International Security and International Law in the Northwest Passage

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ABSTRACT

Concern over the loss of sea ice has renewed discussions over the legal status of the Arctic and subarctic transcontinental maritime route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, referred to as the “Northwest Passage.” Over the past thirty years, Canada has maintained that the waters of the Passage are some combination of internal waters or territorial seas. Applying the rules of international law, as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention, suggests that the Passage is a strait used for international navigation. Expressing concerns over maritime safety and security, recognition of northern sovereignty, and protection of the fragile Arctic environment, Ottawa has sought to exercise greater authority over the Passage. This Article suggests that Canada can best achieve widespread global support for managing its maritime Arctic by acknowledging that the Passage constitutes an international strait and working through the International Maritime Organization to develop a comprehensive package of internationally accepted regulations.

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I. THE STRATEGIC VISTA OF THE ARCTIC

Seventy percent of the globe is covered by the single, interconnected “world ocean.” 1 Eighty percent of the world’s population lives within 200 miles of a coastline. 2 Ninety percent of international trade travels by sea. 3 Much of the commerce, many of the people and resources, and much of the conflict on the planet occurs in the coastal zone. 4 Consequently, the diplomatic and legal framework for ocean governance is of direct concern to the maintenance of a stable world system. These figures are especially compelling for the states of North America, which are connected to the world primarily by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The harsh climate of the High North and the ice cap over the Arctic Ocean has deterred most transcontinental traffic from using the northern waters as an approach into the shores of Canada and the United States. 5

1. 8 THE NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA 861 (15th ed. 2005).
4. See id. (describing the high level and growth of commerce in the ports around the world, particularly China and the United States); Liz Creel, RIPPLE EFFECTS: POPULATION AND COASTAL REGIONS 2 (2003) (noting the large and growing numbers of people living in coastal regions).
5. See THE NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, supra note 1, at 795 (describing the ice and other obstacles which made the Northwest Passage historically unnavigable); see generally Anne Cadoret, Conflict Dynamics in Coastal Zones: A Perspective Using the Example of Languedoc-Rousillon (France), 13 J. COASTAL
While three vast oceans—the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic—have shielded North America in the past, in recent decades globalization has brought increasing numbers and diversity of shipping into Atlantic and Pacific ports. Climate change may transform the Arctic Ocean into yet a third waterway for transcontinental traffic into North America. The result is that the northern tier will become open to the benefits and exposed to the potential costs of worldwide commerce. The greatest impact to date of the prospect of increased shipping in the North American Arctic has been the disruption of Canada’s sense of security.

Over the past thirty years, the annual average sea-ice extent has decreased about eight percent, or nearly one million square kilometers—an area larger than all of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark combined. The extent of sea ice has declined more dramatically in summer than the annual average, with the loss amounting to 15–20 percent of late-summer ice coverage. Moreover, a consensus is building that the melting trend is accelerating, as Arctic temperatures have increased over the last few decades. Winter temperatures in Alaska and Western Canada, for example, are 3–4°C higher over the past fifty years, and there is an expectation that larger increases will be projected.

The five Global Climate Models (GCMs) utilized in the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) project a decline in winter maximum extent ice over the next 100 years. Scientists believe these changes are one major reason for dramatic environmental events, such as the recent detachment of a sixty-six-square-kilometer giant ice shelf from Ellesmere Island, which is located about 800 kilometers from the North Pole.
A. War in the Arctic?

Coupled with other environmental stress, such as illegal fishing, overfishing, and pollution, there is concern that the trends in Arctic climate change may “overwhelm the adaptive capacity” of some Arctic ecosystems and reduce or even eliminate populations of living resources. The security implications of these changes could be enormous.

The New York Times suggests that Arctic waters are an emerging arena of international competition in a High North version of the “Great Game.” New Arctic maritime claims, maritime boundary disputes, and international competition over the resources of the Arctic Ocean exacerbate the unease precipitated by the prospect of increased international shipping. These trends led Scott Borgerson to warn in Foreign Affairs last year of an impending “Arctic meltdown” generating conflict in the region. Meanwhile, the European Commission suggests that changes in the Arctic physical environment are altering the geostrategic dynamics of the region and will affect global security.

Climate change is transforming the security dynamic in the Arctic, but does the future hold a stable and cooperative Arctic order or a competitive and volatile Arctic anarchy? The United States has been the voice of reason, and Washington has the power to shape the future. Yet those concerned about the potential for Arctic conflict suggest that climate change threatens to upend international stability or even drag nations into war. We have, after all, been here before.

The seventeenth century faced upheaval and adversity on a monumental scale: in China, the Ming dynasty suffered a violent collapse; the Ottoman Empire was engaged in a bitter struggle with the Holy League; and the Dutch Revolt pried the Low Countries from

10. Hassol, supra note 7, at 5, 10.
12. Id.

Climate change is best viewed as a threat multiplier which exacerbates existing trends, tensions and instability. The core challenge is that climate change threatens to overburden states and regions which are already fragile and conflict prone. It is important to recognise that the risks are not just of a humanitarian nature; they also include political and security risks that directly affect European interests.

Id.
the Spanish Empire. The Thirty Years War dismembered Central Europe, ending in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and ushering into existence the modern nation-state. More warfare afflicted the globe during the seventeenth century “Great Crisis” than during any time until the 1940s. New climate data archives have begun to confirm what Voltaire explained to his mistress Madame du Chatelet in the 1740s: “The ‘period of usurpations almost from one end of the world to the other’ . . . were the result of government, religion and ‘le climat.’” The planet had cooled in the Little Ice Age, which froze Chesapeake Bay; chilled Alexandria, Egypt; and killed rice crops in Japan and wheat in Portugal. These climate changes caused widespread famine that descended into anarchy, triggering riots and chaos throughout the world.

