

THESIS

ENVIRONMENTAL SHIFTS AND STRATEGIC RIFTS: CLIMATE CHANGE'S ROLE IN ALLIED
RELATIONS; THE CASE OF THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

Submitted by

Tate Williams

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2025

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Iasmin Goes

Julia Lee
KuoRay Mao

Copyright by Tate Scott Williams 2025

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

ENVIRONMENTAL SHIFTS AND STRATEGIC RIFTS: CLIMATE CHANGE'S ROLE IN ALLIED RELATIONS; THE CASE OF THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

As Arctic sea ice continues to recede due to accelerating climate change, the Northwest Passage (NWP) - a historically ice-bound maritime route - has become increasingly navigable and economically valuable. This thesis investigates whether climate change is influencing the longstanding dispute between Canada and the United States over the legal status of the NWP. While Canada asserts that the route lies within its internal waters, the U.S. views it as an international strait, open to global navigation. This research employs a qualitative single-case study to examine how increasing navigability is shaping political relevance, policy framing, and interstate discourse over the region.

Drawing on sea ice data, historical policy documents, and discourse analysis of public statements by Canadian Prime Ministers, U.S. Presidents, and Chinese officials since 1988, the study traces how national narratives and securitization strategies have evolved. The thesis considers the implications of rising outside interest - namely Chinese - in the Arctic and how this external pressure affects bilateral relations and domestic responses. It concludes by evaluating potential outcomes of the dispute and analyzing how Arctic Indigenous populations are increasingly marginalized in a securitized policy landscape. The findings contribute to understanding how environmental change acts as a catalyst in transforming geopolitical relationships and reshaping traditional alliances.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to those who guided and supported me throughout the development of this thesis. First, I am immensely thankful to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Iasmin Goes, for her insightful feedback and steady encouragement during this project. I also wish to sincerely thank my committee members, Dr. Julia Lee and Dr. KuoRay Mao, for their thoughtful critiques and guidance, which enriched both the analytical depth and clarity of my work. Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. Peter Harris, whose early mentorship helped shape the foundation of my academic interests and this research. Their collective support made this thesis possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Chapter 1.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Sea Ice Loss.....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	12
Methodology.....	14
Single Case Study.....	15
Historical Policy Analysis.....	16
Discourse Analysis.....	17
Triangulation and Integration of Methods.....	19
Ethical Considerations.....	19
Chapter 2.....	21
Policy Analysis.....	21
The Early Arctic: Dormancy and Scientific Idealism (1984–1999).....	21
Arctic Reawakening: Securitization and Symbolic Assertion (2000–2010).....	22
Climate Crises and Competition (2010–2019).....	23
Legal Discourses and Institutional Assertiveness (2020–2024).....	24
Comparative Patterns and Legal Salience.....	25
Discourse Analysis.....	26
Canadian Prime Ministers: Sovereignty, Security, and Stewardship.....	27
U.S. Presidents: Strategic Navigation and Legal Consistency.....	28
Comparison.....	30
Outside Actors.....	30
Chapter 3.....	34
Securitization Impacts:.....	34
Securitization: Regional Impacts.....	38
Conclusion.....	42
Securitization and the Limits of Federal Policy in the Arctic.....	42
Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research.....	46
Further Research.....	48
References.....	50

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Arctic is undergoing a transformation of unprecedented scale and pace. Nowhere is this more visible - or geopolitically consequential - than in the thawing sea ice of the Northwest Passage (NWP), a series of sea routes (although multiple routes makeup the NWP, it is most often referred to as a singular entity) that wind through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Once considered a perilous and nearly mythical trade route for explorers, the NWP is now increasingly traversable due to rising global temperatures and declining sea ice, with significant implications for trade, sovereignty, and international law. As climate change reshapes the physical and political terrain of the Arctic, long-standing jurisdictional disputes are resurfacing with renewed urgency. Namely, the disagreement between Canada and the United States over the legal status of the NWP stands out as a paradigmatic case where environmental change intersects with questions of regional governance, state sovereignty, and strategic resource competition.

This thesis seeks to explore a central research question: Is climate change impacting the dispute between Canada and the United States in the Northwest Passage? More specifically, as the disputed good - the Northwest Passage - grows more valuable due to increasing navigability, does the dispute itself become more politically relevant and strategically salient to both countries? In addressing this question, this thesis situates the NWP not just as a regional concern, but as a microcosm of broader political trends, including the securitization of environmental issues, the race for resource acquisition, and the role of non-Arctic actors in polar governance.

The legal disagreement is straightforward in its core premises but complex in its ramifications. Canada maintains that the NWP lies within its internal waters, enclosed by the

exclusive economic zone around the Arctic Archipelago. The United States, conversely, claims that the NWP constitutes an international strait - a corridor used for international navigation -thus granting the right of transit passage under international law. This divergence in interpretation of international maritime law reflects a deeper structural tension between Canada's emphasis on Arctic sovereignty and environmental stewardship, and the U.S.'s global commitment to preserving navigational freedoms (Pharand 1988; Byers 2013).

For much of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, this legal dispute remained relatively subdued, buffered by pragmatic diplomacy and mutual understanding. The 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement exemplified this accommodation: the U.S. agreed to seek Canadian consent for icebreaker voyages, and Canada allowed such cooperation without prejudicing its legal position. However, the environmental conditions that once made the NWP largely theoretical as a commercial route are now eroding. According to the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), Arctic sea ice has declined by over 13% per decade since 1979, and in recent years, the NWP has opened during the summer season with increasing frequency (NSIDC 2023) and duration. This environmental shift is transforming what was once a dormant or frozen legal disagreement into a live geopolitical concern.

The renewed salience of the NWP is driven by three interconnected developments. First, the economic calculus of Arctic shipping is changing. As sea ice thins, the NWP offers a potentially shorter and less congested maritime route between Asian and North American markets compared to the Panama Canal. Smith and Stephenson (2013) estimate that commercial use of the NWP may become economically viable by mid-century under high-emissions scenarios. Already, cruise liners and even cargo vessels have navigated parts of the route during the summer months. Although the route remains treacherous and underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure, its strategic and symbolic importance is growing.

Second, the geopolitical landscape of the Arctic is becoming more contested. As Arctic ice retreats, countries beyond the Arctic Circle - most notably China - are asserting interest in the region. In its 2018 Arctic Policy White Paper, China declared itself a “near-Arctic state” and expressed intent to participate in Arctic governance and develop shipping corridors through its “Polar Silk Road” initiative (State Council of China 2018). Though China has remained largely ambiguous on the legal status of the NWP, its growing presence in Arctic research, investment, and diplomacy is reshaping regional dynamics (Brady 2017; Lackenbauer 2021). This creates pressure on Canada and the U.S. to clarify their respective positions and solidify their respective influence.

