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WELCOME LETTER FROM SECRETARY GENERAL

Dear delegates,

I, the secretary general of the conference, would like to welcome you all to AZIZMUN'25. It is an honor for me to be able to present you this work that we have been preparing for months. My team has worked tirelessly to hopefully bring you one of the best MUN experiences you will ever attend.

In our UNEP committee, you are the ones deciding on the future of the Arctic. With the Arctic becoming an important zone in global politics, many different agreements have been made and international conferences have been held. In this committee, you will be studying these agreements and their long-term effects deciding whether or not they will work in protecting the environment. I believe if you come prepared enough, you will succeed in this committee. I urge all delegates to also do research outside of this study guide.

We are eager to see you and can't wait for the debates we will have. As a team, we will do our best to make this conference unforgettable for everyone. I wish you all the best with your preparations!

Best regards,

Melis KARAALI
Secretary General of AZIZMUN'25

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WELCOME LETTER FROM DIRECTOR GENERAL

Esteemed Delegates ,

My name is Ecem Yaren Ekici, and I am the Director General of AZİZMUN'25. It is truly a pleasure for me to welcome you to our conference. We've been working on this event for a long time, and I put a lot of effort into preparing the study guide for the UNEP committee. I paid attention to every detail to ensure that everything is as effective as possible for you. That's why it is so special to see you here, and I am genuinely excited about this moment.

The United Nations Environment Programme is more than just about environmental discussions — it is a space where the future of our planet is shaped through collaboration, awareness, and responsibility. This year, we will focus on one of the most critical environmental issues of the Cold War era: the militarization of the polar regions. You will discuss how global powers have used ecologically fragile zones for political purposes, and explore ways to prevent similar threats in the future. Every discussion will be an opportunity to understand our impact on nature and to think of sustainable solutions.

I wish you an unforgettable experience, meaningful debates, and plenty of inspiration throughout the conference. If you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I'm looking forward to meeting all of you and working together in our committee!

Best regards,

Ecem Yaren EKİCİ
Director General of AZİZMUN'25

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WELCOME LETTER FROM UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we extend a warm welcome to each of you to the United Nations Environment Programme of AZIZMUN 2025.

As your Under-Secretary-General, I am committed to ensuring that your experience will be both memorable and enriching, characterized by passionate and constructive debates of an exceptional academic standard within a collegial and collaborative atmosphere. Throughout our sessions, you will be called upon to address the complex and pressing issues related to the militarization of the Arctic, which poses significant threats to international peace and stability at the regional level.

This Study Guide has been crafted as a valuable resource to assist you in navigating and organizing your research on this critical topic. It provides a foundational overview of the multifaceted issues at hand. However, it is essential to conduct your own thorough research on both the topic and your country's specific position, as this independent investigation will be vital for gaining a comprehensive understanding.

I am confident that you will deliver well-structured, articulate position papers and engage in constructive dialogues during the conference. While I expect all delegates to demonstrate respect, dedication, and enthusiasm, I also encourage you to fully embrace this opportunity and share your passion, knowledge, and appreciation for debate.

Throughout this experience, we remain at your disposal to address any questions or concerns that may arise. If this endeavor entails strategy, negotiation, cooperation, and preparation, we are here to provide guidance and inspiration for your next steps. I wish you all the best and look forward to meeting you in person at AZIZMUN.

Warm regards,

Belinay BAŞ
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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created after the 1972 Stockholm Conference as the major UN body in charge of international environmental affairs. UNEP encourages sustainable development, prevents impending environmental crises, and strives for the co-existence of humankind and nature. Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, UNEP determines existent environmental problems at the global level and gives the governments awareness of potential solutions.

As for the UNEP mission, environmental issues are in the main especially scientific investigations with sustainable solutions over the long term. Also, these programmes cover many issues, from sustainable utilization of natural resources to biodiversity conservation, to climate change and improving air and water quality. UNEP helps countries, civil society, and the academic communities in strengthening environmental awareness and translating policies into actions.

