

**Committee: SPECPOL 1**

**Topic: The Question of Territorial Sovereignty in Antarctica**

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## Summary

Antarctica is the fifth largest continent, covered in ice and is under imminent threat from climate change. It was first discovered in the 1500s by the Portuguese. It is currently divided by the Antarctic treaty, which only 52 nations have agreed upon. Despite existing agreements, there is still some territorial disputes. With the research capabilities that Antarctica offers, including the South Pole, and the possibility for natural resources to be discovered, the land has lots to offer. Also, the conditions under the treaty are from when it was signed, and not relative to the modern agreements in place today. A new agreement is in order to ensure the struggling landmass is able to survive and to ensure all disputes get sorted out.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Sovereignty** - the power that a country has to govern itself or another country or state.

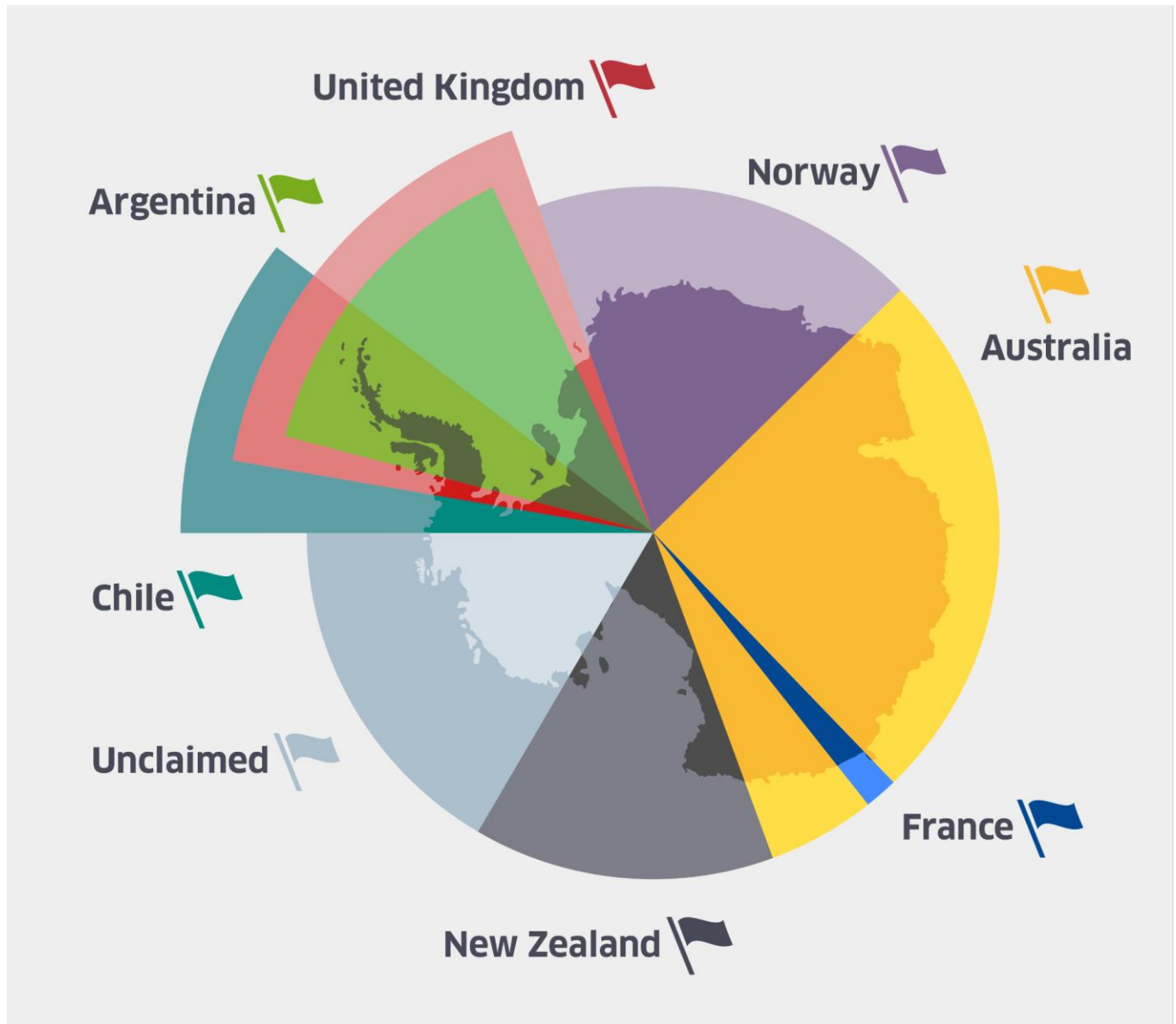
**Climate change**- Changes in the Earth's climate, especially those said to be produced by global warming.