Third, domestic politics in both countries are evolving in ways that challenge the previous consensus on Arctic cooperation. In Canada, Arctic sovereignty remains a politically potent issue, particularly among northern communities and nationalist constituencies. The notion of a uniquely Canadian Arctic identity, reinforced by decades of cultural and political narratives, underpins demands for strong federal presence and legal clarity in the North (Grant 2010). In the United States, recent defense and maritime strategies have emphasized the importance of maintaining navigational freedom in a changing Arctic, framing the region as a frontier of strategic competition (U.S. Department of Defense 2019; U.S. Navy 2021).

These developments raise questions about the adequacy of existing legal and diplomatic frameworks to address a rapidly changing Arctic. The UNCLOS regime, while providing essential guidelines for maritime jurisdiction, was not designed explicitly with climate change in mind. Its provisions on baselines, straits, and internal waters assume a degree of geographic and environmental stability that is increasingly untenable in the Arctic context. Scholars have debated whether a reinterpretation of UNCLOS or new regional agreements will be necessary to accommodate the novel challenges posed by disappearing ice and emerging routes (Rayfuse 2007; Lalonde and Wright 2009).

Indigenous peoples in the Arctic have historically been excluded from sovereignty debates, even though their presence, mobility, and traditional knowledge predate modern state boundaries. The Inuit Circumpolar Council has argued that Inuit use of the Northwest Passage constitutes a form of Indigenous sovereignty and stewardship (ICC 2009). Recent legal and political movements toward Indigenous self-determination, such as the recognition of Inuit Nunangat and the implementation of land claims agreements, underscore the need to center Indigenous voices in Arctic governance (Rodon 2021). The Canada–U.S. dispute, by focusing primarily on state interests, and the subsequent re-securitization of the region risks perpetuating the marginalization of Arctic Indigenous populations, whose livelihoods are directly impacted by environmental and policy shifts.

From a theoretical standpoint, the NWP dispute offers an important case study for understanding how environmental change acts as a “threat multiplier” in international relations. Building on the work of Barbier and Homer-Dixon (1999), Busby (2008), and Gleditsch (2012), this thesis adopts the perspective that environmental stressors rarely generate conflict in isolation but rather exacerbate existing tensions, institutional gaps, and competing interests. The melting Arctic does not inevitably lead to conflict, but it increases the stakes of latent disputes and forces actors to reassess previously acceptable compromises.

At the same time, the Arctic has long been viewed as an exceptional zone of peaceful cooperation and institutional innovation. The Arctic Council, established in 1996, and various bilateral mechanisms have enabled Arctic states to coordinate scientific research, search-and-rescue protocols, and environmental protection efforts (Young 2009; Exner-Pirot 2012). However, there is growing concern that this cooperative ethos is being undermined by geopolitical competition, increased military activity, and the sidelining of multilateral forums in favor of national strategic interests (Huebert 2010; Chater 2021). The case of the NWP illustrates how this shift from “low politics” to “high politics” is unfolding in real time.

This thesis employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the impact of climate change on the Canada–U.S. NWP dispute. First, a historical and legal analysis traces the evolution of both countries’ Arctic policies during the period, focusing on key legal arguments, diplomatic agreements, and policy statements from the late 20th century to the present. Analysis of sea ice data illustrates the increasing accessibility of the NWP. Additionally, a discourse analysis of public statements by Canadian Prime Ministers and U.S. Presidents since 1988 examines how political leaders have framed the Arctic, sovereignty, and the NWP over time. This is complemented by an analysis of rhetoric surrounding China’s Arctic engagement and the reactions it has provoked within North America to suggest external pressure in addition to increasing value of the dispute may combine to impact the increase in salience.

The chapters that follow build upon this introduction by unpacking the key dimensions of the NWP dispute. Chapter 2 focuses on the political and discursive representations of the NWP by leaders in Canada and the U.S., examining whether and how the salience of the dispute has shifted in line with environmental and geopolitical changes. The chapter also includes an analysis of how China’s presence in the Arctic is interpreted within Canadian and American policy communities, adding an external lens to the bilateral dispute. Chapter 3 considers the potential future trajectories of the dispute, drawing on conflict resolution literature. It evaluates whether allied relations between Canada and the U.S. are sufficient to contain disagreement, or whether domestic and external pressures may potentially escalate tensions. The chapter concludes by examining the implications of increased Arctic securitization for Indigenous Arctic communities, whose legal rights, environmental concerns, and sovereignty claims are often subordinated to national strategic interests.

The melting of Arctic sea ice is not merely an environmental phenomenon; it is a geopolitical catalyst. The Northwest Passage dispute exemplifies how climate change can reshape international relations by altering the material and strategic value of contested spaces. As states respond to these

transformations, the norms, institutions, and legal principles governing such regions are increasingly strained. This thesis argues that understanding these dynamics requires an approach that integrates environmental science, legal analysis, political discourse, and the lived realities of Indigenous Arctic communities. Understanding how climate change shapes political conflict and cooperation requires an interdisciplinary approach drawing from environmental politics, international relations, legal studies, and Arctic studies scholarship. The case of the Northwest Passage (NWP) is particularly suited ground for this analysis, as it combines evolving geophysical realities with persistent legal and geopolitical contestation.

Literature Review

Early work in resource conflict theory focused on scarcity-induced conflict, positing that degrading or scarce resources—such as water or farmland—can drive instability (Homer-Dixon 1999; Klare 2001). Scholars like Levy (1995) caution that environmental disruption does not cause violence in a linear or deterministic way, but rather alters political and economic incentives. A significant theoretical expansion distinguishes resource scarcity from resource opportunity, the idea that newly valuable or accessible resources can produce competition and conflict. Borgerson (2008) applied this logic to the Arctic, noting that melting ice would open strategic maritime routes such as the Northwest Passage, fundamentally reshaping state interests. Meierding (2020) further refines this by stressing that environmental change can be a source of value—even if temporary—not only loss.

Empirical studies in the Arctic support this perspective. Lassinantti (2019) documents rising investments in Arctic infrastructure, reflecting strategic recalibrations arising from reconfigured navigability. At the same time, Keil (2014) argues that institutional mechanisms—such as the Ilulissat Declaration (2008) among Arctic states—significantly mediate the risk of conflict

arising from environmental opportunity. High North cooperation in institutions like the Arctic Council often channels tensions into diplomacy and regulatory processes (Keil 2014; Rahbek-Clemmensen and Thomasen 2020).