The United States is more circumspect about the prospects of impending Arctic warfare. The Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power, which was signed by the service chiefs of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard in 2007, suggests,

Climate change is gradually opening up the waters of the Arctic, not only to new resource development, but also to new shipping routes that may reshape the global transport system. While these developments offer opportunities for growth, they are potential sources of competition and conflict for access and natural resources.

II. ARCTIC COMPETITION

In 2008, the U.S. Geological Survey estimated that the Arctic region holds 13% of the undiscovered oil and 30% of the undiscovered natural gas in the world—figures that do not include potentially vast

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15. See generally Paul Arblaster, A HISTORY OF THE LOW COUNTRIES 121–55 (2006) (describing the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish Empire and contemporaneous issues and events in the Low Countries); Kenneth M. Setton, Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century (1991) (describing the various troubled relations between the members of the Holy League and the Ottoman Empire); F.E. Wakeman, The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China (1985) (detailing the fall of the Ming dynasty and the rise of its successor).


17. Woodrow Wilson Int’l Ctr. for Scholars, Fallout from the Ice Age (Mid 17th Century Crises), Wilson Q., Winter 2009, at 77 (reviewing, THE GENERAL CRISIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (Geoffrey Parker & Leslie M. Smith eds., 2d ed. 1997) (discussing the various conflicts that occurred during the 17th century)).

18. Id.

19. Id.

20. Id.; see also Parker & Smith, supra note 17, at 7–12.

reserves of methane gas hydrates.\textsuperscript{22} Areas of the Beaufort Sea and north of Siberia as well as the waters and seabed of the Sverdrup Basin were identified as probable areas of interest.\textsuperscript{23} However, most of the Arctic energy resources are located within coastal states’ recognized 200-mile exclusive economic zones, which are not subject to any controversy or likely to incite conflict.\textsuperscript{24} The talk of a war over resources is inaccurate—though it is red meat for Canadian and Russian nationalists; it is the prospect for new resources that is driving the competition.\textsuperscript{25}

\section*{A. Factors Driving Tension}

There are at least five broad factors contributing to rising tension in the Arctic, and all are related to the rich natural resources in the region. The foremost Arctic resource is water—the immense spatial resource of the Arctic Ocean—as a domain of movement for international shipping. Ninety percent of international trade travels by sea, and if the Arctic ice melts, intercontinental tanker and cargo traffic between Europe and Asia will become much more economical.\textsuperscript{26}

Second, high commodity prices and scarce supplies of oil, gas, and minerals mean demand for commodities is tight—even in a depressed global economy.\textsuperscript{27} If prosperity returns, commodity prices could skyrocket to feed the global economy.

Third, we are experiencing a renaissance in technology for operating in the extreme Arctic environment. New technologies make drilling in the extreme conditions of the Arctic Ocean feasible, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ed Struzik, \textit{Dawn of a New Arctic}, EDMONTON J., May 3, 2009, at E1 (Can.).
\item \textsuperscript{24} Yuri Solozobov, \textit{Escalating Tensions Over Hunt for Oil and Gas in the Arctic}, ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA (Russ.), Aug. 28, 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/russianow/6098600/Escalating-tensions-over-hunt-for-oil-and-gas-in-the-Arctic---Russia-Now.html (noting that the great majority of the Arctic’s gas and oil resources are concentrated within the Russian and U.S. Arctic territories, respectively).
\item \textsuperscript{25} Struzik, supra note 22.
\item \textsuperscript{26} See Brian Beary, \textit{Race for the Arctic}, 2 CQ GLOBAL RESEARCHER 213, 218 (2008), available at http://www.indigenoussummit.com/servlet/download?id=68 (“Savings on shipping routes could be enormous if the Arctic routes were to become usable for longer periods.”).
\item \textsuperscript{27} See Mark J.C. Crescenzi, \textit{Economic Interdependence and Conflict in World Politics} 12 (2005) (noting that “[i]f a nation needs a certain quantity of oil—regardless of the price—to keep its production and transportation systems running, then this demand for oil is inelastic” and the nation will be forced to pay whatever price is necessary to obtain such oil or any other absolutely necessary commodity).  
\end{itemize}
new ice-breaker designs make it easier to travel through the ice pack.\footnote{28} Fourth, climate change is melting the ice, and the Arctic could be ice-free during the summer within a few years.\footnote{29} While this trend increases access to the seas, the melting permafrost threatens to disrupt road and rail infrastructure on land.

Finally, with increased activity and greater numbers of ships come potential new threats to homeland security. The attacks of 9/11 altered the perception of port, vessel, and waterway security, galvanizing public attention toward potential maritime vulnerabilities in Alaska.\footnote{30}

Norway, with an economy based on oil and fishing, wants to fence off as much of the water in the Barents Sea and surrounding Svalbard as possible in order to ensure a steady flow of new oil and other resources in the coming years.\footnote{31} Oslo seeks international recognition for Norwegian control of the resource-rich waters off Svalbard; responsibility for governing the frozen island outpost was granted to the nation under a 1920 treaty.\footnote{32} Russia has resisted the move; Norway and Russia are also at odds over control of portions of the Barents Sea.\footnote{33} Like Norway, Greenland needs to develop natural resources if it ever hopes to declare independence and give up government subsidies from Copenhagen.\footnote{34}

