



ISSN 1732-4254 quarterly

## BULLETIN OF GEOGRAPHY. SOCIO-ECONOMIC SERIES

journal homepages:  
<https://apcz.umk.pl/BGSS/index>  
<https://www.bulletinofgeography.umk.pl/>

# Modern conflicts regarding the political status of territories: typological differences, features of spread and prospects for resolution

Myroslav Dnistrianskyi<sup>1,CDFMR</sup>, Galina Kopachinska<sup>2, CDFMR</sup>, Nataliia Dnistrianska<sup>3, CDFMR</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Faculty of Geography, Department of Geography of Ukraine, Lviv, Ukraine, e-mail: [m\\_dnister@ukr.net](mailto:m_dnister@ukr.net), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5663-6740>; <sup>2</sup>Lesia Ukrainka Volyn National University, Faculty of Foreign Relations, Department of Foreign Relations and Regional Studies, Lutsk, Ukraine, e-mail: [kopachinska.galina@vnu.edu.ua](mailto:kopachinska.galina@vnu.edu.ua) (corresponding author), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9395-8730>; <sup>3</sup>Lviv Polytechnic National University, Vyacheslav Chornovil Institute for Sustainable Development, Department of Tourism, Lviv, Ukraine, e-mail: [d\\_natalja@ukr.net](mailto:d_natalja@ukr.net), <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6465-9902>

### How to cite:

Dnistrianskyi, M., Kopachinska G. & Dnistrianska, N. (2022). Modern conflicts regarding the political status of territories: typological differences, features of spread and prospects for resolution. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 57(57): 113-123. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.12775/bgss-2022-0026>

**Abstract.** All international conflicts regarding issues of contention about the political status of territories are united by the lack of legitimate power in various places on Earth or the desire to establish such power. A classification of conflicts regarding issues of contention about the political status of territories is proposed in the article. It is shown that the main territorial and political conflicts of modernity are: issues of self-proclaimed states; issues of control over dependent countries; border conflicts over the status of individual islands; and conflicts due to incomplete and disordered decolonization processes. Resolving international conflicts over issues of the contended political status of territories is currently an important task that requires modernization and reformation of the UN Security Council and international law, and confirms the relevance of the research topic addressed in the article.

### Article details:

Received: 25 April 2022

Revised: 26 May 2022

Accepted: 30 June 2022

### Key words:

classification of conflicts,  
territorial disputes,  
political status of territories,  
territorial-political conflict,  
border conflict,  
self-proclaimed states

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## 1. Introduction

The widespread conflicts that are based on problems of territory affiliation and status have become a special kind of international issue of political contention that can be traced from ancient times to the present. These conflicts cover annexed lands, unrecognized and self-proclaimed political entities, disputed territories, political claims to uninhabited territories and others that contradict international legal documents. All these conflicts differ in causes, peculiarities, variety of negative consequences, and other features. All are united by the problem of legalization of the political status of territories, which to varying degrees relates to international relations, in contrast to other conflicts based on social problems between different groups in individual states or structural and functional maladaptation of political systems to different social demands. Moreover, the second group of conflicts are mainly intra-state, though they can be subject to international influences; at the same time, the conflicts related to the status of territories are predominantly interstate, but they can also be affected by various aspects of domestic relations. It is also important to emphasize that conflicts related to the contended political status of territories are only part of a wider range of international conflicts caused either by the interference of some states in the internal affairs of other states or by economic, ideological, religious, ethnic and other reasons or issues of contention in the delimitation of territories, water areas, etc.

Hence, the emergence and solution of conflicts regarding the status of territories will depend primarily on the effectiveness of the system of international law and the nature of international relations in general. The increase in number of such conflicts in recent decades (Slyvka, 2016) indicates the lack of clear international legal mechanisms for their resolution, and the growing danger of the expansion of territories with illegitimate power, which in turn threatens to destabilize vast international regions and deepen the crisis of international relations in general.

Thus, all current international conflicts regarding the political status of territories, despite the various reasons of their origin and the position of the

participants in the conflict, are united by the lack of legitimate, internationally recognized power in these territories or attempts to establish such power. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of all existing groups of conflicts may create a holistic picture of their origin and spread, and thus outline the possibilities for their resolution.

