**Forum:** GA 1 – Disarmament and International Security

**Issue:** Preventing conflicts over energy resources in the Arctic

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**Introduction**

Nowadays, the world mostly depends on fossil fuels to function. The Arctic is full of these natural resources, and some reserves are yet to be discovered. This fact could lead to a major conflict in the future when these resources are needed and/or discovered. It could also lead to other countries having to comply with the demands of the Arctic countries if these resources are desperately needed. It is in the interest of the Arctic countries to exploit these resources while protecting the ecosystem and developing renewable sources of energy. Furthermore, the arctic also has large mineral reserves, as well as aquatic ecosystems which are responsible for 10% of the world's capture of fish. It is important to note that the exploitation of these resources can greatly harm the environment and that many countries do not have laws or regulations to protect the ecosystem from exploitation.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**The Arctic**

According to National Geographic: "The Arctic is the northernmost region of Earth. Most scientists define the Arctic as the area within the Arctic Circle, a line of latitude about 66.5° north of the Equator. Within this circle are the Arctic ocean basin and the northern parts of Scandinavia, Russia, Canada, Greenland, and the U.S. state of Alaska." (Evers, J, 2016, para. 1)

**Arctic Council**

In the official Arctic Council site, it is stated that "The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic." (Arctic Council, “Home”, “Who We Are”, para. 1) It is integrated by Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States. Furthermore, it recognizes six organizations representing indigenous peoples as Permanent Participants.

**Sustainable Development Working Group**

The Arctic Council Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) was created in September 1998 by the Arctic Council, which main goals are, according to its site: "To propose and adopt steps to be taken by the Arctic States to advance sustainable development in the Arctic, including opportunities to protect and enhance the environment and the economies, culture and health of Indigenous Peoples and Arctic communities, as well as to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions of Arctic communities as a whole." (SDWG, para. 3)

**Energy Resources**

They are any resource (such as coal, oil or gas) or natural condition (weather patterns or condition of an area) that can be exploited with the purpose of generating energy, especially electricity. There are two main groups of energy resources, renewable and non-renewable. Renewable sources of energy replenish themselves in a human time scale, while non-renewable resources are finite.

**Fossil Fuels**

Fossil fuels are naturally formed fuels made from the remains of living organisms. These fuels can be used as a source of energy. The most commonly used fossil fuels are coal, oil and gas.

**General Overview**

According to the SDWG Report on Arctic Energy: “To date, petroleum production in the Arctic has mainly taken place in Alaska and Northern Russia, although Canada and Norway have some production from the far north and potential is being explored in Iceland and Greenland. Around 97% of current total Arctic oil and gas production is from onshore developments in Russia and Alaska. However, exploration and production in Arctic offshore regions is expected to increase.” (SDWG, p. 7, para. 6)

**Historical Background**

In the 1970s, the famous Middle East Oil Embargo occurred, massively affecting the economies of many countries since fossil fuels are of extreme necessity. Since then, it has become an objective of many states to prepare for a reduction in supply or an increase in the price of oil. These objectives encourage the exploration and exploitation of the natural resources of the arctic.

**The Arctic fossil fuel reserves**

According to the SDWG Report on Arctic Energy: “The Arctic shares of undiscovered oil and gas are estimated to be as high as 20.5% and 27.6% of the total global resources, respectively. When total proven reserves and undiscovered oil resources are considered, the Arctic represents approximately 13% of the world reserves.” (SDWG, p. 7, para. 7) There are many reserves of fossil fuels that have not yet been discovered that could lead to future conflict when they are discovered and/or needed.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

* **The Arctic Council:** The Arctic Council mostly focuses on protecting the natural resources from the Arctic, as well as it;s ecosystem. Recently, they are starting to invest more in energy: from fossil fuels to renewable sources.
* **The Russian Federation:**Russia contains the world's biggest natural gas reserves, the second-largest coal reserves, and the eighth largest oil reserves. This, and many other resources, add up to 30% of the world's natural resources.(Jeffrey Hays, 2008)
* **United States of America:**The United States of America has the biggest coal reserves in the world and is the world’s third-biggest producer and consumer of coal. The state of Alaska is rich in natural resources, having gold, coal, natural gasses, oil and zinc. It is in the interest of the USA to exploit the natural resources that it possesses.
* **Canada:** Canada owns multiple energy resources such as oil, coal and natural gas. It also possesses huge amounts of minerals, such as gold, silver, nickel, copper, iron uranium, diamonds and more. Canada also possesses timber reserves. Canada contains about 10% of the world’s proven oil reserves. (Government of Canada’s Statistics, 2013)
* **The Kingdom of Denmark:** The Kingdom of Denmark possesses oil and natural gas. The country also contains fertile soil and fishing industries. They also have a small mining industry and contain minerals such as chalk, limestone, gravel, and clay. (Benjamin Elisha Sawe, 2019)
* **Finland:** Finland has a strong mining industry and contains many minerals such as copper, iron, zinc, lead, nickel, limestone gold and silver. (G. P. Thomas, 2012)
* **Iceland:** Iceland possesses a strong fishing industry, fertile land, and owns renewable energy sources, including geothermal and hydroelectric power.
* **Norway:** Norway has a large petroleum and natural gas industry and also has some minerals such as titanium, nickel, iron ore, coal, zinc, steel, copper, cobalt, cadmium and aluminium. (G. P. Thomas, 2012)
* **Sweden:** Sweden contains many minerals such as arsenic, gold, iron ore, lead, copper, tungsten, silver, uranium, and zinc. It also possesses oil and natural gas. (Sharon Omondi, 2019)

**Latest Events**

The Arctic Energy Summit 2017[[1]](#footnote-0) was published, in which the Arctic council discussed the oil and gas industries, the renewable energies, the regulations of these industries, the protection of the ecosystem, the financing of the project and more. Since then, there have been attempts to create laws and regulations regarding this issue, as well as the development of the energy industries.

**Possible Solutions**

The general consensus is that the resources of the arctic must be exploited by the Arctic countries while respecting the ecosystem, the environment and the rights of the indigenous people of the region. It is also important for the arctic countries to invest in the extraction of minerals, renewable sources of energy, marine life, tourism and more; developing the area.

**Useful reference material**

* SDWG Report on Arctic Energy <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/bitstream/handle/11374/2460/ArcticEnergyReport-2009.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
* Arctic Council official site https://arctic-council.org/en/
* 2017 Arctic Energy Summit Finland FINAL REPORT https://www.sdwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AES\_Finland\_final\_report\_proof2.pdf

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1. [Arctic Energy Summit 2017](https://www.sdwg.org/activities/sdwg-projects-2017-2019/arctic-energy-summit-2017/) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)