There are other Arctic issues that sometimes are mistakenly conflated with issues related to the Northwest Passage. These include continental shelf claims by Russia and other countries; the related debate over the legal status of the North Pole; and maritime boundary issues such as the disagreement between Canada and the United States in the Beaufort Sea and the disagreement between

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\footnote{28}{Brian Baskin, \textit{Northern Exposure: As the Arctic Gets Warmer, Oil and Gas Producers See the Chance for a Big Expansion; But Plenty of Technological Hurdles Remain}, WALL ST. J., Feb. 11, 2008, at R4; Beary, \textit{supra} note 26, at 218.}
\footnote{29}{\textit{Hassol}, \textit{supra} note 7, at 13. ("The average extent of sea-ice cover in summer has decreased by 15–20\% over the past 30 years. This decline is expected to accelerate, with the near total loss of sea ice in summer predicted for late this century.").}
\footnote{30}{\textit{See Kevin Wadlow, Tighter Boating Oversight?: Terrorism Fears Could Lead to Total Monitoring}, KNIGHT RIDDER TRIB. BUS. NEWS (Wash., D.C.), Mar. 14, 2007, at 1 (discussing increased attention to maritime security, as well as increased risks of terrorist attacks to the nation’s coastline, following the attacks of September 11, 2001).}
\footnote{31}{\textit{See Beary, \textit{supra} note 26, at 213, 219, 226, 228} (describing declining oil production in Norway, setting off a desperate search by that country for new resources).}
\footnote{32}{\textit{Id.} at 226, 228.}
\footnote{33}{\textit{Id.} at 226.}
\footnote{34}{\textit{See CIA World Factbook, Economy: Greenland, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gl.html} (last visited Oct. 8, 2009) (showing that Greenland’s economy is heavily dependent on subsidies from Denmark, but that Denmark intends to reduce the subsidies as revenues from oil exports come onstream).}
\end{footnotes}
Canada and Denmark with regard to Hans Island, which is situated in the center of the Nares Strait between Ellesmere Island (the most northerly part of Nunavut, Canada) and Greenland.

While each of these and other issues may be affected by ice changes occurring in the Arctic, they encompass separate and distinct problems and are subject to different international rules. Morris Maduro, a professor of international law at the University of Alberta, recently warned in the Edmonton Journal that mixing Arctic issues has tended to generate confusion and impede cooperation.35 For that reason, this Article focuses primarily on the legal status of the Northwest Passage, its associated diplomatic and security issues, and its effect on the global oceans order.

The United States, which has been labeled the “reluctant Arctic power”36 but is catching up to the other Arctic nations, released a presidential-level Arctic Region Policy in January 2009.37 The Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Thad Allen, is fond of saying that when it comes to climate change and the causes of global warming, he is an agnostic: “All I know is there is more water up here than ever. And I have to provide marine safety and marine security to that water.”38

The milieu of Arctic politics and competing maritime claims, new Arctic security considerations, and the promise of Arctic economic development has disturbed the historically placid Arctic politics. The epicenter of this trend is a new “cold war” developing between Russia and Canada. Disputes over competing claims to the continental shelf of the North Pole have unnecessarily ignited a contest of words and wills featuring Moscow and Ottawa as the principle antagonists.39

B. Russia: Responsible or Revanchist?

Russia views Arctic development as a means to attain greater recognition and as a resource basin to fuel renewed economic growth powered by Arctic-region natural resources. The Arctic currently produces twenty percent of Russia’s GDP.40 The new Russian

37. Id. at 1.
national security strategy warns that, within a decade, nations could be at war over resources in the Arctic Ocean. In language reminiscent of the hand-wringing over bipolar measurements concerning the U.S.—Soviet “coalition of forces” in the 1970s, Moscow’s new strategy states that Arctic resources will become the “critical point for the world military balance.” Wrapping 170 degrees around the Arctic Circle, the high latitude nation dominates the geography of the polar north. Russia “thinks like the North and drinks like the North.”

The country has embarked on a project to ensure it is regarded as the first Arctic superpower. In 2001, Russia was the first nation to stake a claim to the oil and mineral resources of the seabed in the Arctic Ocean by filing a claim for exclusive resource rights under the Law of the Sea Convention. Canada and Denmark (Greenland) have filed claims as well. The cheeky 2007 submarine expedition to plant a Russian titanium flag on the seabed of the North Pole presaged Moscow’s entry to a geostrategic opera in the High North. Meanwhile, long-range Tupolev-95 “Bear” and Tupolev-160 “ Blackjack” strategic bomber flights over the Arctic have been renewed after a fifteen-year suspension, raising hackles in Canada and Norway. Flush with petrodollars, Moscow is developing the Arctic as a cash cow to provide a future stream of oil, gas, and mineral wealth. Is the warning contained in the new Russian strategy a prescient sign of the future or more bluster from the Kremlin’s public diplomacy machine to restore national pride?

43. One need only look at a map to confirm the extent of Russia’s immense Arctic coastline.
44. Russian National Security Strategy, supra note 42 (author’s translation).
45. Beary, supra note 26, at 225, 228.
46. See id. at 217.
47. Id. at 215.
49. See Beary, supra note 26, at 230–34 (describing the actions taken by Russia to extract resources in the Arctic).
C. Canada: Progressive or Paranoid?