Canada and the U.S. have navigated the opening of the Northwest Passage through a series of reactive-but-managed responses: the 1985 Polar Sea incident prompted the 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement, preserving bilateral coordination in the face of warming-induced route accessibility (Polar Sea Controversy 1985; Lalonde 2023). Sheehan et al. (2021) note that both nations are now racing to build the necessary SAR and shipping infrastructure, signaling strategic preparation for a more accessible Arctic. While resource opportunity drives reassertion of claims and capabilities, the lack of violent conflict in the region suggests the continuing strength of institutional governance (Borgerson 2008; Sheehan et al. 2021).

The Copenhagen School reframes security not as an objective condition but as a discursive act: issues become matters of national security when framed as existential threats by powerful actors and accepted by relevant audiences (Wæver 1995; Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). The Arctic is a particularly fertile ground for this dynamic. Labossiere (2024) demonstrates how Canada securitized Arctic sovereignty during the Harper era, deploying icebreakers, surveillance, and public discourse to transform navigational developments into national security imperatives. Similarly, NATO's growing Arctic-oriented posture shows how institutional actors recast melting ice as collective defense challenges, reinforcing securitization across governmental levels. Critics, however, warn securitization may produce militarized overreach and marginalize non-state actors (Hoogensen and Kristoffersen 2007). This is especially salient in the Northwest Passage, where Indigenous voices—such as those in Lalonde (2023)—raise questions about discursive power, representation, and whose security interests are prioritized.

Contemporary literature advocates for holistic frameworks that combine material opportunity and discursive framing. Rashid (2021) highlights “mixed motivations” in Arctic

geopolitics, where material openings interact with strategic communication. Sheehan et al. (2021) note that infrastructure investments both reflect and reinforce securitization dynamics: building SAR and port capacity both responds to increased accessibility and signals governance legitimacy. Rising attention by non-state actors compounds this complexity. Indigenous groups are both sources of historical claim-making and part of the political frontier, contesting legacy state frameworks while engaging in sovereignty discourse (Rahbek-Clemmensen and Thomassen 2020; Lalonde 2023). They introduce alternative conceptualizations of territory, law, and rights that challenge purely state-centric IR narratives.

Against this literature, the Canada–U.S. dispute over the Northwest Passage aligns with a hybrid model wherein climate-induced navigability (resource opportunity) provokes state action. Canada has strengthened its Arctic capabilities and legal claims (Lalonde 2023; Sheehan et al. 2021), deploying military and regulatory instruments. The U.S., in turn, has escalated freedom of navigation rhetoric and maintained routine transits.

Meanwhile, securitization unfolds through bilateral discourses and multilateral institutions. Canadian defense updates such as *Our North, Strong and Free* and military exercises are built around existential narratives of Arctic sovereignty. The U.S. Department of Defense’s Arctic strategy, released in recent years, similarly frames the passage as part of broader domain awareness and strategic readiness (Bergman and Svendsen 2024). This meeting of material, regulatory, military, and discursive dynamics demonstrates the utility of combining resource conflict theory and securitization theory. Climate-induced opportunity sets the stage, but it is state discourse and institutional capacity that shape both the tone and texture of geopolitical interaction.

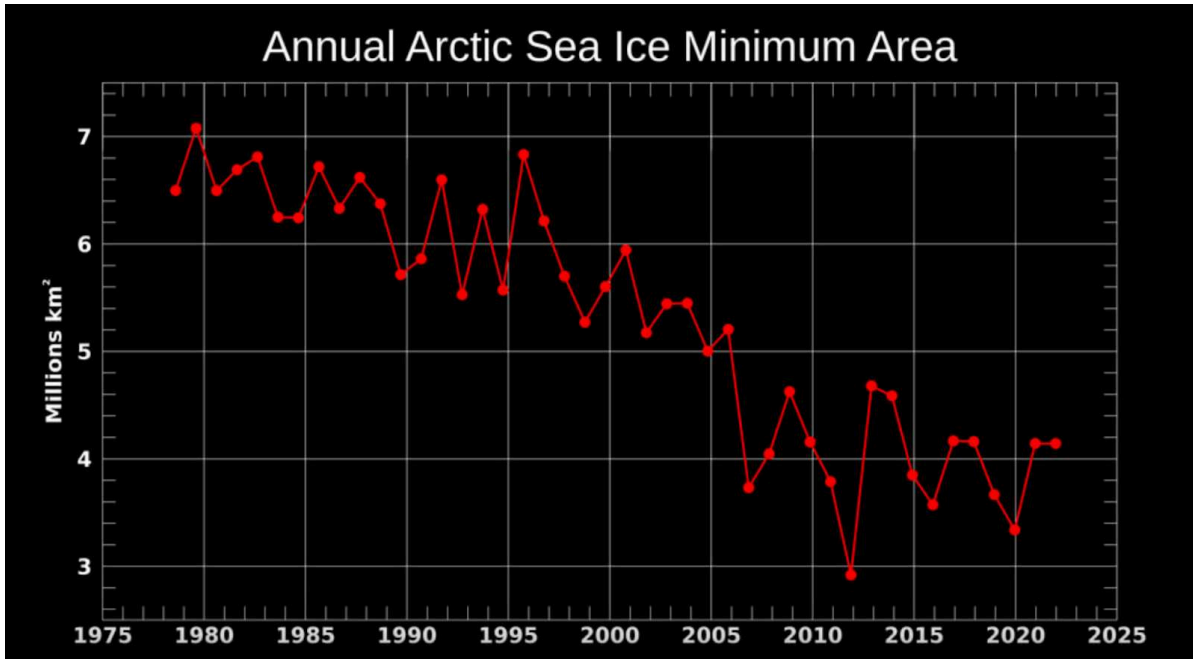
Despite their centrality to the Arctic, Indigenous peoples have often been marginalized in both academic and legal discourse about the NWP. The Inuit Circumpolar Council (2009) issued a formal declaration asserting Inuit rights over Arctic marine space, including traditional use of the NWP. Scholars such as Rodon (2021) and Nuttall (2012) emphasize that Inuit mobility and

stewardship predate state sovereignty claims, suggesting that any settlement of the NWP dispute must include Indigenous governance.

This perspective aligns with broader environmental justice literature, which critiques the securitization of environmental change for marginalizing vulnerable communities (Schlosberg 2007; Whyte 2017). In the Arctic context, the militarization and commodification of space—under the guise of sovereignty or economic development—can further displace Indigenous peoples, undermine land claims, and erase local knowledge systems (Aporta 2011). Furthermore, climate change disproportionately affects Arctic communities, leading to infrastructure collapse, food insecurity, and cultural insecurity. The literature increasingly calls for integrating Indigenous knowledge into governance systems (Berkes 2012), both as a matter of justice and as a means of enhancing resilience and sustainability.