At AZIZMUN '25, the UNEP committee provides an important platform for discussions on how much environmental concerns overlapped with political and military occurrences during the Cold War. The agenda item, "Militarization of the Polar Regions During the Cold War," is directly aligned with UNEP principal core values for the environment, global cooperation, and sustainability. Within these parameters, the committee will operate under the 1980 time frame, when a small degree of global environmental consciousness was beginning to be recognized but was decidedly overshadowed by the climate of tension in international relations throughout the Cold War.

INTRODUCTION

The superpowers during the Cold War converted the polar regions, specifically the Arctic and Antarctica, into strategic areas of interest. Construction of military bases, nuclear tests, radar systems, and submarine deployments in any case on these fragile ecosystems could then escalate political tensions and bring a denouncement to their environmental degradation. The focus of this committee will then be to assess in detail the environmental impact of militarization in such countries and the means available for states to mitigate such impacts.

Delegates shall be expected to broaden their discussions to include the environmental consequences of military operations and assessments of the effectiveness of relevant international legal frameworks and conclude by articulating any new proposals that may be made to promote enhanced global cooperation in environmental protection. Discussions will cover existing treaties such as the Antarctic Treaty, while new treaties will be proposed to respond to challenges posed to polar ecosystems today and in the future.

The UNEP committee will therefore address contemporary environmental aggressions under the guise of peace, scientific cooperation, and international diplomacy. Member States will have an opportunity to comprehend not just environmental matters but also on the historical ties between environmental factors and security issues in the world.

AGENDA ITEM: The Militarization of the Polar Regions During the Cold War

Indeed, after a long history during the 20th century, the polar regions have emerged as sites of geopolitical interest. These were once remote and untouched areas, and now these have acquired strategic interest as well as scientific worth by great powers. Such areas have been seen really well for their potential as future natural resources. Such areas which received the culmination of interest during the Cold War; ideological divides and military arms races by the two superpowers- the United States and the Soviet Union- turned even these continents into a stage of rivalry in all spheres. The agenda thus deals with the query as to how and to which these regions were militarized and what consequent transformations had to the environment and the political community emerged during this tense cold war period.

Right after World War II, the Cold War started, which embroiled Washington and Moscow in petty squabbles. NATO members, on the one hand, and Warsaw pact nations, on the other, sought to extend their strategic outreach in the early years of Cold War. Close geographically, Arctic proved to be not so, with the United States and the Soviet Union, in terms of distance; it could serve as a basis for early-warning radar systems, military airfields, and submarine routes. Coupled with the missile technology development, it also became a feasible area to launch or cross intercontinental ballistic missiles. Under such conditions, military installations began to emerge across northern Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and in the Soviet Arctic.

Antarctica was understood in a sense as strategic more than anything else. As to Antarctic continent, it would not put up with any military conquest; it never could. Sharpness of climate and remoteness shall not permit any takeover by military means. Given its size and promise of scientific endeavors, the territory has drawn many countries. The United Kingdom, United States, Soviet Union, Argentina, and Chile are among such countries. All countries had a conflicting territorial claim over Antarctica. During that time of competition in territory in the Cold War period, it was feared that Antarctica might easily be dragged into the worldwide conflict or be used as a site for nuclear tests and military reconnaissance.

The signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959 to ban the militarization of Antarctica was arguably the most blunt of these measures; the treaty entered into force in 1961. Antarctica was thus set aside as an area for peace and science and was prohibited from any military activity or nuclear testing on its territory. This treaty represented one of the rare occasions in which cooperation persisted during the Cold War amongst the United States and the Soviet Union, which were original signatories. The treaty was meant to curb militarization in principle even if the definition of 'non-military' looked all too easily to encompass uses of dual-use scientific equipment, military logistics support, and persons perhaps connected in some way with institutions of defense masquerading as scientists.