## 2. Research materials and methods

### 2.1. Literature review

Scholars and researchers from various sciences, including political, historical, military, geographical and others are interested in and are dealing with the problem of modern conflicts regarding the political status of territories. However, the study of this scientific issue by geographic scientists is insufficient because their works are far fewer in number than the works of scientists in other fields. Nevertheless, the theoretical aspects of the research topic chosen in the article were studied by such researchers as Dnistryanskyi, M. S. (2011; 2021), Gurňak D. (2007), Ištók, R. (2004), Kolosov, V. A. (2002), Nartov, A. A. (2003), Jones, M. (2004), Painter, J. (2009), Slyvka, R. (2016) and others. In their works, they substantiated the preconditions and factors of conflicts regarding the political status of territories and their social significance, analyzed the peculiarities of their origin, and have attempted to classify them. Peculiarities of the current situation about the international conflicts regarding the political status of territories were analyzed by such researchers as Abramson F., Scott and Carter B., David (2016), Chong, Chen (2018), Johnson, D. P. Dominic, and Duffy, Toft Monica (2014), Horowitz, Shale and Redd, B. Steven (2018), Kyu Kim, Nam (2019), Núñez E., Jorge (2020), Robert Nagy, Stephen (2013), etc. The spread of these conflicts, as well as their depiction on global political and geographical maps, have been studied and elaborated by such researchers as Gurňak D. (2007) and Ištók R. (2004). The problem of the emergence of self-proclaimed states in the system of modern international relations was studied by such researchers as Dnistryanskyi, M. S. (2010; 2011), Ker-Lindsay, J. (2012), Kolosov, V. and O'Loughlin, J. (1998), Pegg, S. (1988), Zayats, D. V. (2020) and

Slyvka, R. (2015; 2016). Despite the importance and topicality of studying current conflicts regarding the political status of territories, analyzing their classification, and studying their distribution and possible roads to resolution, the number of works devoted to a comprehensive study of this issue in terms of geography is rather small, which influenced the choice of the topic of the conducted research.

## 2.2. Methodological bases of the research

The study of international conflicts regarding the political status of territories is a complex and detailed task, as it requires the classification of these conflicts, analysis of their cause and identification of their spread and possible ways to resolve them. In order to fulfill the tasks of the article, structural-functional and historical-geographical approaches were used, as well as such groups of methods as comparative analysis and a forecasting method.

The main method of studying the conflicts regarding the issues of contention about the political status of territories is a comparative analysis, which helped to investigate their origins and to highlight the most significant issues of contention and features of their location. The application of structural-functional and historical-geographical approaches helped to reveal the preconditions of the emergence of conflicts, to study the causal links and evolution of conflicts, to identify the positions of the parties to the conflict and to substantiate some proposals for their resolution based on existing socio-geographical and international political realities.

The comparative analysis of primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information enable a thorough scientific study of current conflicts regarding the political status of territories, their classification, analysis of their distribution, and exploration of possible ways to resolve them.

The cartographic method made it possible to identify some trends in the spread of conflicts. Prospects for conflict resolutions were proposed taking into account ethnocultural and economic aspects and the possibility of using international legal mechanisms.

While conducting this research, content and event analysis were also used. Content analysis is based on the study of official information materials.

Event analysis is a method of studying official information that allows to explore and systematize events in international relations. The use of these scientific methods allowed a comprehensive study of all possible factors of political, historical, cultural and economic natures that have a direct impact on the formation and development of modern conflicts over the political status of territories.

With the method of forecasting, which allows possible situations and processes to be predicted using appropriate techniques and methods of scientific knowledge, possible scenarios of current conflicts regarding the political status of territories were predicted in the article, as well as possible ways to resolve them.

## 3. Research results

### 3.1. The explanation of conflicts over the political status of territories and their influence on the system of international relations

Any international conflict is a complex socio-political problem with historical, cultural, economic, psychological and other dimensions. At the same time, in essence, conflicts regarding the disputed status of territories arise as conflicts of interests between various parties to interstate and domestic relations (states and autonomies, intergovernmental associations, regional centers, political parties and movements, etc.), which have different views on the political situation of the disputed territories. Very often, such conflicts primarily have objective causes, such as aspirations to increase the political status of certain territories being inconsistent with the possibilities and desires to provide such changes, differences in the visions of belonging to certain territories, and the uneven political and socio-economic statuses of regions. Their emergence can be prompted by a number of subjective factors, including the spread of destructive geopolitical doctrines, especially imperial or extremist ideologies, terrorism and others. In modern conditions, one source of various conflicts, including the contested status of territories, is the rapid politicization of Islam. Such combination of objective and subjective factors creates antagonism between various parties' differing visions of the belonging or status of

separate territories. This antagonism favors the appearance of the prerequisites for latent conflict to become active, during which violent or direct military actions can happen.