Sea Ice Loss

Sea ice in the Arctic Ocean has been declining in both summer minimum ice coverage and quantity of multiyear sea ice. Seasonal variation in sea ice coverage is expected, a key metric in the measurement of Arctic sea ice is the yearly minimum, usually occurring at the end of summer or beginning of fall in the Northern Hemisphere. The warmest period of the region corresponds to the lowest rate of sea ice coverage. This decline in decreasing minimum sea ice area is visualized in the graph below. Since the onset of satellite based imaging - which engages passive microwave imaging today - sea ice area in the Arctic has diminished in large part due to human-induced warming. Since the late 1980s, sea ice minimums have decreased by nearly half.



Source: Schindler 2022

In addition to a decrease in absolute area, the amount of multiyear sea ice has decreased significantly during this period (Comiso 2012). Multiyear sea ice is that which survives the warmer seasons and remains frozen. Ice that survives a summer melt season can grow thicker and less salty - qualities that make it more resistant to melt. Multiyear ice is more likely to survive temperatures that would melt first-year ice, and to survive waves and winds that would break up first-year ice (Lindsey and Scott 2022). The loss of Arctic sea ice is relevant for the planet as a whole but more specifically a dispute between Canada and the United States. Decreased snow and ice coverage in the Arctic polar region decreases albedo (Hall 2024) - the amount of light reflected by a surface. Decreased albedo then leads to increased warming in the Arctic which in turn melts greater quantities of ice and decreases albedo further (Kashiwase, Ohshima, Nihashi and Eicken 2017). This feedback loop is ongoing in the region and drastically contributes to the impacts of climate change worldwide.

Not only has the NWP become increasingly ice-free, but this has translated into increasing navigability as demonstrated by transits of the passage. There have been a total of 430 recorded transits of the NWP (Headland 2025) with a mere 33 occurring prior to 1988. From 1988-2024, 397 transits of the NWP have concluded with 336 occurring from 2005-2024. This significant increase in transits of the passage corresponds with rapidly decreasing sea ice minimums, as demonstrated above. Beyond complete transits of the NWP, from 2013 to 2019 the NWP saw a nearly 45% increase in unique vessels entering the passage, with the most common ship types to navigate the area including bulk carriers, general cargo ships, fishing vessels and cruise ships (Arctic Circle 2021). More dramatic has been the increase in distance sailed during that same period which saw a growth of 107% from 2.98 to 6.17 million nautical miles (Ibid). While greater study is required to increase safety in navigating the NWP, the period of time in which transits are viable is increasing (Jaicai, Mengjie, and Feng 2025). At present, the NWP is ice-free - and therefore not requiring icebreaker escorts - for a period of approximately two months but by the end of the 21st century, that period is expected to extend to four ice-free months (Khon et al. 2009).

The importance of the NWP lies primarily in its ability to lower shipping costs and time - herein lies the value of the dispute. Notably, transits from East Asia to the Eastern coast of North America through the NWP are over 4,000 miles shorter than their counterparts utilizing the Panama Canal. This alternative to the higher traffic Panama Canal has significant potential not only in distance traveled, but time and fuel cost savings - potentially upwards of 15 days and 200,000 USD in savings (Powell 2018). Maritime shipping companies stand to significantly lower expenditures not only in fuel, but also in crew wages, through the use of the NWP. While the prospects of lower-cost shipping are increasing in the NWP as the period in late summer-early fall where the NWP is largely ice-free is growing, this expansion is still undergoing. At present, insufficient navigational data required for the transit of the multiple routes with collectively makeup the NWP, sparse port infrastructure particularly relevant for search and rescue operations,

and increased insurance costs (Sarrabezoles, Lasserre, and Hagouagn'rin 2016) in comparison with less novel shipping routes - all prove persistent barriers to mass exploitation of the NWP at this time. Nonetheless, as this disputed passage becomes increasingly accessible, larger numbers of maritime shipping firms are looking North to decrease journey time and costs associated with Pacific-Atlantic transits. The value of enforced and reaffirmed sovereignty for Canada is more than symbolic with policy analysts acknowledging the potential for Canadian coffers in the collection of entry fees (Hermann 2019). The Canadian government, if electing to impose entry fees for transits in the passage beyond the costs associated with ice breaker escorts The United States government has not officially suggested the raising of entry duties for access to the NWP via the Beaufort Sea off the Northern coast of Alaska.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis draws on resource conflict theory to explain the intensification of the territorial and legal dispute between Canada and the United States over the Northwest Passage. At the intersection of environmental change and geopolitical competition, resource conflict theory offers a compelling lens through which to analyze the evolving strategic significance of the NWP in the context of climate change.

Resource conflict theory emerged in the 1990s as part of a broader effort to integrate environmental change into peace and conflict studies. Scholars such as Homer-Dixon (1999) and Klare (2001) advanced the notion that environmental pressures - such as resource scarcity, ecological degradation, or resource concentration - could act as catalysts for conflict. While initially applied primarily to cases of civil war in the Global South, the theory has since been extended to

interstate competition, especially where climate change impacts the accessibility and strategic value of disputed goods (Levy 1995; Meierding 2013).

Resource conflict theory distinguishes between two primary mechanisms: conflict stemming from resource scarcity and conflict arising from resource abundance. In the latter case, competition emerges not from deprivation or lack, but from new opportunities for control, wealth, and strategic advantage. Meierding (2020) emphasizes that resource-induced conflict is more likely when climate change transforms previously marginal or inaccessible zones into contested geopolitical spaces. The Arctic embodies this dynamic, as warming temperatures open sea routes, such as the NWP, which carry significant implications for global shipping, energy exploration, and national security (Borgerson 2008).

The legal and political dispute between Canada and the United States over the NWP centers on its classification and subsequent access: Canada claims the Passage as internal waters, based on historical use and inhabitation, while the United States insists it makes up an international strait, allowing transit passage under international law (Byers 2009; Pharand 2007). Although this disagreement was long managed (or sidelined) through diplomatic ambiguity - especially with the 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement - the increased economic, legal, and ecological stakes associated with the passage have brought the issue back to the forefront of politics in the region (Lackenbauer and Lalonde 2017; Baker 2013).