Canada is taking Russia at its word, firing back diplomatic missives in response to each intemperate move by Moscow. At the same time, shoring up its own excessive assertions of sovereignty over large parts of the Arctic Ocean has become a national preoccupation. Canada plans to build up to eight ice-strengthened patrol vessels to enforce strict laws in the famed Northwest Passage, a network of Arctic Ocean waterways—some of which are 100 miles wide—that connects the North Atlantic in the east to the Beaufort Sea in the west. Although Canada claims these areas as internal waters—the equivalent of the Great Salt Lake in Utah—under the Law of the Sea Convention, the waters of the Passage are actually composed of a combination of territorial seas, the Canadian exclusive economic zone, and an international strait open to the international community.

Canada was the first Arctic nation to assert controversial claims over large areas of the Arctic Ocean beyond its land territory. Even as other Arctic nations scramble to assert sovereign rights in the resources of the seabed, Canada’s internal waters claims over vast stretches of the sea still constitute the most excessive maritime claims of any Arctic nation. Ottawa’s extensive claims are built on a northern mythos and profound disquiet over a new sense of national vulnerability that first emerged in the late 1960s.

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51. See Huebert, supra note 36, at 7 (stating that Canada claims the Arctic areas as internal waters but that other countries do not recognize these claims).
52. Id. Canada’s claims to the Northwest Passage as internal waters became controversial by 1970. See id. (noting that tensions escalated between the United States and Canada over the Canadian claims to the Northwest Passage as internal waters). For comparison, Russia did not make its controversial claim of half the Arctic Ocean, including the north pole, until 2001. Beary, supra note 26, at 225.
54. See Guy Killaby, “Great Game in a Cold Climate”: Canada’s Arctic Sovereignty in Question, CANADIAN MILITARY J., Winter 2005/2006, at 31, 33 (“As noted by Canadian legal scholar Douglas M. Johnston, ‘... the remoteness and vastness of these [Arctic] territories have passed down a legacy of political, legal, and military unease. Part of this uneasiness can be traced to the history of Canada’s unrequited claims of Arctic sovereignty.’”).
lay claim to essentially the entire panoply of littoral and coastal regions of the Arctic Ocean in the western hemisphere. 56 Canada and Denmark (in its capacity as proprietor of Greenland) dispute Hans Island, an insignificant speck of ground between the two nations. 57 Canada also claims authority over part of the Beaufort Sea off the coast of Alaska and rejects Russia’s seabed claims in the Arctic Ocean. 58

Critiquing Canada’s straight baseline claims, the European Commission stated:

The Member States acknowledge that elements other than purely geographical ones may be relevant for purposes of drawing baselines in particular circumstances but are not satisfied that the present baselines are justified in general. Moreover, the Member States cannot recognize the validity of a historic title as justification for the baselines drawn in accordance with the order. 59

Alert, Canada’s northernmost base, located on Ellesmere Island, is actually closer to Moscow than to Ottawa. 60 This remote outpost for defending Canada’s sovereignty had a population of only five inhabitants in the 2006 census. 61

The prospect of increasing numbers of oil tankers, cargo vessels, cruise ships, oceanographic research ships, and fishing fleets entering the area compelled the five Arctic nations—Russia, Canada, the United States, Denmark, and Norway—to focus seriously on the Arctic in recent years. The five-year international Arctic marine shipping assessment found that 6,000 vessels operate in the Arctic Ocean every year. 62 As a result of increased traffic, Canada’s claim over the waters throughout the Northwest Passage as internal waters appears likely to weaken in the future.

57. See Beary, supra note 26, at 226 (describing the once good-humored rivalry over the 300 acre barren and uninhabited island).
58. See id. (describing many of the territorial disputes presently at issue in the arctic and surrounding area).
59. ROACH & SMITH, supra note 53, at 121 (citing Note from British High Commission, Note No. 90/86 (Jul. 9, 1986), reprinted in Telegram from U.S. Embassy in Paris, No. 33625 (Jul. 24, 1986)).
61. Id.
The United States and Canada are among the closest allies in the world; their economies, people, and destinies are intertwined. They share a fundamental interest in North American security. In a joint media appearance with Canadian Foreign Minister Cannon, Secretary of State Clinton stated:

Obviously, there are questions of sovereignty and jurisdiction that have to be acknowledged and respected, but what we don’t want is for the Arctic to become a free-for-all. If there is going to be greater maritime passageways through the Arctic, if there is going to be more exploration for natural resources, if there are going to be more security issues, I think it’s in the Canadian and the United States’ interests to try to get ahead of those, and try to make sure we know what we’re going to do to resolve them before countries that are not bordering the arctic are making claims, are behaving in ways that will cause us difficulties.

Neither country is secure if the other is vulnerable, which is why the two neighbors have integrated continental defense under the bilateral North American Air Defense (NORAD) military command for decades. Membership in NATO provides an additional opportunity for the two democracies to champion stability and freedom, with both nations sharing the burden of combat in Afghanistan.

Canadian exceptionalism in the Arctic Ocean has weakened the ties between the two countries and provided an unflattering glimpse into how governments in Ottawa—both on the left and the right—have used the Arctic to score political points at home and reject multilateralism abroad. At times, all nations are inclined to feel defensive within the international community, and going it alone feeds a certain hypersensitive sovereignty impulse that can appeal to fears, pride, and independence.

63. Canadians Everywhere Mark Canada Day, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE, July 1, 2009, available at http://www2.canada.com/topics/news/story.html?id=1750171. In a statement on Canada Day, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote that “Canada and the United States are the closest of allies and friends. Our two peoples are joined by fundamental values that define our societies.” Id.

64. Hillary Clinton, U.S. Sec’y of State, Remarks with Canadian Foreign Minister Cannon (Jun. 13, 2009), http://ottawa.usembassy.gov/content/textonly.asp?section=can_usa&document=Sec_State_Minister_Cannon.