The problem of political status of territories is also directly related to the issues of contention between international relations and hierarchical-polar interstate relations, and between their level of coherence and order, as evidenced by the development of events during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Thus, as a result of the Second World War, which provided certain preconditions for the coordinated resolution of territorial and political issues of contention, including the settlement of the political status of the territories, the new system of international relations was created. Obviously, not all agreed decisions were correct and fair. The decision to give East Prussia with its center in Königsberg to the USSR administration and to deport the German population from there is one example. Nevertheless, with the creation of a new system of international relations, it became possible to stabilize the borders in Central and Eastern Europe and to agree the issue of statehood administration over the territories, taking into account those territories' interests. Moreover, in the immediate post-war years, the countries occupied during the war by Japan (Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia 1945) obtained political self-determination, as did the Philippines (1946).

But, as a result of the gradual formation of a rigid bipolar system of geopolitical and ideological confrontation, many conflict situations remained frozen, and new areas of territorial and political issues of contention emerged. And while in Europe some controversial issues of the status and affiliation of territories were still partially resolved (Saar's accession to Germany in 1957, recognition of the inviolability of new borders), the contradictory territorial conflicts in Asia became increasingly apparent (Indo-Pakistani wars and Indochina wars, the Korean conflict, the Kurdistan problem). The decolonization of Africa, providing the preconditions for independent political development, was carried out without taking into account ethno-geographical and religious-geographical realities, which immediately led to a number of territorial and political conflicts, including conflicts regarding the political status of different regions. Hence, despite the fact that conflicts regarding the contradictory

political status of territories are widespread in relatively small areas, they can or do aggravate international political relations between a large number of states, including the largest, and cause geopolitical destabilization in many areas of the world.

### **3.2. Classification of conflicts over the political status of territories**

It should be stressed that most international conflicts regarding the status of territories are a unique coincidence of circumstances, causes and consequences. However, taking into account all the factors and summarizing the available facts, some of their typological features can be identified. Moreover, the following features must be taken into account: 1) under what conditions and circumstances the international community began to contest the status of the territory; 2) how this status is interpreted by the political forces that control the territory; 3) how this status is interpreted by international organizations and other political forces. Therefore, taking into consideration the above-mentioned features, the following main types of conflicts regarding the political status of territories can be differentiated (Table 1): 1) conflicts that arose as a result of the forcible annexation of territories, the incorporation of which is not recognized by the international community; 2) conflicts that arose due to the creation of self-proclaimed states in territories controlled by occupation regimes; 3) conflicts that arose due to the creation of self-proclaimed states as a result of domestic crises, but with the participation of foreign policy factors; 4) conflicts over disputed border areas and islands; 5) conflicts regarding political claims to political units under the control of other states; 6) latent conflicts over claims to land and water areas that according to international conventions should not be extended to the sovereignty of any state; 7) the Middle East conflict due to non-compliance with the decision of the UN General Assembly of 1947 on the establishment of a sovereign Arab state.

In addition to the above-mentioned main types by origin of conflict regarding the political status of territories, there are some other conflict situations that can be attributed to this group by

