

Arctic Geopolitics activity

Author: Klaus Dodds

Case study: One Arctic, Many Arctic(s)

A-Level Syllabus:

- AQA Global systems and global governance
- OCR Global governance – Power & Borders; sovereignty; territorial integrity;
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Introduction

The Arctic region has attracted considerable global attention in recent years, in large part due to climate change and what has been termed great power competition involving China, Russia and the United States and their allies. One common refrain is that the Arctic is ‘opening up’ for business and resource-led opportunities such as fishing and mining. The region is becoming more accessible to commercial shipping due to declining sea ice cover over the Arctic Ocean.

The term ‘Arctic paradox’ is used to describe the following tension: the Arctic is warming, thawing, and even burning (‘zombie fires’) due to climate change which has been fuelled by coal, oil and gas. Many Arctic countries are also resource-exporters and have large mining sectors. Arctic states are very sensitive to any suggestion that their sovereign rights and territorial integrity should be questioned even challenged by others (e.g. environmental campaigners from outside the Arctic region demanding that mining and oil extraction should end).

The concept of ‘territorial integrity’ is intrinsic to international legal order. It refers to the Inviolability (something too important to ignore) of the national territory to the nation-state. Territorial integrity also refers to airspace. Every country has national airspace and it extend up to 12 nautical miles from the coastline.

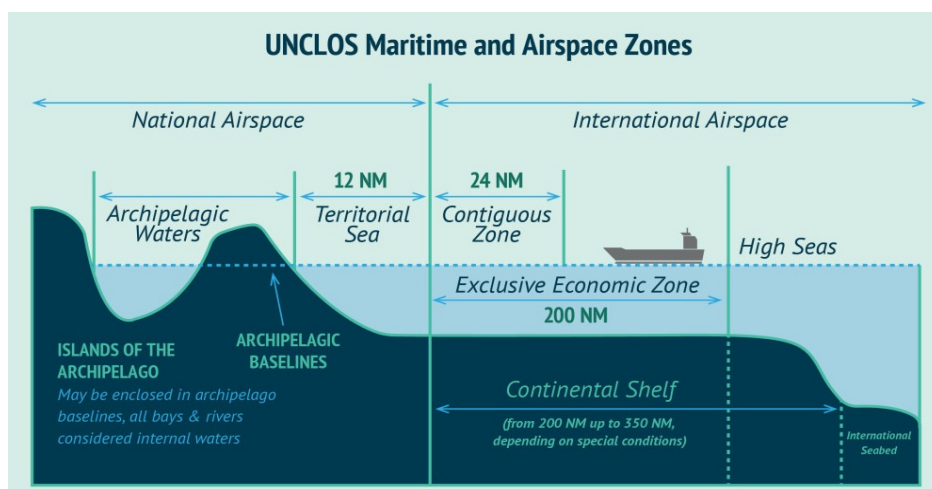


Image 1: UNCLOS Maritime and Airspace Zones (<http://iilss.net/legal-status-of-the-territorial-sea-international-law-of-the-sea-losc-cases/>)

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EXERCISE: Mapping indigenous peoples and Arctic state in the Arctic

The Arctic is a homeland to some 4 million people and across the Arctic region there are indigenous peoples who have lived in northern territories for millennia. The territorial integrity of Arctic states such as Finland, Russia and Canada co-exist awkwardly with the homelands of Arctic peoples – after all northern communities pre-dated the creation of modern nation-states and in many cases their homelands criss-cross modern state boundaries.

Using this blank map of the Arctic: do you know where the following indigenous communities are to be found in the main?

Saami, Nenets, Chukchi, Aleut, Yupik and Iñupiat, Inuit, Gwich'in and Aleut.

And can you name and locate all the Arctic states? There are eight! And do you know where Svalbard is?



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EXERCISE: Territorial disputes in the Arctic

Look at this map and imagine what might be the cause conflict in the Arctic region in the future

What do you notice about the map and its detail including captions? Do you see the presence of indigenous communities acknowledged anywhere? Who benefits from this opening for commerce?



Source of map: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesconca/2014/11/14/does-our-military-know-something-we-dont-about-global-warming/>

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Video resources:

Klaus Dodds 'Geography for Schools Lecture: Arctic Geopolitics'

View on Facebook: <https://fb.watch/v/1Thak0k0Y/>

View on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/motnkyj6spg>

Further reading:

China, Russia, and Arctic geopolitics: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/china-russia-and-arctic-geopolitics/>

Discovering the Arctic: <https://discoveringthearctic.org.uk/>

Indigenous population in the Arctic: <https://nordregio.org/maps/indigenous-population-in-the-arctic/>

'The nuances of geopolitics in the Arctic': <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/nuances-geopolitics-arctic/>

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