**South Pole** - The Southernmost point of the Earth

## Background Information

Antarctica is 14.2 million square kilometres large. It was first discovered by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1520 while circumnavigating the globe. This was followed by James Cook who in the 18th century explored the sub-Antarctic region. The first person to see the mainland is disputed between Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, Edward Bransfield and Nathaniel Palmer, all of which were claimed to see it in 1820. Antarctica only really started to have many territorial claims laid onto it in the 1900s, often regarded as the colonial period in Antarctica's history. It is important to recognise that many nations conducted expeditions in the region but haven't kept claims on the area.

Antarctica includes the South Pole, which offers many research opportunities. This includes climate change research which is vital considering the state of the environment. Antarctica also has a lot of natural resources in it, including oil and gases. It also serves good for tourism and for fishing. While barely any people live in Antarctica, a few scientists and their families live there to form the few towns there.



As the image above shows, there are currently overlapping claims between Argentina, Chile and the UK. The Chilean and Argentine claim comes from the old Spanish claims that came from the treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the world between Spain and Portugal. This means that when the Spanish wars for independence happened, Spain lost all claims on Antarctica, and Chile and Argentina gained those claims. The Antarctic Treaty claims that these claims stand as they originated from before the date specified.

There is also currently a section of Antarctica which is unclaimed, and as the Antarctic treaty stipulates, no new claims would be recognised. This leaves the area unclaimed by anyone and unable to be claimed by anyone. This area, for the most part, is uninhabitable but could still have research opportunities for a multi-nation research effort.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

**Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition** - The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) are a group of environmental NGO's who are aimed at preserving the ecosystems of Antarctica.

**United Kingdom** - Claimant to the area in the South Pole; has a conflicting claim with Argentina and Chile. One of the first nations to discover the Antarctic and survey its waters.

**Argentina** - Claimant to the area in the South Pole; has a conflicting claim with the UK and Chile. Claim originates from old Spanish empire claims.

**Chile** - Claimant to area in the South Pole; has a conflicting claim with the UK and Argentine. Claim also originates from old Spanish empire claims.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description
1520	Ferdinand Magellan discovers the Antarctic Ocean
1772	James Cook circumnavigates the globe at high low latitudes, exploring Antarctica
1820	3 people from different nations claim to have found the antarctic mainland first
1837-40	French expedition discovers Adelie Land
1838-42	US expedition explored lots of East Atlantic coast

<b>1839-43</b>	British explorer James Clark Ross discovered the Ross sea, the Ross ice shelf and the Victoria Land coast
<b>March 1898</b>	The Belgian ship Belgica became the first vessel to winter in Antarctic waters
<b>1901-04</b>	The British National Antarctic Expedition set a record for reaching the farthest point south.
<b>January 16th 1909</b>	The South pole was reached on January 16, 1909, at 72°25' S, 155°16' E.
<b>1915</b>	The plans for an Imperial Trans-Atlantic expedition failed when the ship 'Endurance' was crushed by a pack of ice of the Weddell Sea.
<b>1924</b>	France claims Adelie land.
<b>November 16th 1928</b>	Aircraft first used to navigate around Antarctica.
<b>December 5th 1935</b>	First transcontinental flight across Antarctica.
<b>1940</b>	Chile lay claim to area in Antarctica

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

**The Antarctic Treaty (1959)** - Signed by 14 nations originally. Stipulated that Antarctica would become a demilitarised zone, meaning no military could be stationed on the continent. It also encouraged scientific exploration, while making regulations to protect the environment.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

**Antarctic Treaty System** - A set of treaties created around Antarctica, each with separate aims and purposes. These happened around 1959 but had revisions in the years after.

## Possible Solutions

**Creating set claims** - Currently there are many overlapping claims in the region, which could cause tension in the future. Creating set boundaries could create a more set solution, or some other form of territorial sovereignty could be granted to the area.

**Environmental protections** - While the Antarctic treaty did provide regulations to preserve the environment, the situation has become more dire in recent years, and more drastic regulations may be in order.

**Tourist structure** - Tourism has been increasing on the continent, with people wanting to look at the landscapes. With the increasing climate emergency, measures could be taken to regulate tourism.

**Research capabilities** - Containing the South Pole within it, there is a lot of potential research that could be conducted in the area. Terms in a potential resolution should at least address this. Also, the possibility of a collective research facility could be in order.

## Bibliography

(Title of source, author, date of publication – you may also wish to list some useful websites)

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