**Table 1.** Classification and geographical extent of conflicts over political status of territories

Main types of conflicts	Geographical extent of conflicts
Conflicts caused by forced annexation of territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crimean Peninsula (Ukraine), occupied by Russia;</li> <li>- Southern Kuril Islands (Japan), annexed by Russia;</li> <li>- most of Western Sahara (Saharan Arab Democratic Republic), annexed by Morocco;</li> <li>- Golan Heights (Syria), annexed by Israel</li> </ul>
Conflicts caused by the creation of self-proclaimed states in occupied territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- South Ossetia (in the Russian-occupied part of Georgia),</li> <li>- Donetsk People's Republic (in the Russian-occupied part of Ukraine);</li> <li>- Luhansk People's Republic (in the Russian-occupied part of Ukraine)</li> </ul>
Conflicts caused by the creation of self-proclaimed states as a result of an internal political crisis, but with the participation of an external factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transnistrian Moldavian Republic (in part of the territory of Moldova),</li> <li>- Abkhazia (on the territory of Georgia),</li> <li>- Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (in the part of the territory of Azerbaijan);</li> <li>- Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (part of Cyprus);</li> <li>- Somaliland (on the part of Somalia territory);</li> <li>- Azad-Kashmir (in the disputed territory of India and Pakistan)</li> </ul>
The Israeli–Palestinian conflict	Conflict caused by non-fulfillment of the decision of the UN General Assembly to establish a sovereign Arab state with its capital in East Jerusalem (currently under Israeli administration).
Conflicts over disputed border areas and islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Municipality of Olivens (administered by Spain, claims by Portugal),</li> <li>- the islands on the Danube, Vukovar and Sharengrad (administered by Serbia, claims by Croatia),</li> <li>- the Kashmir region (a disputed region between India and Pakistan),</li> <li>- Aksaychin region (administered by China, claims by India),</li> <li>- Arunachal Pradesh region (under Indian rule, claims by the PRC),</li> <li>- Liancour Island (administered by South Korea, claims by Japan),</li> <li>- Senkaku archipelago (under Japanese rule, claims by PRC),</li> <li>- Spratly Islands (claims by Vietnam, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei),</li> <li>- Paracel Islands (administered by China, claims by Vietnam),</li> <li>- Preahviea temple complex (administered by Cambodia, claims by Thailand),</li> <li>- the island of Hawar (administered by Bahrain, claims by Qatar),</li> <li>- Abu Musa Island (under Iranian administration, UAE claims),</li> <li>- Guyana-Esequibo border area (administered by Guyana, claims by Venezuela),</li> <li>- the narrow territorial strip of Caprivi (administered by Namibia, claims by Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe),</li> <li>- Ilemi Triangle (disputed territory on the border of Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan),</li> <li>- The Triangle of Halaib (administered by Egypt, claims by Sudan),</li> <li>- the border strip between Sudan and South Sudan</li> </ul>
Conflicts regarding control over dependent countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gibraltar (administered by the United Kingdom, claims by Spain),</li> <li>- Falkland Islands (under British administration, claims by Argentina),</li> <li>- South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (administered by the United Kingdom, claims by Argentina),</li> <li>- Mayotte (administered by France, Comorian claims),</li> <li>- the cities of Ceuta and Melilla (administered by Spain, claims by Morocco),</li> <li>- Chagos archipelago (under British administration, claims by Mauritius)</li> </ul>
Possible conflicts due to claims to Arctic waters and land areas that, according to international conventions, cannot be under the sovereignty of any state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- North Pole and adjacent waters (claims by Russia, Denmark, Canada, Norway, USA),</li> <li>- Antarctica and adjacent islands (territorial claims by Argentina, Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, Norway, France, Chile)</li> </ul>

Source: developed and proposed by the authors personally

some features, but that are generally typologically different. This applies in particular to the status of Taiwan, which is not integrated with China as a recognized subject of international relations, but which still has not declared independence and still supports the policy of a united China, as well as the Russian autonomous region of Chechnya, whose

political rulers declared independence in the 1990s but failed to sustain opposition to the central Russian government.

There are other features that distinguish geopolitical conflicts regarding the political status of territories (coverage area, time of appearance, etc.). In particular, local and large-scale conflicts

involving a large international region or several countries can be distinguished by area of distribution. Moreover, local geopolitical conflicts, when aggravated, can become large-scale whereas, conversely, systemic constructive influences on the course of conflicts leads to their gradual localization. In the chronological aspect, long-standing historical conflicts are particularly difficult.

### **3.3. The conflict over the status of Palestine and guaranteeing the security of Israel as a cause of large-scale geopolitical issues of contention**

Current international political controversies regarding the political status of territories are both in the initial (latent) phase and in the active phase or in the phase of frozen conflicts. Each has its own area of distribution, geopolitical resonance and consequences. Also, taking into consideration the typological features, the prospects for the resolution of these conflicts are different.

