

**Forum:** The Fourth General Assembly

**Issue:** Territorial Claims in the Antarctic Region

**Student Officer:** Varsha Bharadwaj

**Position:** Deputy Chair of the Fourth General Assembly

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## **Introduction**

The Antarctic continent represents humanity's last great terrestrial frontier, a vast expanse of ice and rock that has shaped global climate patterns and international relations since its discovery in 1820. This massive landmass, encompassing approximately 14 million square kilometers, stands as a testament to both the potential for international cooperation and the persistent challenges of managing shared global resources. The continent's unique status as a global commons, combined with its crucial role in Earth's climate systems and its vast potential resources, has created one of the most complex geopolitical situations in modern history.

The governance of Antarctica presents one of the most unique diplomatic arrangements in human history, with seven nations maintaining territorial claims while operating within a framework that effectively "freezes" these assertions. This delicate balance, established through the Antarctic Treaty System of 1959, has created a remarkable example of international cooperation while simultaneously preserving competing national interests. The treaty's success in maintaining peace and fostering scientific collaboration stands as a testament to the possibility of nations working together despite conflicting territorial ambitions.

As we progress into the 21st century, Antarctica faces unprecedented challenges that threaten to upset this carefully maintained equilibrium. Climate change continues to reshape the continent's physical landscape, potentially exposing new resources and shipping routes while endangering its fragile ecosystems. Technological advances have made previously inaccessible areas reachable while growing global resource demands have intensified interest in the continent's potential mineral and hydrocarbon deposits. These developments occur against a backdrop of shifting global power dynamics, with emerging nations seeking to establish their presence and influence in the region.

The intersection of environmental preservation, scientific research, resource potential, and geopolitical interests creates a complex web of challenges that the international community must navigate. As we approach the 2048 review of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic

Treaty, questions about the continent's future governance and use have become increasingly pressing. The decisions made in the coming decades will determine not only the fate of Antarctica but also impact global climate systems, sea levels, and international relations for generations to come.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

#### **Territorial Claim**

A formal assertion of sovereignty over a certain geographic region, encompassing its land, resources, and waterways, is known as a territorial claim. Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom are the seven countries that have made overlapping territorial claims in the Antarctic.

#### **Antarctic Treaty System:**

The Antarctic Treaty System is a 1959 global agreement that declares Antarctica a scientific preserve and revokes territorial claims there. It forbids military action, encourages environmental preservation, and advances international collaboration in scientific research. The region's peace and stability have been preserved in large part because of the pact.

#### **Geopolitical Interests:**

A nation's strategic interests encompass its military, political, and economic goals. Geopolitical concerns in the Antarctic environment might include strategic positioning, scientific research, and resource access. Antarctica, the southernmost continent of Earth, is strategically important, especially for shipping lanes and possible mineral deposits.

#### **Resource Potential:**

The possibility of important resources including minerals, oil, and gas might be found in the Antarctic area. Although the use of these resources is now forbidden under the Antarctic Treaty System, technical developments and shifting global energy dynamics may make them more attractive. The possibility of resource exploitation might intensify territorial conflicts and jeopardize the treaty system's framework of cooperation.

#### **Scientific Research:**

The study of the Antarctic environment, including its climate, geology, biology, and oceanography. Scientific research in Antarctica provides critical insights into global climate change, ocean currents, and biodiversity. The continent's pristine environment and unique ecosystems make it a valuable natural laboratory for scientists from around the world.

### **Environmental Protection:**

The preservation of Antarctica's unique ecosystems and fragile environment. The Antarctic Treaty System and subsequent protocols, such as the Protocol on Environmental Protection, have established strict environmental regulations to minimize human impact on the continent. However, as climate change and other anthropogenic pressures intensify, the challenge of protecting Antarctica's delicate balance becomes increasingly complex.

### **Key Issues**

Studying the Antarctic environment, including its climate, geology, biology, and oceanography, is known as scientific research. Scientific study in Antarctica gives crucial insights into global climate change, ocean currents, and biodiversity. Scientists from all over the globe find the continent to be a great natural laboratory because of its clean environment and distinctive ecosystems.

### **Environmental Protection**

The preservation of Antarctica's unique ecosystems and vulnerable environment. Strict environmental rules have been put in place by the Antarctic Treaty System and later protocols, such the Protocol on Environmental Protection, to reduce the effect of humans on the continent. However, as climate change and other manmade pressures rise, the issue of safeguarding Antarctica's fragile equilibrium becomes increasingly challenging.

### **Resource Exploitation**

Mineral resources, such as hydrocarbons and rare earth elements, have a lot of promise in the Antarctic area. Interest in exploiting the Antarctic is growing as the world's need for these resources increases. But the possibility of resource exploitation can intensify territorial conflicts and jeopardize the treaty system's framework of cooperation.

A robust framework for environmental protection has been developed by the Antarctic Treaty System and associated protocols. However, the fragile equilibrium of the Antarctic environment is coming under more and more strain as human activity in the area increases. The continent's ice sheets and marine habitats are particularly at risk from climate change.

Addressing Antarctica's problems requires ongoing international collaboration. Nations can guarantee the long-term conservation of the continent's distinctive ecosystem and scientific significance by cooperating. To secure the survival of our beautiful continent, scientific research, environmental conservation, and international collaboration must be given top priority.

