

Pathways to Unlikely Outcome

An almost certain race to tap the Arctic's newly available resources will increase the chances of a violent incident leading to conflict. For example, nonpolar states starved for resources could claim underwater energy reserves. Canada could require ships using the Northwest Passage to pay high licensing fees. Fishing vessels of some polar states might harass those of other states, such as Japan.

Armed conflict could take many forms including the following: Russia versus NATO, the United States versus Canada, and polar states versus nonpolar states. A possible armed grab for resources and control of shipping lanes could undermine existing alliances and open the door to resource grabs by other states. If the "Battle over the Arctic" becomes a clarion call in various national media, pressure will grow on all the players to assert their "sovereign rights," possibly ushering in a new era of interstate tension and conflict.

Indicators to Watch For

- Russian calls to renegotiate the treaty limiting land claims in the Arctic.
- Canada increases patrols in Arctic waters and starts searching ships to demonstrate that these are internal waterways.
- Border states send "scientific teams" year round to key Arctic locations.
- More nations plant their flags in Arctic waters.
- Special oil carriers and drilling platforms are built for the Arctic.

Factors to Encourage Positive Outcome

- International bodies or regional states propose new legal principles to reflect changed circumstances caused by sea ice melting.
- Support grows for the creation of an international ecological zone that sets parameters for resource sharing.