One of the biggest examples of a global geopolitical controversy is the conflict over the state of Palestine and the security of Israel in the context of the 1947 UN General Assembly resolution about the establishment of Israel and an Arab state on the Palestinian lands as mandated by the United Kingdom. Since then, a wide range of geopolitical actors have been involved in the conflict, and the escalation of relations between them has led to large-scale military conflicts and heavy casualties. During the Cold War, not only the countries of the Middle East but also geopolitical leaders, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, were involved in this conflict, giving it an ideological color. And at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the contested issue of recognition of the state of Israel and its right to safe development and the establishment of a sovereign state of Palestine by neighboring Arab countries remains one of the greatest geopolitical challenges and a source of global geopolitical controversy. In particular, both the radicalization of Islam and Islamic terrorism are also largely consequences of the contested issues; this notwithstanding, it is clear that other factors also influenced them. Hence, geopolitical consequences of this conflict are spread all over the world. Sometimes, in modern

conditions, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is painted as a cultural and civilizational confrontation, which is generally incorrect, because it hides the real territorial–political and ethno-political meaning of this problem.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, attempts to resolve the problem of the status of Palestine and the security of Israel through open negotiations with all interested parties were unsuccessful. In 2019, in a bilateral format, the leaders of the United States and Israel announced the so-called “agreement of the century” (Uhoda...), which was touted to finally resolve this problem. Moreover, it was to provide a number of positive aspects for Palestine (allowing it to become an internationally recognized state; its capital had to be East Jerusalem; Palestine had to receive significant development funds). However, its territory was to be very different from the territory of the 1947 decision, while Israel was to administer large areas of the West Bank of Jordan and the Golan Heights, which Syria recognized as its own. Therefore, the Palestinian leadership immediately rejected this project. It was also condemned by a number of Arab countries and was not supported by the EU.

As a result, the chances to solve the geopolitical confrontation over the political status of Palestine are diminishing every year. Moreover, it will only be possible to implement a solution when all parties to the conflict abandon the policy of force and are ready to make concessions. This is especially true of Israel’s readiness to cede the disputed territories of the West Bank of Jordan to Palestine. It is also important in this case to find intermediary international organizations that would be able to persuade all parties to abandon their maximum requirements.

### **3.4. Self-proclaimed states as special zones of international tension and instruments of geopolitical pressure**

Another significant source of various geopolitical disturbances and conflict situations is the problem of so-called self-proclaimed republics, whose state and political status do not have broad international support although they may receive recognition from individual states. Most self-proclaimed

states emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century out of the complex disintegration of the USSR, and are therefore focused primarily in the post-Soviet space and are an instrument of Russia's geopolitics towards neighboring states. In particular, Nagorno-Karabakh, with the support of Armenia and later Russia, began to withdraw from Azerbaijan in the late 1980s. During the 1990s, Russia, using some intra-Georgian preconditions, pushed South Ossetia and Abkhazia to effectively secede from Georgia, and the left bank of Transnistria, again with Russian support, refused to become part of the state of Moldova, declaring the formation of an independent state called Transnistria (officially, the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic).

Thus, the emergence of these political formations primarily exhibited Russia's desire to maintain control in the post-Soviet space, preventing the strengthening of the independence of new states (former Soviet republics), insidiously using some objective ethnocultural differences between these regions, which under favorable conditions could be resolved by the political entirety of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. Contradictory status issues regarding these self-proclaimed states in the post-Soviet space caused military conflicts in the 1990s that are currently frozen, but the threat of their resumption and even escalation into multilateral military clashes is real.

During the undisguised aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the Russian Federation occupied the Crimean region of Ukraine and, seeking to capture the east and south of Ukraine, inspired the creation of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic". Such actions testified to Russia's entry into a new level of geopolitical adventurism, as the creation of self-proclaimed "republics" became means not only to exert geopolitical pressure, but also to expand as a "great power". And when plans to seize all of southern and eastern Ukraine failed, the Kremlin began using these pseudo-republics to extort Ukraine into changing its state structure toward federalization.

Isolated problems of creating self-proclaimed states are also typical for other regions and parts of the world. Thus, the growing conflict between the Greek and Turkish communities during the 1960s to '70s ended with the proclamation of the Turkish

Republic of Northern Cyprus, whose independence was recognized only by Turkey, while the European states and international political organizations advocated the preservation of the integrity of Cyprus. At the beginning of the 21st century, some preconditions for the unification of this country appeared, on new principles of cultural and political weakening between the two communities on the island and in the relations between Greece and Turkey, but the negotiation process has not yet had concrete results. Optimizing EU-Turkey relations would give a positive impetus to solving this problem.

Since the formation in 1947 of independent India and Pakistan, whose religious demarcation was controlled by Britain, the main area of mutual territorial claims has been the former principality of Kashmir, which has a mixed religious population. As a result of several military conflicts, most of Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan. A small eastern part of the Kashmir Highlands was annexed by China. In part of the Pakistan-controlled territory of Kashmir, the establishment of the state of "Azad Kashmir" was announced, although in fact it remained part of Pakistan. The future of the self-proclaimed state of Azad Kashmir will depend on resolving the problem of all of Kashmir, which is possible as a result of compromises in the Indo-Pakistani negotiations and the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions, including a local plebiscite.