Much less so for the Arctic, a dimension of opposite military action prevailed in the Cold War. The U.S. construction of its Distant Early Warning Line, a series of radar stations in the northernmost territories of North America to watch for incoming Soviet bombers, contrast with the concurrent Soviet construction of military entities like Arctic bases and icebreaker fleets. And beneath the Arctic ice, both sides patrolled the region with nuclear submarines using it as a covert strategic corridor.

It can be said that while all were driven by military-security considerations, these have had other far-reaching environmental implications on the other hand. Nuclear submarines have increased the risk of radioactive contamination, especially when accidental spills occur. Radar stations and military outposts were a direct affront to the survival of Arctic wildlife. Ultimately, the exploratory mission to drill and extract fossil fuels, to generate chemical waste, and to dump military garbage in polar environments that heal from ecological damage much slower than do temperate ecosystems-had far reaching consequences.

The concerns around the environment became much more critical in the 1980s, which is where it will draw all its attention as a committee. The climate of the Cold War at this time is what really put into place that much concern into environmental consciousness, being part of the hatch to be treated as a global issue. The scientific knowledge of sensitive polar ecosystems was developed, and the military potential threats against ice sheets, marine life, and indigenous communities were starting to gain notice. However, it was more of an issue that had little priority consulted within military strategies for the general protection of the environment overall.

On top of this, international law was limping in terms of governance of the polar territories. Antarctica proved to be at the background of cooperation at the South Pole through the Antarctica Treaty System with neither general support nor strong enforcement mechanisms. The Arctic was an area of vulnerable militarized activities and resources exploitation under a confused mix of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) lacking a uniform legal regime again.

This was the real turning point of the 1980s. The arms race sharpened, rapidly blooming military technologies, and the first flickers of international environmental norms began to shape the consciousness of the globe: will the polar regions remain areas of peace and scientific advancement or will they again become new theaters for political and military confrontation?

Through this valley of decision this committee would have to traverse. Superpowers of the Cold War will really sit out the balancing act of costs and benefits when it comes down to securing the fragile ecosystems of the planet. They would explore the strengths of existing treaties and create recommendations on how to improve these. They would also analyze how scientific cooperation promotes peace and discharge responsibilities that the developed and developing can have toward the environment.

Delegates will tackle through questioning on these themes the legacy of Cold War militarization while reflecting on how present and future environmental challenges such as climate change and melting ice caps are dictated by choices made during the time of Cold War. Polar militarization is an issue which is now part of history; its effects, however, continue to be felt to this day. Knowing the historical context is the first step on the path toward a more sustainable and peaceful future of these in-need territories.

SUB TOPICS

1. Nuclear Armament and the Polar Regions

The Arctic and Antarctic regions became during the whole Cold War the scene of a very quiet nuclear rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. This region, the Arctic, came to be an extremely important area of nuclear strategy. The two powers were using ice regions as locations for placing submarines and missiles, radar systems, and other military installations.

The United States stationed nuclear-capable bombers at sites like the Thule Air Bases, Greenland. A bomber crash in 1968 near the base further exemplified the dangerous nature of such deployments by causing the loss of four nuclear bombs. In turn, the Soviet Union also deployed nuclear submarines under Arctic ice, thus providing itself with both greater strategic stealth and mobility.

Opportunity was given to present the polar regions as being part of a global military strategy rather than merely environmental treasures. Radioactive contamination and long-term environmental harm from nuclear activity in these delicate ecosystems posed serious questions as far as long-term concerns are concerned.

2. Establishment of Military Bases in Polar Regions

The Arctic, along with bordering nations, such as the United States, Canada, the USSR, and Denmark (via Greenland), saw military bases establish during the Cold War to improve surveillance and defense capabilities, as well as possible offensive operations. These countries established bases in polar regions as early as the mid-1950s, when the Distant Early Warning Line (DEW Line) project launched its construction of radar stations across northern Canada and over the selected few regions in Alaska to provide early detection for Soviet bombers.

Greenland, northern Norway, and Alaska were among the zones built up as Cold War military installations. Vast naval bases and nuclear submarine facilities turned the Arctic into a theatre of military contention in the USSR.