In a world fraught with conventional and irregular military risks, political and cultural divisions, and the global economy collapsing in slow motion, the United States, Canada, and the strong network of free, democratic, and capitalist allies, friends, and partners form the fulcrum of stability that holds the world together. Ottawa and Washington are principle defenders of a stable state world system. Both nations are rich and prosper from the enjoyment of peace, liberty, and equality that is only possible with a safe and stable planet.

The foundation for ocean governance is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is the constitution for the world’s oceans. Conflict avoidance, international peace and security, and global stability are directly connected to the Law of the Sea. In the United States, the sovereignty impulse has led us astray, convincing a handful of powerful senators to reject the Law of the Sea Convention. They believe that going it alone protects U.S. sovereignty and promotes American interests. But as one of the prime beneficiaries of a stable, fair, and widely accepted global order, the United States has abandoned self-interest in favor of placating a false sense of independence by not working multilaterally to join the Law of the Sea Convention.

Likewise, Canada is under the unilateralist spell of oceans sovereignty, going it alone in the Arctic Ocean in a vain attempt to grasp a future of stability and security amidst a rapidly changing geophysical Arctic climate and unsettling and dynamic Arctic politics. Canada has resurrected “sovereignty” patrols, loudly trumpeted plans to construct ice-strengthened patrol vessels to enforce unilateral rules in the Northwest Passage, and retreated behind the mythos of Canadian Arctic sovereignty. The storyline is recycled by the government–media–academic complex to obtain the approval—or at least the acquiescence—of the international community, especially the United States.

The often repeated assertion of Canadian sovereignty has acquired an elusive definition; in the media, it has become a rhetorical vessel containing varying elements of control, authority, and perception. There is a sense that Canada would like to exercise

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70. Id.
71. See Arctic of ‘Strategic Importance’ to Canada: PM, supra note 67; Canada to Build Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships, supra note 50.
sovereignty over the waters and have them recognized as internal waters, but Ottawa has never determined how to do this or precisely what theory might be most effective in obtaining the support of the international community. Relying on cultural and policy arguments augmented by a series of claims and legislative acts over a period of time, Canadians typically view all these efforts as having coalesced into a convincing package of evidence to support claims of

Outside of government, some of the rhetoric from Canada is particularly undisciplined, with nongovernmental organizations and media making seemingly self-evident assertions that the waters are under Canadian “control,” “oversight,” “jurisdiction,” or “sovereignty.” Some believe that an increased level of sovereignty-affirming activities by the Canadian government will secure Canadian claims. Paradoxically, rather than supporting multilateral efforts to protect arctic ecology, Canadian environmental groups are among the most strident in supporting unilateral assertions of Canadian sovereignty over the passage in order to avert what they see as an impending ecological catastrophe caused by increased shipping.

The 1967 and 1968 Canadian straight baselines in the arctic, both in the East and West, project at numerous points tens of miles into the high seas, violating virtually every rule governing lawfully drawn baselines. The effect is to enclose the entire Canadian [A]rctic as internal waters. Even if one accepts the series of straight baselines, the international community would still enjoy the right of innocent passage through those newly enclosed internal waters. This is because the Law of the Sea Convention provides that where the establishment of straight baselines has the effect of enclosing as internal waters areas that had not previously been considered as such, a right of innocent passage still exists in those waters. Some suggest that straight baselines made by a nation before 1982 have special status and should be considered permissible. This approach is unconvincing; otherwise, the entire range of excessive maritime claims predating the 1982 Convention similarly would be permissible, thus creating a global crazy quilt of conflicting maritime claims and defeating the purpose of the Convention as “one gigantic package deal.”


75. Kraska, supra note 7, at 262 (arguing that recent international pressures have led to an increased interest in Arctic security from both the Canadian government and the media); Robert Huebert, The Shipping News Part II, How Canada’s Arctic Sovereignty is on Thinning Ice, 58 Int’l J. 295, 296–97 (2003) (arguing that the Canadian government must do more to protect its Arctic sovereignty).

The problem is that the ice keeps melting and no other nation has accepted Canada's excessive claims of sovereignty.77 The reason for this lack of acceptance is that Canada's Arctic claims are inconsistent with the Law of the Sea Convention, to which Canada became a party in 2003.78 Canadian scholars have circulated well-practiced (if not slightly tortured) theories purportedly grounded in the international law of the sea in order to manufacture a rationale that would support Canada's claims to sovereignty over an ocean.79

III. THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

In particular, the loss of sea ice in the High North has renewed discussions over the legal status of the Arctic and subarctic transcontinental maritime routes connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific. The routes, which shorten transit from Europe to Asia by 4,000 miles, connect the North Atlantic and the Labrador Sea to the Beaufort and East Siberian Seas.80 The merchant shipping industry is also interested in using the shorter routes through the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage, and perhaps a transpolar route straight across the pole.81 The United States and Russia are poised to manage all traffic through the Bering Strait (also called the Bering Gate), a narrow choke point only fifty-two miles wide that is the

77. See BUREAU OF OCEANS & INT’L ENVTL & SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS, U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, LIMITS IN THE SEA NO. 112: UNITED STATES RESPONSES TO EXCESSIVE NATIONAL MARITIME CLAIMS 29–30 (noting that both the United States and the Member States of the European Community rejected Canada’s straight baseline claims as excessive).


79. See, e.g., Donat Pharand, The Arctic Waters and the Northwest Passage: A Final Revisit, 38 OCEAN DEV. & INT’L L. 3, 58–59 (concluding that Canadian sovereignty over the Northwest Passage is legally secured by the 1985 baselines).