The acute political crisis in Somalia in the early 1990s ended with the de facto collapse of the single central government and the formation of a number of self-proclaimed states (Somaliland, Puntland, Maahir, Nortland, etc.), which were based only on some historical and geographical differences from the period of colonial dependence. This development has further deepened the country's internal issues of contention that have been further destabilized and marginalized by the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and the widespread scale of maritime piracy, which have become a problem of international security throughout the region. Most of the self-proclaimed states, including Puntland, Maahir and Nortland, later declared their readiness to create a single Somali state on a federal basis. Ultimately, there are good reasons for this, because

Somalia is one of the few predominantly ethnically homogeneous African states.

Thus, in the modern world, a complex web of geopolitical interactions and various conflicts is formed around each unrecognized state, the resolution of which requires that both unique moments and some general international legal approaches be taken into account that could especially minimize the negative effects of external factors, such as Russia's destructive intervention. The cessation of military actions is most achievable with the introduction of peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the UN Security Council.

### **3.5. Geopolitical controversies regarding the status of dependent territories, some border areas, the Arctic and the Antarctic as zones of international tension**

Geopolitical issues of contention are also deepened by various manifestations of the political status of so-called dependent territories currently referred to as former colonial possessions. These have already achieved significant autonomy and some could freely exercise their right to political self-determination. In general, according to the UN, there are more than 30 such countries in the world (about 1.6% of the area and 0.25% of the world's population) that have various official statuses (as self-governing provinces, overseas departments and territories, associated autonomies, etc.) (Dnistrianskyi, 2011: 415–421).

The geopolitical significance of the dependent territories was manifested in the past both in their desire to become sovereign states and in the struggle by different states to possess them. Today, only a few of them are disputed possessions. In particular, this applies to the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands, whose membership of the United Kingdom is not recognized by Argentina, which even led to a large-scale military conflict in 1982, as a result of which the United Kingdom provided control over the islands. Some Spanish political forces claim Gibraltar, which is a dependent of Great Britain, and radical groups in Morocco are advocating the annexation of small Spanish enclaves on the African continent – Ceuta and Melilla.

In international law, the situation around Western Sahara, which has long been considered by Morocco and Mauritania as a disputed territory, also remains contested. Despite the UN having officially recognized Western Sahara's right to political self-determination, Morocco unilaterally annexed the country in 1976.

Interstate geopolitical conflicts regarding border issues have in the past been the most common types of conflict, especially in Europe, whose political map has changed dynamically. Today, as a result of the establishment in international law of the principle of inviolability of borders and the territorial integrity of states, the situation has changed radically. This is especially seen in Europe, where the formulation of territorial claims at the official level is not supported by the entire international community.

However, outside Europe, the preconditions for cross-border conflicts remain quite tangible. This also applies to Asia, where there is a high probability of a resumption of the border conflicts between India and China, India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia, Japan and Russia, and others. Paying attention to the postcolonial nature of borders, the situation in Africa is even more difficult, especially in its northern and eastern regions. Nevertheless, in recent years alone, a number of frozen border conflicts in Latin America have been resolved.

Conflicts in the near future may also be caused by interstate issues of contention over the desire to change the status of Antarctica and the Arctic. With the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in Washington in 1959, (Dohovir...) international legal barriers were established to avoid interstate confrontation over the territorial division of Antarctica and Arctic. The mainland and adjacent territories of them are recognized by the international community as a neutral demilitarized territory where the deployment of military bases is prohibited. Due to the growing problems of natural resources and some other geopolitical factors (deepening international political unpredictability, voluntarism and even adventurism), a new outbreak of territorial claims to Antarctic ownership can be predicted soon that will require further international legal regulation of possible status issues of this area and of the possibilities for its research and development, especially with regard to nature management.



The situation is more complicated regarding the international legal regulation of the status of the Arctic (Yelyeazarov, 2016), which has both an important geostrategic position and a significant natural resource potential – in particular, significant oil reserves. Five countries adjacent to the Arctic (Denmark [with Greenland], Canada, Norway, USA, Russia) merely defended their national interests at a meeting of authorized government delegations in 2008. Thus, they did not support granting special status to the region and agreed on the distribution between them of the Arctic shelf in accordance with current international law on the sea shelf.