On the other hand, Article I of the Antarctic Treaty expressly prohibits the establishment of military bases in Antarctica. The entire continent is demilitarized and given fully to scientific pursuits. Some such bases were cloaked defenses of military establishments, and military logistical support was frequently reinterpreted as scientific missions, ironically blurring demilitarization lines and raising legal and ethical dilemmas.

3. Long-Term Environmental Impacts

In the later decades of the Cold War period, it became increasingly accepted that military operations in polar areas had environmental impacts. The ecosystems were destroyed with the presented equipment, chemical waste from radar stations, and the environmental damage made by nuclear accidents.

The USA continues to dump nuclear waste into the Arctic Ocean until the early eighties. Chemical wastes were dumped by the U.S. military bases into Alaska and the northern territories of Canada contaminating soil and ground waters. Also, several accidents of nuclear submarines or abandonment have resulted in the radioactive threat of the Arctic waters for an indefinite time.

The increased visibility of military personnel is little more than a chemical-radioactive pollution threat; it will be borne by the wildlife: polar bears, seals, and whales. Some hidden contaminants flooded previously non-visible by melting ice, triggering new environmental remediation projects.

4. International Law and the Antarctic Treaties

Antarctica is unique in international law. In the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, military activities, nuclear testing, and radioactive waste disposal are prohibited on the continent, and the region may only be used for peaceful and scientific purposes.

That treaty is sometimes heralded as a rare instance of Cold War collaboration, although not all signatories invested the same in environmental protection. Some countries felt that the treaty was a way of "freezing" territorial claims instead of in a long-term engagement and commitment to conservation. The United States and the Soviet Union maintained military presence in the form of personnel and logistics under the pretext of research.

Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic is devoid of any comprehensive binding treaty. All that comes close to governing it are national claims over exclusive economic zones (EEZs) with little international oversight. The demand for Arctic oil and gas reserves grew in the 1980s and exposed very serious gaps in the legal framework, which increased tensions over sovereignty, environmental protection, and militarization.



COUNTRIES POSITIONS ON THE MILITARIZATION OF THE POLAR REGIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

United States

The United States has expressed its interest in the Arctic many times due to its proximity via Alaska, growing geopolitical competition in the region, and the increasing accessibility of Arctic due to climate change. Traditionally, USA was focused on scientific research on the region however now the state has recently shifted its Arctic policy to address rising concerns over security and power rivalry—particularly with Russia and China. Military, USA is enhancing its Arctic capabilities through the creation of icebreakers, military training, and the modernization of infrastructure, particularly in Alaska. They emphasize cooperation with NATO allies and members of the Arctic Council to promote regional stability while monitoring for foreign military bases. Despite all these security concerns, USA has an environmental stewardship commitment in the form of organizations such as NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) in the hope of weighing security interests with the goals of sustainable development in the region.

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union had a crucial part in the Militarization of Arctic, the region was seen as an essential component of their national and international position globally — especially during the Cold War. On their coastline, the USSR invested heavily in military bases, airbases, radar systems and early warning stations. Arctic was also used by the USSR as a test and launch location for their nuclear-based weapons, submarines and missiles. The USSR also constructed worlds largest nuclear powered ice breaker fleet, in order to guarantee access and control over the Northern Sea which was important for military mobility, as well as resource transportation. USSR also established civilian settlements and scientific outposts to solidify its presence and authority in the High North. After its collapse, its infrastructure was inherited by Russian Federation and they have revitalized and expanded their military capabilities in the Arctic, building upon Soviet-era foundations.