80. See Northwest Passage, By the Numbers, CBC NEWS, July 25, 2006, http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/northwest-passage/numbers.html (stating that 7,000 km would be saved by utilizing the Northwest Passage rather than an alternate route like the Panama Canal or Suez Canal).

81. See Huebert, The Shipping News Part II, How Canada’s Arctic Sovereignty is on Thinning Ice, supra note 75, at 302–05 (detailing the reasons why it is likely that the shipping industry will take advantage of this new shipping lane as soon as possible).
gateway connecting the Pacific Ocean to the Arctic Ocean.\textsuperscript{82} The two nations should use their position astride the strait to ensure that other Arctic states adopt only internationally accepted vessel safety, security, and traffic management regulations.

Compared to the current routes via the Panama Canal and Suez Canal, a transit from the Pacific to the Atlantic through the Northwest Passage could save two weeks of travel.\textsuperscript{83} The savings in transit time will be especially beneficial to European and Asian nations:

EU Member States have the world’s largest merchant fleet and many of those ships use transoceanic routes. The melting of sea ice is progressively opening opportunities to navigate on routes through Arctic waters. This could considerably shorten trips from Europe to the Pacific, save energy, reduce emissions, promote trade, and diminish pressure on the main trans-continental navigation channels. But serious obstacles remain, including drift ice, lack of infrastructure, environmental risks and uncertainties about future trade patterns. Hence the development of Arctic commercial navigation will require time and effort.\textsuperscript{84}

This time savings translates into lower fuel costs, saved ship steaming time, and a reduction in labor costs for the commercial shipping industry. Although transport by ship is the most environmentally sensitive method of moving heavy cargo, bunker fuel is extremely dirty, so less travel time means fewer air emissions.\textsuperscript{85} For the armed forces, utilizing the route could facilitate improved crisis response and accelerate time-phased force deployment schedules to move forces from one theater to another.

Canada has succumbed to the sovereignty impulse because the nation fears that without ownership over the Arctic Ocean and unilateral control over the Northwest Passage, the safety, security, and environmental protection of the Arctic Archipelago—and the entire nation—will be threatened by the outside world.

Much like 9/11 absorbed the psychological final measure of the American sense of self-protection and innocence regarding terrorism, the disappearing ice cap threatens to impose the ugly reality of the

\textsuperscript{82} This will become even more important with the increased shipping traffic that the Bering Strait is likely to see in the future due to global warming. See TRAUSTI VALSSON, HOW THE WORLD WILL CHANGE WITH GLOBAL WARMING 107 (2006) (“The narrowness of the Bering Strait, where the Arctic Ocean opens into the Pacific will mean that there will be enormous shipping traffic there later in the century.”).

\textsuperscript{83} Northwest Passage, By the Numbers, supra note 80.


\textsuperscript{85} See Adrian Burton, Air Pollution: Ship Sulfate an Unexpected Heavyweight, 116 ENVTL. HEALTH PERSP. A475, A475 (2008) (arguing that the high sulfur content in bunker fuel presents an environmental hazard).
world on the idyllic doorstep of Canada. Poorly maintained Third World merchant ships and their multinational crews from distant and unsavory lands will discover the new superhighway between Asian manufacturers and European markets. The result: the challenging, ice-infested waters will cause oil spills, and the multiplying number of ships will bring illegal migrants or, even worse, terrorists.

In this regard, ensuring safety, security, and environmental protection in the Arctic and the Northwest Passage is a shared concern that provides an opportunity for greater cooperation not only between Canada and the United States but also among all maritime states and future users of the waterway. Although it is common (albeit unhelpful) to cast the issue of the Northwest Passage as a bilateral disagreement between the United States and Canada, it is not. The issue is a multilateral matter involving the interests and equities of nations from Asia and Europe.

Consequently, Canada can best secure its interests in sovereignty, safety, security, and environmental protection by proactively engaging to develop an Arctic legal regime under the framework of Law of the Sea Convention. This will mean abandoning some of the more audacious and unsupported claims of sovereignty and complying with the rules contained in the treaty. On the other hand, if it acts now, Ottawa will be able to lead the design and implementation of the new Arctic framework before the ships arrive.

Canada should move quickly. Surface vessels belonging to Canada, the United States, Norway, Netherlands, Japan, Bahamas, and Liberia have fully transited the Northwest Passage nearly seventy times. Submarines of the United States, the United Kingdom, and presumably Russia have utilized the Arctic Ocean as a transit corridor for decades. Both the United States and Canada have essential national interests in developing a widely accepted respected legal regime for the Arctic Ocean and Northwest Passage before climate change alters shipping patterns.

If the shipping arrives before the two North American partners can work with the international community to adopt an Arctic regime, both Washington and Ottawa will experience reduced negotiating leverage and the result will be less control over the Arctic. Hardline foot-dragging in Canada is squandering time and
the diplomatic capital needed to negotiate such an agreement, making both nations less secure over the long run.

Canada exercises complete sovereignty over the islands of the North American Arctic. Although there is not much open to question on the issue of Canada’s sovereignty over the islands of the Canadian Arctic, it is worth addressing the issue because the point is typically obfuscated, generating chest-thumping reassurances of sovereignty.

