

Antarctic Treaty

In 1957, twelve countries set up scientific bases to conduct investigations about the continent, thus heightening tensions surrounding Antarctica.

Antarctic Treaty - History

Amidst growing tensions surrounding the claim of sovereignty over Antarctica, the presence of scientific bases of twelve countries on the continent, and the looming fear of an upcoming Cold War, an Antarctic Conference was convened by President Dwight Eisenhower (USA). After meeting and negotiating in two phases between 1958 and 1959, the Antarctic Treaty was formulated on 1st December 1959.

The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 provided that Antarctica could only be used for the peaceful purpose of scientific investigation. It seeks to preserve Antarctica forever by prohibiting military activity, nuclear explosions, and radioactive waste disposals. The Antarctic Treaty is applicable to the area south of the 60° South Latitude, including all ice shelves and islands. The Treaty entered into force in 1961 and is therefore also referred to as the Antarctic Treaty of 1961.

Antarctic Treaty - Members

The members of the Antarctic Treaty have been listed below;

- The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 was signed by twelve countries - Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the USSR, the UK, and the US.
- The Treaty has since been acceded to by many other nations, and the total number of Parties today stands at 54.
- India became a party to the Treaty in 1983.

Antarctic Treaty - Rules

The Antarctic Treaty put in place some rules for the use of the resources in the region and the conduct. They have been listed below;

- Antarctica is to be demilitarised and used for peaceful purposes only. No military personnel can be stationed, and military weapons cannot be tested on the continent.
- Scientific research and collaboration can be carried out, and the findings are to be made freely available to signatories of the Treaty.
- Any territorial claims over Antarctic territory are put on hold while the Treaty remains in force.
- No nuclear testing can be carried out in Antarctica or any radioactive waste dumped on it.
- The Treaty only applies to ice shelves and land, not the sea.
- All signatories must provide information about expeditions, ship movements, or military movements taken to Antarctica, and designated inspectors can carry out inspections regarding the same.
- Mining of mineral resources except for the purpose of scientific research is prohibited.
- The continent's environment, flora, and fauna are not to be harmed.

The Antarctic Treaty of 1961 recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. It is an important Treaty in international law because it laid the foundation for a rules-based international order for a continent without a permanent population. The Antarctic Treaty is gaining larger significance today, with global warming and the increasing scarcity of resources. It remains to be seen whether the member nations will continue to preserve the sanctity of Antarctica.

Antarctica Treaty of 1959 - Current Scenario

Despite a number of issues, the Antarctic Treaty has shown to be incredibly effective. More nations are expressing interest in doing research in Antarctica. 54 nations are currently parties to the agreement. This is due to both the mass availability of rapidly changing technology and climate change.

There are currently more nations that have staked out considerable claims in the area. The prospect of mining has generated a great deal of discussion recently. Although mining is prohibited in the region, nations will want to relax the prohibition soon as essential resources like oil start to run out more quickly.

