

### **Unlikely Event**

Recent trends in the Arctic spur a military conflict among regional players over conflicting claims to Arctic resources within the next five years.

### **Background**

The United Nations Law of the Sea prohibits any country from owning the North Pole or the Arctic Ocean surrounding it. The treaty permits each bordering country (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States) to expand its claim beyond its permitted 200-mile economic zone if its continental shelf is geographically linked to the Arctic seabed. The United States has not ratified the treaty, however, and does not recognize any rights beyond the 200-mile economic zone or Canada's claim that the Northwest Passage represents internal Canadian waters to which it may limit access.

### **Events and Triggers**

In 2001, Russia made an unsuccessful bid for more of the Arctic, and Canada and Denmark subsequently submitted claims on the region. Since 2006, NATO forces, including Norwegian and Dutch troops, have conducted annual training exercises in the Arctic. Russia planted its flag on the seabed below the North Pole in 2007, raising concerns by other states that Russia was trying to claim more territory.

Polar melting is expanding access to untapped energy and mineral reserves that are increasingly attractive to both polar and nonpolar states in a resource-scarce world with escalating energy prices. Long-term overfishing could spur nations dependent on this source of protein to begin fishing in the Arctic Ocean as it becomes more accessible. The melting of Arctic ice is likely to open the Northwest Passage to year-round shipping in the coming years, undercutting the commercial utility of the Panama Canal.