A. Law of the Sea

On September 10, 1985, Canada claimed that “all the waters among its Arctic islands as internal waters” and drew straight baselines to encircle the North American Arctic. This claim is inconsistent with the Law of the Sea Convention. Under the Law of the Sea Convention, nations are entitled to draw normal baselines along the low water mark of the shoreline and claim a twelve-nautical-mile territorial sea projecting into the water. Straight baselines may be drawn in some localities, such as Norway, “where the coastline is deeply indented” and deeply “cut into” or where “there is a fringe of islands along the coast in its immediate vicinity.” Straight baselines must fulfill two additional criteria: they “must not depart to any appreciable extent from the general direction of the coast, and the sea areas lying within the lines must be sufficiently closely linked to the land domain to be subject to the regime of internal waters.”

The Arctic Ocean also does not support a claim of historic internal waters. The UN has said that “three factors are to be considered in determining whether a body of water may be considered historic internal waters: (1) the exercise of authority over the area of the claiming nation; (2) ‘the continuity of this exercise of authority’; and (3) the acquiescence of foreign nations.” “This three-part test makes historic claims notoriously difficult to maintain,” and the Northwest Passage does not meet the test.

89. See Dufresne, supra note 56, at 3–5 (asserting that while Canada has not consistently occupied the Arctic Islands, Canadian sovereignty over all but Hans Island has been uncontested).
90. BUREAU OF OCEANS & INT’L ENVTL & SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS, supra note 77, at 29 (quoting Letter from James W. Dyer, Acting Asst. Sec’y of State for Legislative & Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Dep’t of State, to Charles Mathias, Jr., U.S. Senator, State Dep’t File No. P86 0019-8641 (Feb. 26, 1986)).
91. UNCLOS, supra note 68, art. 3.
92. Id. art. 7(1).
93. Id. art. 7(3).
95. Kraska, supra note 7, at 264; Pharand, supra note 79, at 13.
It is particularly important to note that, within the context of the Canadian Arctic, where straight baselines are established that have the effect of "enclosing as internal waters areas that had not previously been considered as such," the international community retains the right of innocent passage through those waters. In other words, even if one accepts Canada's excessive claims for straight baselines or historic internal waters, international shipping still has the right of innocent passage through the waters.

The routes through the Northwest Passage meet the plain definition of a "strait used for international navigation," in which vessels and aircraft are entitled to the nonsuspendable right of transit passage. This means submarines can travel under the surface, aircraft can fly over the area, and ships and planes may use the route without the permission of, or prior notice to, Canada. Waters within twelve nautical miles of the coastline are still under Canadian sovereignty, but the nonsuspendable right of transit passage supersedes that sovereignty. Canadian laws still apply, but only so long as they do not impede or impair transit through the strait. Both the United States and the European Community have rejected Canada's claim.

Seeking a positive way forward, some scholars in Canada and the United States have advocated a bilateral solution under the assumption that the issue would be resolved if the two countries could cut a deal. A bilateral approach will not resolve the issue,
however, because it is a global rather than a bilateral issue. Any bilateral agreement between the two countries would not affect the rights of other states such as Korea, China, or Germany. Furthermore, a special deal between the United States and Canada provides a precedent for other nations to develop bilateral treaties for controlling traffic, such as Iran and Oman with respect to the Strait of Hormuz. Just as Russian reconnaissance aircraft and Chinese intelligence-gathering ships are free to operate just beyond twelve nautical miles of the United States and European countries, the rules respecting the Canada’s territorial sea in the Arctic Ocean are no different, and the state does not acquire any special protection in this regard. On the other hand, both Canada and the United States benefit from a liberal global order of the oceans that entitles their commercial shipping and naval vessels and aircraft to operate throughout the globe. Having an increasingly expeditionary military force and an economy reliant on transcontinental and cross-border trade, Canada has compelling economic and national security interests in a stable regime of the Law of the Sea. Being internationalist, outward-looking, and concerned about global order—rather than just homeland security—both the United States and Canada should be strong proponents of the generous navigation regimes permitted by the Law of the Sea Convention.

Still others have suggested the issues of the Northwest Passage may be best resolved in new treaty architecture modeled on the Antarctic Treaty governing activities in the polar South. The difference, however, is that Antarctica is a continent; the Arctic Ocean is primarily a maritime domain with existing rules reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention. There is, however, an international institution ready-made to serve as an effective multilateral forum for increasing coordination and cooperation throughout the Arctic generally and the Northwest Passage specifically: the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

103. See Solozobov, supra note 24.

Each year, Canada holds military exercises aimed at asserting sovereignty over the northern territories. Recently, the Canadian government unveiled plans to establish a new army training centre for 100 personnel in Resolute Bay, as well as to build a new deep-sea port at the north of Baffin Island. In addition, Canada will build six to eight new patrol vessels for deployment in the Northwest Passage.

104. See, e.g., Pharand, supra note 79, at 59.

105. See Int'l Mar. Org. [IMO], Introduction to IMO, http://www.imo.org/ (last visited Oct. 7, 2009) (“IMO’s main task has been to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.”).
IV. CONCLUSION: OTTAWA SHOULD LEVERAGE THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

Working in conjunction with the United States, Japan, and the EU nations, Canada should develop a comprehensive Arctic Ocean framework for ensuring appropriate sovereignty, safety, security, and environmental protection in the Arctic Ocean, including the Northwest Passage. The IMO is the specialized UN agency for developing standards for shipping and the oceans. The organization has already “adopted nearly fifty treaties and hundreds of codes, guidelines, and recommendations,” and it should begin work under Canadian leadership to complete the regime applicable to the Arctic. The IMO already has in place a number of widely accepted treaties that could be strengthened and extended for application to the Arctic Ocean, thereby accommodating Canada’s sensitivities and concerns within a strong, stable framework that is universally respected.