From the perspective of resource conflict theory, the NWP has become a resource in its own right: not solely a waterway, but a strategic asset whose value increases as it becomes navigable for longer periods of the year. This has prompted both Canada and the United States to reassert and formalize their claims - Canada through legal and regulatory frameworks, and the US through freedom of navigation assertions. The conflict, while not violent, is emblematic of how

climate-driven environmental change can revive relatively dormant geopolitical disputes or disagreements (Young 2009).

Importantly, resource conflict theory does not predict inevitable conflict. Rather it provides a framework for understanding how material changes in the environment - such as ice melt and sea-level shifts in this case - interact with political interests, legal regimes, and institutional capacities. In the NWP case, climate change acts as a conflict multiplier, amplifying the political salience of Arctic sovereignty and access, and contributing to the degradation of norms. While cooperation persists through institutions like NORAD and the Arctic Council, the underlying dispute is increasingly shaped by the resource value of the passage itself and the evolving cost-benefit calculus of Arctic governance (Young 2009; Baker 2013).

Methodology

This thesis employs a multi-method qualitative research design combining a single case study, historical policy analysis, and discourse analysis. Each methodological choice is tailored to the research question: Is climate change impacting the dispute between Canada and the United States over the Northwest Passage? As the disputed good - the passage itself - becomes more valuable due to melting ice and increased navigability, does the relevance of the dispute increase for the two parties? This layered methodology provides analytical depth and historical context while enabling a nuanced interpretation of political discourse over time.

Single Case Study

The single case study is a widely respected and deeply embedded approach in qualitative political science, especially when the aim is to generate conceptual insights, uncover underlying mechanisms, or interpret the unfolding of political processes over time. The case of the Northwest Passage dispute offers a bounded empirical phenomenon with both theoretical and substantive implications for climate-security relations, Arctic governance, and sovereignty debates (George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2004).

According to Robert Yin (2018), case studies are most appropriate when a “how” or “why” question is being posed about a contemporary phenomenon over which the researcher has little control. The current study fits this condition: it asks how climate change—an exogenous, uncontrollable force—is influencing a long-standing geopolitical dispute between two allied nations. Further, the Northwest Passage represents a “critical case” (Eckstein 1975) due to its layered complexity: it lies at the intersection of environmental change, strategic interest, national sovereignty, and international law.

A common critique of the single case study is its limited generalizability. However, this critique often rests on a misunderstanding of the epistemological goals of qualitative research. As Gerring (2004) and Flyvbjerg (2006) argue, case studies are not designed to yield broad statistical generalizations, but rather to contribute to theoretical understanding through the examination of causal mechanisms, historical processes, and contextual specificity. In this sense, the Northwest Passage dispute acts as a heuristic case: its exploration can inform broader inquiries into how climate change transforms the strategic and legal dimensions of international relations.

Furthermore, the Arctic is often treated as a *sui generis* region in international relations, due to its physical remoteness, its unique ecosystems, and its complex legal geography (Young 2009;

Koivurova 2010). Hence, findings from the Northwest Passage case cannot be extrapolated mechanically to other regions, but they may still yield valuable conceptual insights about climate-induced geopolitical friction in allied contexts. This is especially relevant as the case speaks to how two liberal democracies with longstanding alliances and shared security interests nonetheless encounter friction under changing material conditions.

Historical Policy Analysis

To complement the case study design, this thesis employs historical policy analysis to trace the evolution of Canadian and American Arctic policies, focusing particularly on how each nation has conceptualized and asserted its sovereignty, security interests, and environmental priorities in the Northwest Passage over time. Historical analysis is particularly valuable in studies where policy positions are embedded in evolving institutional, geopolitical, and technological contexts (Pierson 2004; Skocpol 1985).

Canadian and American Arctic policies have deep institutional roots and have shifted in emphasis over time, influenced by Cold War dynamics, indigenous politics, environmental movements, and now, climate change. Historical policy analysis allows for the identification of continuities and ruptures in these strategies. In particular, this method permits the tracing of how sovereignty claims and security policies have evolved in tandem with scientific developments (such as sea ice monitoring), international legal norms (e.g., the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), and shifting global power configurations (e.g., the rise of China's interest in the Arctic).

Canadian policies, from the 1985 Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act and subsequent declarations of sovereignty over the NWP, to the 2019 Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, reflect a persistent national narrative of stewardship, indigeneity, and sovereignty (Lajeunesse

2016; Canada 2019). The U.S., by contrast, has historically viewed the Northwest Passage as an international strait, privileging freedom of navigation and defense imperatives (Huebert 2011; U.S. Department of Defense 2019). Historical policy analysis allows this divergence to be placed in temporal and geopolitical context. This method will involve content and contextual analysis of key policy documents, white papers, national strategy statements, and ministerial communications. These include (but are not limited to): Canada's Northern Strategy (2009), Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019), and Department of National Defence reports; U.S. National Security Presidential Directives (NSPD-66), Arctic strategy documents (2013, 2019), and related Department of Defense publications; Selected communications from Arctic Council meetings and bilateral diplomatic notes concerning the NWP.

Historical institutionalism underpins this approach. As scholars such as Mahoney and Thelen (2010) suggest, policies evolve through path-dependent processes and punctuated changes, which can be illuminated through diachronic analysis. This methodological choice aligns with the project's broader interest in the temporality of geopolitical adaptation under climate change.

Discourse Analysis

The third methodological pillar of this study is discourse analysis, focusing on how U.S. Presidents and Canadian Prime Ministers have publicly framed the Northwest Passage since 1988. Discourse analysis provides insight into the ideational dimensions of policy: how leaders construct meanings, justify actions, and shape public perception through language (Fairclough 1995; Hansen 2006). By tracing how leaders have narrated the Northwest Passage—whether as a matter of sovereignty, environmental protection, national identity, or geopolitical risk—this method helps identify discursive shifts that reflect underlying political and material changes. Discourse analysis is

particularly useful in examining Arctic politics, where symbolism, identity, and performative sovereignty often play outsized roles (Dodds 2010). The Arctic, and the NWP specifically, is not only a physical space but also a space of narrative competition and strategic imagination. By analyzing elite rhetoric over time, this research assesses how leaders use discourse to maintain legitimacy, assert national claims, and respond to perceived threats—real or constructed.

The time period of 1988 to the present has been selected for both methodological and substantive reasons. It allows for the inclusion of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's tenure and the Reagan and Bush administrations, covering the post-Cold War reconfiguration of Arctic strategy. The period also encompasses significant environmental changes in the Arctic and evolving international interest in the region, particularly from non-Arctic actors like China.