Moreover, the declared territorial claims to the Arctic shelf go far beyond the 200-mile strip. Taking into consideration the global importance of the Arctic, such an approach is constructive neither from a geo-economic nor geo-ecological point of view, particularly in the context of climate change. Therefore, the question of its international legal status should be considered by the UN General Assembly. Only the influence of this global international institution is able to prevent the further escalation of geopolitical tensions in the region, which is characterized simultaneously by individual statements of state leaders and by plans to form various coalitions.

The localization of conflicts regarding the political status of territories on the world map reveals some general features of their distribution. In particular, their greatest concentration can be found in areas where their status issues remain contradictory as a result of recent global territorial and political transformations caused by the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia, the collapse of colonial systems and World War II. Such international regions include, primarily, the territories of neighboring European states adjacent to Russia, the Middle East, and, until recently, the Balkans.

Another big area of geopolitical conflicts, including those about the political status of territories, is the African continent, which arose due to the immaturity of the political systems of many countries in that part of the world and the colonial origins of state borders. Some preconditions for the emergence of new problems of political status of the territories exist in other countries, including countries of Western Europe such as Great Britain, Spain and others.

Thus, due to the inconsistency of interests of various actors and political centers of international importance, especially due to the destructive position of Russia, the international community not only fails to develop a more acceptable model of constructive resolution of issues of territorial status (border disputes, status of dependent countries, self-proclaimed states), but the size of territories controlled by marginal political and even criminal groups is growing. This situation requires: an increase in the role of the UN (especially the UN Security Council); more active use of peacekeeping missions, which will only be possible with their reform and the development of various international legal principles (especially regarding the conditions and circumstances of political self-determination); and the imposition of sanctions in the case of annexation of territories. Given that there can be no vacuum of political power or self-government in inhabited territories, the issues of contested political status of different territories and loss or weakening of legal political influence in a certain territory can lead aggressor states to vie for control of them (thereby threatening to destabilize interstate relations), or to install hybrid political regimes or to establish other illegal entities.

#### **4. Discussion and conclusion**

All international conflicts regarding the contested political statuses of territories, despite the variety of their types, are united by the lack of legitimate power in different parts of globe or the desire to establish such power, creating clashes of interests between parties to the conflicts and the spread of instability. Moreover, they become resolvable only with active international political intervention and appropriate international legal support.

All the conflicts regarding the contested political status of territories can be differentiated by origin into the following types: 1) conflicts that arose as a result of the forcible annexation of territories the incorporation of which is not recognized by the international community; 2) conflicts that arose due to the creation of self-proclaimed states in territories controlled by occupying regimes; 3) conflicts that arose due to the creation of self-proclaimed states as a result of domestic crises, but

with the participation of foreign policy factors; 4) conflicts over disputed border areas and islands; 5) conflicts regarding political claims to dependent countries under the control of other states; 6) latent conflicts over claims on land and water areas that, according to international conventions, should not be extended to the sovereignty of any state; 7) the Middle East conflict due to non-compliance with the decision of the UN General Assembly of 1947 on the establishment of a sovereign Arab state.

Among the various types of conflicts regarding the political status of territories, the main issue of geopolitical controversy is the conflict over the legal status of Palestine and the resolution of so-called self-proclaimed states, most of which are associated with Russia's desire to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet space. The conflict-generating potential regarding disputes over control in so-called dependent territories is much smaller today. Interstate border disputes mostly concern the status of individual islands. The greatest concentration of conflicts regarding the political status of the territories is connected with the issues of contention in the collapse of the USSR and in the incompleteness and disorder of decolonization.

In order to avoid new conflicts, the UN needs to strengthen the status of Antarctica and the areas adjacent to the North Pole, making them a neutral demilitarized territory that cannot be extended to the sovereignty of individual states. Thus, the resolution of territorial and political conflicts requires modernization and reform of the UN Security Council and international law, paying much attention to the conditions and circumstances of state and political self-determination, as well as the realization of effective sanctions in the case of annexation of territories.

## Acknowledgement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors and has been carried out within the framework of the state budget scientific theme of the Department of geography of Ukraine of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv called "Territorial and political problems of Ukraine" and the state budget scientific theme of the Department

of international relations and regional studies of Lesia Ukrainka Volyn National University called "Ukraine in the system of the European integration and the cross-border cooperation".

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