### **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

#### **Chile**

Since the early 20th century, these nations have all had overlapping territorial claims in Antarctica. Historical research, geographic closeness, and perceived strategic significance serve as the foundation for their assertions. Underlying tensions and nationalistic feelings still exist, even though the Antarctic Treaty System has essentially put an end to their territorial ambitions.

#### **Russia**

Russia has had strong geopolitical interests in Antarctica as a world superpower. Through scientific programs and research stations, Russia continues to have a significant presence in the continent. Occasionally, their competition, which frequently appears in other geopolitical spheres, permeates Antarctic issues.

#### **The United States**

Similar to Russia, The United States has had strong geopolitical interests in Antarctica as a world superpower. Through scientific programs and research stations, Russia continues to have a significant presence in the continent. Occasionally, their competition, which frequently appears in other geopolitical spheres, permeates Antarctic issues.

#### **China**

In Antarctic affairs, China has become a significant participant. In an effort to become a significant player in the area, it has made significant investments in infrastructure development and scientific research. Concerns over possible resource exploitation and geopolitical competition have been raised by China's increasing influence.

### **Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting**

The main decision-making body for the Antarctic Treaty System; in order to debate and coordinate Antarctica-related policies, it brings together representatives from the 54 Treaty Parties. The ATCM is essential to preserving global collaboration and guaranteeing the continent's peaceful use.

### The International Scientific Community

Researchers from all over the globe study in Antarctica, advancing our knowledge of biology, geology, climate change, and other subjects. When it comes to influencing world policy on Antarctica and promoting its preservation, the scientific community is essential.

### Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
14/12/1959	Signing of the Antarctic Treaty	Established Antarctica as a zone for peaceful scientific research, banning military activity and suspending territorial sovereignty claims. This prevented conflicts over territorial claims but left unresolved ownership disputes.
23/06/1961	Antarctic Treaty came into force	Strengthened cooperation among claimant and non-claimant countries, ensuring that no new claims would be recognized while the treaty is in effect.
18/09/1983	Formation of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)	Set international guidelines for the conservation of marine life around Antarctica, highlighting the intersection of territorial claims with ecological concerns.
01/07/1991	Signing of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty	Designated Antarctica as a 'natural reserve, devoted to peace and science,' prohibiting mining activities, which limited economic exploitation of claimed territories.

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14/01/1998	Norway expands territorial claim to Bouvet Island	Highlighted ongoing tensions as countries sought to reinforce claims to Antarctic-adjacent territories, despite the treaty's restrictions.
02/12/2002	Australia submits revised map of its Antarctic territorial claims	Emphasized the challenge of defining territorial extents under the Antarctic Treaty framework, sparking debates among signatories.
18/03/2013	Argentina intensifies lobbying for territorial recognition	Reflects the enduring disputes between Argentina and the UK over Antarctic territories linked to the Falkland Islands conflict.
16/05/2019	Russia increases presence in Antarctica through new research stations	Signaled a strategic interest in maintaining influence over Antarctic governance, under the guise of scientific research.
24/06/2021	China announces new Antarctic exploration initiatives	Raised concerns among treaty members about China's intentions, given its rapid expansion of infrastructure in the region.
04/09/2023	Calls for review of the Antarctic Treaty System	Some nations began pushing for treaty revisions as the 2048 review period approaches, driven by geopolitical and resource interests.

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

The Antarctic continent, a land of extreme cold and vast, pristine landscapes, has been the subject of territorial claims by several nations. This unique region, governed by the Antarctic Treaty System, has seen various attempts to assert sovereignty over specific sectors.

**The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)**

The ATS, signed in 1959, established a framework for international cooperation in Antarctica. It set aside territorial claims, designating the continent as a scientific preserve. While the treaty effectively halted territorial disputes, it did not address the underlying geopolitical interests and resource potential that continue to simmer beneath the surface.

### **Challenges to the ATS**

Despite the success of the ATS, several challenges threaten its long-term viability. As global demand for resources increases, the potential for mineral and hydrocarbon reserves in Antarctica becomes a tempting prospect. This could lead to renewed territorial disputes and environmental degradation. Additionally, the rapid pace of climate change is altering the Antarctic landscape, opening up new shipping routes and exposing previously inaccessible resources. This could intensify geopolitical competition and strain the delicate balance established by the ATS. Furthermore, rising geopolitical tensions between major powers could spill over into the Antarctic region, as countries seek to assert their influence and secure strategic advantage.

### **Possible Solution**

#### **Strengthening the ATS**

Expanding the scope of the ATS to address emerging issues like climate change and resource exploitation, enforcing stricter environmental regulations and monitoring mechanisms, and promoting international cooperation and scientific collaboration is crucial.

#### **Developing a Comprehensive Resource Management Regime**

Establishing a global framework for the sustainable management of Antarctic resources, including minerals, fisheries, and marine ecosystems, implementing strict environmental impact assessments and conservation measures, and ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from resource exploitation is essential.

#### **Promoting Diplomacy and Dialogue**

Encouraging open and transparent dialogue between all stakeholders, building trust and fostering cooperation through joint scientific research and capacity-building initiatives, and resolving disputes peacefully through diplomatic means and international arbitration is vital. By adopting these measures,

the international community can safeguard the future of Antarctica as a global commons and a symbol of international cooperation.