Primary sources for this analysis include official transcripts of speeches, press releases, and public addresses by U.S. Presidents and Canadian Prime Ministers. These will be collected from government archives, presidential libraries, and digital repositories (e.g., the White House website, the Prime Minister of Canada's archive, and Hansard transcripts). Discourse will be coded for key themes such as: Sovereignty and international law, National security and military presence, Environmental stewardship and climate change, Indigenous rights and inclusion, Freedom of navigation and international shipping

This project draws on the methodological guidance of scholars such as Milliken (1999) and Bacchi (2009), who emphasize that discourse is not merely reflective but constitutive of political realities. The method allows for an analysis of how both threat perceptions and policy justifications are linguistically constructed, with implications for international cooperation or conflict. Discourse analysis, in this context, will not claim to exhaustively model causality but will supplement the historical and policy analysis by adding a critical dimension to the understanding of how meaning is made in Arctic geopolitics.

Triangulation and Integration of Methods

This thesis uses methodological triangulation to improve the robustness and credibility of its findings. Each method—case study, historical policy analysis, and discourse analysis—has distinct strengths and limitations. By combining them, the project mitigates potential blind spots and offers a more comprehensive account of the evolving Northwest Passage dispute. For example, while the single case study may lack statistical generalizability, it provides depth and process-tracing that are critical for understanding complex, path-dependent dynamics. Historical policy analysis adds context and institutional layering, allowing us to see how formal strategies evolve and interact. Discourse analysis brings attention to ideational and performative dimensions, revealing the ways in which power, identity, and legitimacy are constructed in public debates. Each method also interacts with different types of data—policy documents, elite speeches, archival material—thereby enabling data triangulation as well. This enhances the internal validity of the study and situates its findings within the broader literature on climate-induced conflict and Arctic geopolitics.

Ethical Considerations

Given that this research relies exclusively on publicly available documents and academic literature, there are minimal ethical concerns associated with data collection. However, care will be taken to interpret political discourse responsibly, avoiding over-determination or assumption of intent. When quoting, context will be carefully considered to avoid decontextualization or misrepresentation. Furthermore, sensitivity will be applied when referencing policies affecting Indigenous communities, following calls in the literature for ethical engagement with Indigenous

rights and epistemologies in Arctic research (Whyte 2017; Aporta 2011). An area for further research in this project would emphasize non-state-centric sources of data such as this thesis.

Chapter 2

Policy Analysis

The Arctic has long served as a geopolitical frontier—a site of latent contestation and emerging opportunity. Nowhere is this more visible than in the Northwest Passage (NWP), a complex network of Arctic waterways whose legal and strategic status has drawn sharp contrasts between Canadian and U.S. policy over four decades. While Canada claims the NWP as internal waters, the United States contends that it is an international strait open to transit passage. This dispute, long submerged beneath the surface of strategic cooperation, has become increasingly legible in the policy discourses of both states.

This analysis uses a discourse-focused historical policy comparison to trace the evolution of U.S. and Canadian Arctic policies since the 1980s. It identifies and categorizes language across four domains—securitization, environmental change, collaboration, and references to the Northwest Passage—and evaluates how each state has used these discursive tools to construct its Arctic vision. Drawing on eleven major policy documents, the paper highlights the growing centrality of the Northwest Passage and underscores how discursive choices reflect broader legal and strategic orientations.

The Early Arctic: Dormancy and Scientific Idealism (1984–1999)

In the Cold War's final years, the Arctic featured less as a space of direct contestation and more as a scientific and environmental laboratory. The U.S. Arctic Research and Policy Act (1984)

encapsulates this ethos. It is almost entirely devoid of securitization language, contains no references to the Northwest Passage, and instead emphasizes research, cooperation, and environmental stewardship. Notably, terms like “climate change,” “security,” or “sovereignty” are absent, reflecting the era’s depoliticized Arctic posture. Canada’s corresponding policy, the Defence Policy (1992), is similarly muted. The document avoids references to the Arctic altogether, let alone to the NWP. In this period, sovereignty claims were largely asserted through state practice rather than public discourse. Although the 1985 U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Polar Sea*’s unauthorized passage through the NWP spurred bilateral negotiations (Byers 2009; Lajeunesse 2016), these tensions remained buried beneath formal diplomatic cooperation.

Arctic Reawakening: Securitization and Symbolic Assertion (2000–2010)

The early 2000s marked the beginning of a new Arctic awareness. Canada’s *Canada First Defence Strategy* (2008) and the *Statement on Canadian Arctic Foreign Policy* (2010) introduced a lexicon centered on “defense,” “security,” “sovereignty,” and “threat.” This is the first instance in which the Northwest Passage is mentioned by name, with one mention per document. The term “access” is also introduced, although still sparingly. This era marks the rhetorical onset of Canada’s renewed claim to Arctic authority. The NWP is not merely a route; it has become a symbol of Canadian national identity and sovereignty, particularly under Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Griffiths 2009). However, while these documents introduce assertive language, they stop short of confronting U.S. legal interpretations directly.

On the American side, National Security Presidential Directive 66 (NSPD-66) (2009) is the first document to explicitly restate the U.S. legal position - the NWP is an international strait - during this period. While the document includes only one direct mention of the passage, it refers to

“access” six times and consistently emphasizes “freedom of navigation.” The directive marks a turning point in which U.S. Arctic strategy becomes entangled with global maritime priorities.

Climate Crises and Competition (2010–2019)

By the mid-2010s, climate change was no longer a theoretical threat. Melting sea ice and shifting ecosystems rendered the Arctic materially more accessible, and policy language reflected this. Canada’s Strong, Secure, Engaged (2017) defense policy amplifies securitization to an unprecedented degree. It includes 575 references to “defense,” 186 to “security,” and 21 to “access.” Yet the NWP is conspicuously absent—a silence that, paradoxically, underscores Canada’s legal position: as internal waters, the NWP requires no special designation. Canada’s discourse in this period reflects a careful balancing act. On one hand, it emphasizes military capability and national sovereignty. On the other hand, it invests in environmental language—11 mentions of “climate change” and 23 of “changing.” This is also when Canada begins integrating Indigenous perspectives and local governance frameworks, marking a qualitative expansion of its Arctic narrative.

In contrast, the U.S. Arctic discourse shifts sharply under the Trump administration. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s 2019 speech, *Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus*, frames the Arctic not as an ecological system but as a theatre of great power competition. The speech mentions the NWP once, in a context that subtly challenges Canada’s claim. Words like “climate change” are entirely absent, while “competition” and “security” dominate. This pivot from stewardship to realpolitik reflects a broader recalibration of U.S. foreign policy.