China

China officially opposes the militarization of the Arctic, advocating for peaceful development and international cooperation in the region. As a self-styled "Near-Arctic State," China emphasizes principles of "respect, cooperation, win-win result, and sustainability" in its Arctic policy. In its Arctic Policy, China reiterates that peace and stability in the Arctic must be upheld in the interest of settling disputes peacefully according to international law, such as the UN Charter and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China further promotes cooperation with the Arctic states in major areas like maritime and aerial search and rescue, maritime early warning, and emergency response. However, China's increased activities in the Arctic have also drawn the attention of other nations. Even without troops stationed there, China's increasing research and commercial endeavors, including investments in developing so-called "Polar Silk Road" and infrastructure in the region, are considered by some to be strategic moves which would eventually have military applications in the near future. Moreover, China's collaboration with Russia in the Arctic region, for example, in the form of joint naval drills and energy projects, has been taken by some analysts to mean closer strategic alignment between the two countries in the region. Overall, while China officially endorses the peaceful use of the Arctic and opposes its militarization, its increasing activities and alliances in the region are being closely watched by other Arctic and non-Arctic countries that are concerned about potential shifts in the strategic balance.

India

India officially opposes the militarization of the Arctic, advocating for peaceful development and international cooperation in the region. India's 2022 Arctic Policy focuses on six pillars: science and research, economic and human development cooperation, transportation and connectivity, governance and international cooperation, national capacity building, and climate and environmental protection. In summary, while India publicly advocates for the peaceful use of the Arctic and opposes its militarization, its expanding activities and partnerships in the region are closely monitored by other Arctic and non-Arctic states concerned about potential shifts in the strategic balance zone.

Brazil

Brazil has not made any official statements on the matter, however their past actions suggest a preference for peaceful engagement and scientific cooperation in the region. In July 2023, Brazil launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic aiming to study the region's biodiversity and its role in global climate change. They also considered becoming observers in the Arctic Council which would allow them to be more active and included on the matter. Brazil emphasis on scientific research, environmental sustainability and multicultural cooperation indicates a preference for peaceful engagement in the region. Brazil's actions suggest that it views the Arctic as a space for collaborative efforts to address global challenges, rather than as a place for military acts.

Canada

Canada has opted out for a peaceful arctic, emphasizing cooperation and environmental collaboration. However, in response to increasing geopolitical tensions, particularly due to Russian military activities and China's growing presence, Canada has announced plans to enhance its military and diplomatic footprint in the region. This includes deploying new patrol ships, submarines, aircraft, and drones, as well as modernizing surveillance systems in collaboration with the United States. Canada is also seeking deeper collaboration with Nordic nations and applying a national security lens to foreign research in its Arctic territories.

United Kingdom

UK views the arctic as a critical and significant role in global relations and has increased its military capacity in the past years. 2023, it established Camp Viking in northern Norway to support Arctic operations and training. The UK participates in NATO exercises, conducts cold-weather training, and deploys maritime patrol aircraft to enhance regional security. Their policy also emphasizes on cooperation in order to ensure Arctic's safety.

France

France's military activities in the Arctic are a key aspect of its national Polar policy and diplomatic stance. France holds observer status in the Arctic Council and actively participates in NATO's Arctic initiatives. The French military conducts regular patrols and joint exercises in the region, deploying naval vessels, submarines, and aircraft to support freedom of navigation and demonstrate commitment to collective security. France's involvement aims to support Arctic allies, enhance interoperability, and adapt to challenging environments.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED IN THE RESOLUTION PAPER

1. How can international cooperation be ensured to address the environmental damage caused by nuclear activities and military base establishments in the polar regions during the Cold War era?
2. What steps should be taken to address the environmental and military imbalance between regions, given that Antarctica has been demilitarized through international treaties while the Arctic lacks similar protections?
3. How can the issues of security and transparency caused by military activities disguised as scientific research during the Cold War be resolved in today's context?
4. Which countries should bear historical responsibility for military remnants threatening the environment in the polar regions (such as radioactive waste, abandoned bases, submarine wrecks), and how can their cleanup be ensured?
5. In response to the militarization risks posed by newly accessible natural resources and strategic advantages emerging from melting glaciers due to global warming, how can a preventive and environmentally-based security strategy be established?
6. What new international norms should be developed to resolve the conflicts between militarization practices inherited from the Cold War and contemporary environmental law?

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