan to develop an international science complex. Just two weeks prior to this announcement, Norway had issued a comprehensive White Paper outlining its policy regarding Svalbard, which reinforced the country's commitment to maintaining control over activities on the archipelago. A key point in this document was the clear statement that the University Centre of Svalbard (UNIS) would remain the only institution allowed to provide higher education within the territory under Norwegian sovereignty. By taking this firm stance, Norway aimed to consolidate its authority over the educational

infrastructure in Svalbard, ensuring that no other foreign or private institutions could establish a presence in the region. This decision was part of a broader strategy to assert sovereignty and manage international interests surrounding Svalbard, which has increasingly become a focal point in Arctic policy due to its geopolitical significance. This increased tensions between Norway and Russia.



Russia Flag planting (2007):

Russia has staked its claim on billions of dollars worth of oil and gas reserves in the Arctic after two of its submarines ventured into the North Pole and planted a metre high flag in its sea bed. This signalled growing geo-political interests in the Arctic's resource potential.

Military presence of countries:

- **USA:** The race between US, Russia, Canada, Norway and Denmark for the exploitation of natural resources in those areas has fuelled tensions over drilling rights and environmental concerns. The US initiated by exploring Alaska's Arctic region simultaneously when Russia opened up areas in the Barents and Kara seas for drilling.
- **Russia and NATO:** The Russian Federation, after the 2010s increased its military presence in the region by a great margin to re-activate its Cold War era bases and build new ones along its Northern coast. NATO nations, in response including USA, Canada and Norway began conducting joint military exercises to counter Russia's presence. These included operations "Cold response" and "Trident Juncture".

Environmental & Indigenous threats:

The rapidly transforming Arctic environment is being significantly impacted by three key interconnected issues: climate change, shifts in biological diversity, and the buildup of toxic pollutants. Climate change, the most prominent factor, is largely driven by human activities far from the Arctic, particularly in southern regions. These environmental changes have profound cultural, socio-economic, and health consequences for the Arctic's inhabitants, especially Indigenous communities, and are also detrimental to the region's wildlife.



Human-induced climate change, primarily a result of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, is caused by the accumulation of gases in the atmosphere. This process, largely fueled by fossil energy consumption since the Industrial Revolution and widespread deforestation, traps heat that would otherwise dissipate into space, leading to global warming and the disruption of Arctic ecosystems.

EFFECTS OF EMERGING THREATS IN THE ARTIC

Global warming: The thawing of Permafrost is leading to the release of greenhouse gases such as Methane and Carbon Dioxide, which is leading to a further increase in climate change. Persistent organic pollutants are also being released, such as DDT, PCBs and dioxins. Both animals on land and in the sea are being affected by this too, albeit in different ways. Animals on land are suffering due to the drastic change in temperatures, which is threatening to wipe out entire populations of animals that can only survive in extremely cold temperatures. Marine life is suffering due to the acidification of the oceans, which is being caused by the absorption of the harmful gases that are being released by Permafrost.

The lives of the indigenous community: The lifestyles of communities belonging to the Arctic have been drastically altered as a result of the aforementioned emerging threats to the Arctic. They have had to change their diets due to the decreased availability of certain animals (as a result of climate change) and have even had to alter their hunting routes due to less and less ice freezing over as time goes on. There has been an increase in exposure to toxic substances due to climate change, which is not safe for these people, and on top of this all, they are at risk of losing their culture and traditions due to the drastic changes in their environment.



Strain on international relations: As global warming continues to lead to the melting of glaciers, more and more pathways for trade are being established. This can be taken in both a positive and negative sense. The positive aspect is that it makes it easier for countries to transport minerals and resources, they're mining and extracting from the arctic, back to their nations. On the other hand, this is also leading to a rush to grab as much land and as many resources as possible, without any regard for sustainability in the future.

Chances of accidents: Due to the increasing haste to begin to extract resources, there is a higher chance that oil spills will occur which will further damage the ecosystem of the region. A lack of efficient and well-established maritime security can also lead to accidents between ships and transportation vessels, besides having the ability to negatively impact the environment of the Arctic.

Infrastructural implications: A plethora of risks are associated with planning infrastructure projects in the Arctic. Sustainability must be taken into account alongside the wishes of the indigenous population, and due to the melting of permafrost, many areas of the Arctic aren't even safe for workers.

PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Arctic Council Initiatives:

Launched a multitude of initiatives for climate and environmental reclamation focusing on sustainable development, and environmental protection, especially targeting issues like permafrost melt, biodiversity loss, and pollution.



Regional cooperation initiatives were also launched, such as:

(a) Search and Rescue agreement (2011): The Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement, formally known as the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic, is the first binding treaty established among Arctic Council member states. Signed on May 12, 2011, in Nuuk, Greenland, it aims to enhance coordination for search and rescue operations in the Arctic region. This agreement underscores the increasing economic significance of the Arctic, driven by improved accessibility due to climate change. It officially came into effect on January 19, 2013, after all signatories ratified it.

Other initiatives include the **Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response Agreement (2013)**, and the **Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (2017)**. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, All Arctic council activities were either paused or dissolved.

(b) The UNCLOS: UNCLOS, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, is an international treaty that establishes a comprehensive legal framework governing the rights and responsibilities of states concerning the use of seas, oceans, and their resources. It addresses a wide range of issues, including navigational rights, territorial sea boundaries, economic zones, the legal status of seabed resources beyond national jurisdiction, passage through narrow straits, conservation and management of marine life, environmental protection, and marine research. Notably, it also includes a binding dispute resolution mechanism for conflicts between states. According to Article 38(a) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, treaties like UNCLOS are recognized as a primary source of international law.



Treaties are legally binding for the states that sign them and represent a clear commitment to international obligations. Their formation and implementation are governed by the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

(c) The Polar Code: The Polar code is the Inaugural international maritime agreement tailored for the polar regions, established to safeguard shipping activities and mitigate environmental risks in these fragile and remote areas. Under the auspices of the United Nation, it was adopted by members of the international maritime organisation (IMO) and came into force in 2017 (January)

The code introduced binding regulation focused on safety and pollution prevention specifically for large cargo ships and cruise vessels exceeding 500 gross tons operating in polar waters.

CASE STUDIES

Effect of climate change on the Arctic Tundra: Within the Arctic Tundra, the composition of vegetation has begun to be altered, which is as a result of the release of greenhouse gases in the region. The general population of wildlife has also been affected as Caribou (a type of reindeer) has been forced to adapt, due to the increased production of parasites and a reduction in the vegetation that they rely on. Changes in the ecosystem are also affecting the general public as their food security is also being threatened as a result of the current status-quo within the Tundra.



Oil and Gas Exploration in the Chukchi Sea: The Chukchi Sea is a prime location for the exploration and extraction of resources, however indigenous communities expressed their discomfort of this idea, due to the fact that it would affect their hunting and fishing. Many legal discussions have taken place over this topic however it still remains undecided which path should be chosen. It is also an added concern that oil spills could be detrimental and threaten the habitats of marine life as well.

Increased mining activity in Greenland: Greenland is a region rich in mineral resources, with rare elements being found there, including gold and uranium. The emerging threats associated with this are also significant. Areas cleared for mining are disruptive towards local ecosystems, and extraction processes involve toxic chemicals, and when those are combined with the greenhouse gases already being produced in the Arctic, this can be detrimental to workers, marine life and even the native populations. Indigenous communities fear exploitation so it's imperative for them to be given a say in their situation and discuss how sustainable it is.

QARMA

Questions a Resolutions Must Answer:

Q1. How does NATO plan to address increased military presence of key actors like the Russian Federation and China in the Arctic?

Q.2 How does NATO plan to eliminate military threats from non-Arctic nations in the region?

Q.3 How can NATO enhance its presence in the Arctic to deter aggression or mitigate these threats?



Q.4 How will NATO ensure that there's a balance between military presence and avoiding an arms race in the region?

Q.5 What are the implications of melting ice caps for NATO's operational capabilities e.g., new shipping routes?

Q.6 How will NATO cooperate with Arctic Council nations on environmental protection while still maintaining its strategic interests?

Q.7 How will NATO coordinate with non-member Arctic states (e.g., Sweden, Finland before NATO membership) to enhance security and stability in the region?

Q.8 Will NATO establish joint military exercises with Arctic and non-Arctic states to promote cooperative security?

Q.9 How will NATO address the threat of cyberattacks and hybrid warfare targeting critical Arctic infrastructure?

Q.10 How will NATO navigate the increasing economic competition over Arctic resources (oil, gas, minerals) without escalating tensions?

Q.11 Will NATO respond to the increase in commercial shipping through Arctic waters due to melting ice?