Legal Discourses and Institutional Assertiveness (2020–2024)

The most recent wave of Arctic policy reveals growing discursive complexity and strategic institutionalization. Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019) and Canadian Arctic Foreign Policy (2024) offer the clearest articulation yet of Canada’s position. The 2019 framework mentions the Northwest Passage five times, while the 2024 update includes two mentions and, significantly, two direct references to the legal “dispute.” These references reflect a strategic shift. Where earlier documents implied Canadian sovereignty, these policies name the legal challenge. Moreover, both documents emphasize “access,” “navigability,” and the increasing frequency of maritime activity. Climate change is also a dominant theme—“climate change” is mentioned 35 times in the 2024 document—reinforcing the link between environmental transformation and sovereignty assertions.

Simultaneously, the United States has institutionalized its Arctic strategy in a series of doctrinal releases. The 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region reflects a hybrid discourse: it includes 16 mentions of “climate change,” 8 of “threat,” 28 of “security,” and references to cooperation with allies. Yet the NWP is not mentioned, and “access” and “navigability” appear primarily in logistical and strategic contexts. The absence of direct legal language suggests that while the U.S. maintains its position, it prefers not to escalate the dispute in policy forums.

The 2024 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy reverts to a securitized tone: 42 references to “defense,” 28 to “security,” and 52 to “allies.” The NWP is mentioned once. Its single inclusion, along with references to “access,” reflects enduring U.S. interests in freedom of navigation, even as Arctic military infrastructure and logistics planning dominate the agenda.

Comparative Patterns and Legal Salience

Across all 11 policy documents reviewed, the frequency and framing of the Northwest Passage has intensified over time—especially in Canadian policy. Before 2008, there were no mentions of the NWP in any major national policy documents. Since then, Canada has mentioned it in five of six subsequent policies, culminating in explicit references to the legal dispute. The U.S. has mentioned the NWP in only three documents: NSPD-66 (2009), Pompeo’s 2019 speech, and the 2024 DoD strategy. All maintain the international strait position, but do not make the dispute a central feature. This suggests a strategic ambivalence—firm in position, but cautious in emphasis.

Canada’s increasing use of “access,” “navigability,” and “dispute” reflects its need to reinforce its claim in light of global interest in Arctic routes. It simultaneously draws on environmental discourse to ground these claims in both legal precedent and ecological vulnerability. The inclusion of Inuit voices and rights-based language further enhances this multidimensional framing (ITK 2016). In contrast, the United States continues to frame Arctic policy through a strategic and security lens. While environmental language reemerged in the 2022 strategy, it is largely subordinated to security imperatives. U.S. policy maintains consistency in its freedom of navigation doctrine, even as it avoids directly antagonizing Canadian claims.

The evolution of Arctic discourse between Canada and the United States reveals both divergence and durability. Canada has grown more assertive and legally specific in its claims over the Northwest Passage, while embedding these claims in a broader discourse of environmental stewardship and Indigenous inclusion. The United States, while strategically invested in Arctic access, has largely avoided overt confrontation, preferring to reiterate its navigational principles in general terms.

Discourse in policy is not merely rhetorical; it is constitutive of state practice and international norms. As climate change transforms the Arctic physically, policy language is transforming it legally and politically. The Northwest Passage is no longer a frozen curiosity—it is a strategic crossroads, a legal question, and a discursive battleground for Arctic governance. Future governance will depend on whether these narratives converge or clash. For now, the careful language of both countries suggests a fragile balance—between guardianship and gatekeeping, cooperation and contestation.

Discourse Analysis

Political discourse plays a key role in how Arctic sovereignty disputes, like that over the Northwest Passage (NWP), are constructed and contested. Since 1988, Canadian Prime Ministers and U.S. Presidents have shaped public understanding of the NWP through selective language, rhetorical framing, and appeals to international norms or national identity. While Canada has predominantly framed the NWP as a domestic waterway central to sovereignty and stewardship, the U.S. has consistently upheld the principle of freedom of navigation, treating the NWP as an international strait. This section draws on critical discourse analysis and political communication literature to explore how leaders in both countries have narrated, minimized, or accentuated the NWP dispute, and how their rhetoric reflects broader shifts in domestic politics, foreign policy, and environmental governance.

Canadian Prime Ministers: Sovereignty, Security, and Stewardship

The rhetoric of Canadian Prime Ministers has consistently reinforced sovereignty claims over the NWP, albeit through varying emphases depending on domestic political context and global pressures. Canadian leaders often link the NWP to national identity, environmental stewardship, and regional security—constructing the Arctic as a space of both pride and vulnerability (Dodds 2010; Lackenbauer 2011).

Brian Mulroney (1984–1993), though cautious in publicly addressing the NWP issue, responded to the 1985 Polar Sea incident by reinforcing Canada’s legal claim through legislative measures. His government amended the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act and introduced the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, thereby framing sovereignty through environmental regulation rather than direct confrontation (McRae and Goundrey 1982). Mulroney’s diplomatic tone is often cited as indicative of Canada’s effort to maintain bilateral cooperation without weakening its Arctic claims (Griffiths 2003, 2009).

Jean Chrétien (1993–2003) maintained this environmental framing, focusing on the Arctic as an ecosystem needing protection. Under his leadership, Canada’s Arctic policies emphasized sustainable development and Indigenous partnerships, largely avoiding overt rhetoric about the NWP (Charron 2005). Chrétien’s discourse reflected a liberal internationalist approach that used soft power rather than direct sovereignty assertions.

Stephen Harper (2006–2015), by contrast, dramatically shifted the tone toward nationalist assertiveness. He frequently framed the Arctic as a core symbol of Canadian identity and linked sovereignty to security. In a widely cited 2007 speech in Resolute Bay, Harper declared, “The Canadian government will assert our sovereignty over the Arctic... We either use it or lose it” (Canada PMO 2007). Harper’s rhetoric marked a securitization of the Arctic, aligning with Buzan et al.’s (1998) definition of security discourse as the articulation of existential threats that justify extraordinary measures. Harper’s speeches during annual northern tours consistently used

language such as “defending our Arctic,” “vital interests,” and “Canada’s North, our North,” emphasizing hard power investments like the establishment of the Canadian Rangers and Arctic patrol ships (Lackenbauer and Huebert 2014). Scholars such as Huebert (2011) and Coates et al. (2008) argue that Harper’s discourse responded both to growing global interest in the Arctic and domestic political pressures to assert Canadian distinctiveness.

Justin Trudeau (2015–present) has de-emphasized sovereignty language compared to Harper but has not abandoned the claim. His government’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019) uses terms like “presence,” “leadership,” and “stewardship,” placing Indigenous reconciliation and environmental sustainability at the center of Arctic discourse (Canada Crown-Indigenous Relations 2019). While Trudeau has largely avoided direct engagement with the NWP sovereignty issue in public speeches, official documents continue to assert Canadian jurisdiction over internal Arctic waters (Chater 2021).