The 1974 Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS), for example, applies to 98.8% of world shipping and is generally considered to be the most important of all international treaties concerning the safety of merchant ships. Among the topics covered in its chapters are ship construction, subdivision and stability, fire protection, life saving appliances and arrangements, radio communications, safety of navigation, carriage of cargoes and dangerous goods, safe management and maritime security.

Chapter V of the annexed regulations provides for the establishment of ship-routing measures and reporting systems, which can be made mandatory if the IMO approves them (Regulations V/10 and 11). SOLAS regulation V/12 provides for the establishment by parties of vessel traffic services “where the volume of traffic or the degree of risk justifies such services.” Canada could enjoy ship-routing and reporting measures under the authority of the IMO rather than trying to haphazardly impose unilateral measures.

The voluntary Guidelines for Ships Operating in Arctic Ice-Covered Waters could be strengthened, extended, and made

106. MULTILATERAL PLANNERS CONFERENCE VI, MARITIME SECURITY PRIMER: GLOBAL MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION IN AN AGE OF TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL THREATS AT SEA 11 (2008).
107. Id.
108. Id. at 11–12.
mandatory, thereby controlling the types of vessels that are approved for Arctic transits.\footnote{111} The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) applies to 99.01\% of the world’s shipping.\footnote{112} It contains six annexes dealing with oil pollution, pollution by chemicals carried in bulk, harmful substances in packaged form, sewage, garbage, and air pollution.\footnote{113} Others Conventions address the dumping of wastes at sea, the rights of coastal states to intervene if their coastline is under threat of pollution following a maritime casualty, and the use of certain toxic substances in ships’ antifouling paint.\footnote{114} A special annex covering the ice-covered waters and the Arctic Ocean could replicate Canada’s tough laws on marine ecology but do so in a multilateral context.\footnote{115}

The International Shipping and Port Facility Security (ISPS)—a post-9/11 amendment to SOLAS (chapter XI-2)—and the Convention on the Suppression of Unlawful Acts at Sea against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA) address crimes committed at sea.\footnote{116} The main purpose of the SUA convention “is to ensure that appropriate action is taken against persons committing unlawful acts against ships. These include the seizure of ships by force; acts of violence against persons onboard ships; and the placement of devices onboard a ship that are likely to destroy or damage” the vessel.\footnote{117} At a diplomatic conference in 2005, the IMO adopted two protocols to the SUA Convention, one focusing on the safety of vessels and the other focusing on the safety of fixed platforms on the continental shelf.\footnote{118}

“Among the unlawful acts covered by the SUA Convention in Article 3

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{111}{See generally Int’l Mar. Org. [IMO], \textit{Guidelines for Operating in Arctic Ice-Covered Waters}, IMO Doc. MSC/Circ.1056 (Dec. 23, 2002), available at http://www.imo.org/includes/blastDataOnly.asp/data_id=6629/1056-MEPC-Circ399.pdf (providing a set of advisory guidelines for ships operating in the Arctic).}
  \item \footnote{113}{International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, as Modified by the Protocol of 1978 Relating Thereto (MARPOL), \textit{entered into force} October 2, 1983, 34 U.S.T. 3407, 1340 U.N.T.S. 184.}
  \item \footnote{115}{Part IV infra.}
  \item \footnote{117}{Id.}
  \item \footnote{118}{Id.}
\end{itemize}
are the seizure of ships by force; acts of violence against persons onboard ships; and the placement of devices on board a ship which are likely to destroy or damage it.”

The 2005 protocols criminalize activities such as (1) the use of explosives, radioactive material, biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons, or dual-use material against a ship; and (2) the use of “a ship in a manner that causes death or serious injury or damage.”

The IMO can be an effective institution for strengthening appropriate sovereignty, security, marine safety, and environmental protection. Through a process called the “Cooperative Mechanism,” for example, the IMO helped the littoral nations of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore develop a governance framework to manage the straits.

About one-third of the world’s trade and half of its oil traverse the straits each year, so resolving management and regulation to address safety, security, and environmental protection in the straits was incredibly complex. The IMO and the littoral states began meeting with about thirty other nations beginning in 2005 to develop a comprehensive regime. After meetings in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore, the straits states and the user states reached a groundbreaking agreement for cooperation among stakeholders in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. The agreement, named the Cooperative Mechanism, represents the first time that user states and states bordering a strait have come together in fulfillment of Article 43 of UNCLOS to manage cooperatively both safety and environmental protection in a strait used for international navigation.

The littoral and user states now have a forum for regular dialogue to exchange views, a committee to coordinate and manage specific projects, and a new fund to receive and manage financial contributions to build greater capacity to maintain aids to navigation. The multilateral approach for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, which is supported by several major maritime powers including Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States is a
model for the Northwest Passage, the longest and perhaps most environmentally sensitive international strait.

In the era of globalization, the IMO’s success on the equator provides the ideal framework for promoting Canada’s goals of preserving the fragile Arctic environment, maintaining maritime domain awareness in Arctic waters, and exercising appropriate security jurisdiction and regulatory oversight over the strait. This approach would open the door to widespread international recognition of Canada’s status as a strait state and attract support for appropriate measures to protect the Arctic ecosystem, ensure Canadian security and sovereignty, and promote safe navigation through designated routes. Doing so would achieve a major diplomatic success for Ottawa and would offer the best means for Canada to achieve its goal of obtaining widespread international acceptance of Canadian prerogatives in the maritime Arctic. Furthermore, it would keep all of us safer.