MASMUN'27

UNFOLDING THE DAWN



SC

United Nations Security Council

Topic 2:

Managing Tensions over Svalbard's Strategic Status

MASMUN'27

UNFOLDING THE DAWN

Introduction

Svalbard, located in the Arctic, is an archipelago with Norwegian sovereignty, regulated by the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 and Norwegian law. As the Arctic becomes more accessible and the struggle for resources, infrastructure and military influence grows, Svalbard's strategic significance rises. The main concern is how to ensure the integrity of the treaty structures and regional stability in the context of diverging interpretations of the rights within the treaty system and new security interests.

Background Information

The Svalbard Treaty recognizes Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago, but grants all state parties and individuals equal rights to undertake defined economic activities under the conditions set out in the treaty. The treaty also restricts some military activity on the archipelago. The territory of Svalbard is administered by Norway, although other treaty parties may undertake activities under the rights granted by the treaty. Russia has had a consistent presence on the archipelago since the 1930s in Barentsburg, and has expressed concerns about Norway's interpretation and implementation of the treaty. Climate change, shipping, scientific study and resource interests can all feed into the archipelago's significance.

International Frameworks and Previous Actions

The 1920 Svalbard Treaty remains the primary legal framework for the archipelago. An understanding of the relevant legal issues must take into account all the treaty provisions, including those on sovereignty, equal rights to certain activities, and restrictions on military uses. While the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea should be taken into consideration in relation to the wider issues on the Arctic maritime zones, it does not override the Svalbard Treaty. By way of example, the Svalbard Treaty provisions on certain activities should not be assumed to be settled or settled once and for all. The Security Council's role should be considered from the perspective of the mandate given to it with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Key Challenges

Norway and Russia, specifically in regards to taxing, access, resource exploitation and use of restrictions outside the territorial area of the islands. Other clashes may be exacerbated by the general tensions between Russia and the Western powers. Furthermore, the impact of climate change could lead to more activity on the disputed zone, where rules and habits are disputed. There is a risk of the ordinary administrative conflicts becoming a part of the general strategic competition.

Possible Areas for Resolution

It is recommended to look for expert assistance and diplomatic avenues to help ease disputes surrounding treaty articles.

It is justified to think about notification procedures, hotlines, and increased openness in case of military activities or unexpected operations.

Environmental protections: Talk should center on the international community's collaboration on pollution prevention, monitoring, scientific data-sharing and fragile Arctic ecosystems.

Economic activity and equal treatment: investigations should be carried out according to transparent, non-discriminatory processes respecting the treaty and relevant laws.

Settlement by arbitration, negotiation or other lawful means of binding, if the parties agree or have a legal basis.

Guiding Questions

1. Which treaty provisions are clear, and which are open to competing interpretations?
2. How can Norway exercise sovereignty while meeting its treaty obligations toward other parties?
3. What transparency measures could prevent civilian infrastructure from being mistaken for military escalation?
4. How should environmental protection be balanced with commercial access?
5. What role should the UNSC play if a dispute remains primarily legal or diplomatic?
6. Which peaceful dispute-settlement mechanisms could the parties realistically accept?

Resources

- **Norwegian Government: Svalbard Treaty** https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/territorial-affairs/svalbard/id2352818/
- **Svalbard Treaty Text, Norwegian Government** https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/svalbardtreaty/id449074/
- **UN: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea —** https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm
- **Arctic Council** — https://arctic-council.org/