U.S. Presidents: Strategic Navigation and Legal Consistency

In contrast to Canada’s sovereignty narrative, U.S. Presidents have consistently framed the NWP as an international strait, invoking freedom of navigation as a foundational principle of global maritime order. This framing aligns with the U.S. Navy’s strategic posture and international legal doctrine rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which the U.S. has not ratified but generally adheres to in practice (Byers and Lalonde 2009; Rothwell 2015). Ronald Reagan’s 1983 U.S. Oceans Policy Statement laid the foundation for U.S. Arctic maritime doctrine, affirming the right of “unimpeded navigation” in international straits (Reagan 1983). While the Polar Sea incident occurred under his administration, Reagan’s public discourse remained restrained, reflecting Cold War priorities and a desire not to provoke Canada openly. George H.W. Bush oversaw the 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement with Canada, which allowed U.S. icebreaker

transits through the NWP with Canadian consent. Importantly, the agreement included a clause stating it did not prejudice the legal positions of either country—a hallmark of what Byers (2009) calls “constructive ambiguity.” Bush’s rhetoric, when it appeared, focused on Arctic science and cooperation rather than dispute.

Bill Clinton (1993–2001) and George W. Bush (2001–2009) largely avoided direct public references to the NWP, but strategic documents during their administrations reaffirmed freedom of navigation. Bush’s 2009 NSPD-66/HSPD-25 recognized the changing Arctic environment and emphasized U.S. interests in unimpeded maritime transit (U.S. White House 2009). Barack Obama (2009–2017) placed the Arctic within a broader environmental and climate change framework. His rhetoric emphasized stewardship and science, but he did not challenge or reframe the U.S. position on the NWP. The U.S. continued to describe Arctic straits, including the NWP, as international, a position echoed in Department of State briefings and maritime strategy documents (Steinberg and Dodds 2015).

Donald Trump (2017–2021) rarely spoke about the Arctic publicly in his first term, but his administration’s strategy documents adopted more securitized language. The 2019 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy cited growing competition with Russia and China, highlighting the NWP’s potential geostrategic value while reaffirming the U.S. freedom of navigation stance (U.S. DoD 2019). Joe Biden (2021–2025) returned to environmental and Indigenous-focused Arctic rhetoric, prioritizing cooperation over confrontation. While maintaining the U.S. position on international straits, Biden’s Arctic discourse highlights climate change, infrastructure investment, and Indigenous partnerships, reflecting continuity in U.S. legal interpretations and the growing salience of non-traditional security issues (Knecht 2023).

Comparison

The public discourse of Canadian and U.S. leaders on the NWP reflects divergent legal positions, strategic priorities, and narratives of national identity. Canadian Prime Ministers, particularly Harper, have linked the NWP to sovereignty and national pride, while others like Trudeau and Chrétien have framed it in terms of stewardship and partnership. U.S. Presidents have uniformly adhered to the principle of international navigation rights, often expressing this in bureaucratic rather than rhetorical form. Discourse analysis reveals that despite legal disagreement, both countries have generally avoided overt confrontation, instead embedding their claims in broader themes such as environmental protection, strategic stability, and allied cooperation. These rhetorical strategies help maintain a fragile status quo while allowing both nations to preserve their respective legal positions in the face of changing geopolitical and climatic realities.

Outside Actors

As Arctic ice recedes and the Northwest Passage (NWP) becomes increasingly navigable, new state actors have taken a keen interest in the region. Among them, China's growing diplomatic, scientific, and economic activities in the Arctic have sparked heightened attention from Canada and the United States. While China holds no Arctic territory, its ambitions have prompted discursive shifts in the way North American leaders discuss sovereignty, security, and foreign policy in the Arctic. This section explores how Chinese interest in the Arctic—particularly the NWP—has been framed in the public discourse of Chinese officials and in the responsive narratives of Canadian and American leaders. It also examines how this dynamic has reshaped perceptions of the Arctic from a cooperative to a more competitive geopolitical space beyond the traditional perspective of a bifurcated Arctic between NATO West and Russia.

Since the early 2000s, China has articulated a growing interest in the Arctic, claiming status as a “near-Arctic state”—a concept not formally recognized under international law but heavily

emphasized in Chinese policy statements. In 2018, the Chinese government released its first Arctic Policy White Paper, framing the region as a “global commons” and expressing the right of non-Arctic states to scientific exploration, commercial navigation, and resource development under international law (PRC State Council 2018). The Polar Silk Road, a northern extension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), was announced in the same document, asserting China's intent to participate in developing Arctic infrastructure, including potentially utilizing the NWP. Chinese discourse presents Arctic engagement as peaceful, scientific, and cooperative. However, critics argue that the language is carefully curated to mask underlying strategic and economic ambitions (Sørensen and Klimenko 2017; Brady 2017). Key Chinese terms such as “win-win cooperation,” “joint development,” and “sustainable use” are meant to reduce perceptions of threat, yet their repetition has raised concern among Arctic states (Exner-Pirot 2019).

Canadian political discourse regarding China in the Arctic has evolved in three broad phases: scientific cooperation (pre-2010), economic caution (2010–2016), and strategic suspicion (2017–present). In the early 2000s, Canadian officials viewed Chinese Arctic research expeditions—like the voyages of the Xue Long (Snow Dragon) icebreaker—as benign scientific activity. Public statements emphasized international collaboration in climate research, and Canadian ports granted Chinese vessels entrance for resupply (Lackenbauer et al. 2018). By the early 2010s however, Chinese investments in Arctic mining and infrastructure—including attempts to acquire Canadian firms like MMG Limited’s interest in the Izok Corridor—provoked growing scrutiny. While Prime Minister Stephen Harper did not publicly address China’s Arctic interests in detail, the tone of Canadian defense and foreign policy documents shifted. The 2010 Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy noted the importance of “ensuring that our sovereignty is respected,” a veiled allusion to concerns about both neighboring U.S. interests and external actors like China (Canada DFAIT 2010).

The discourse became more pronounced after Justin Trudeau assumed office. While Trudeau's broader foreign policy was initially aimed at re-engaging China, events like the Huawei–Meng Wanzhou extradition case (2018–2021) and China's retaliatory detention of Canadian citizens soured relations and reshaped the Arctic discourse as well. Canadian leaders and media increasingly portrayed China as a strategic competitor with opaque motives (Chater 2021; Lajeunesse 2020). Chinese expressions of interest in Arctic shipping routes through the NWP also triggered renewed Canadian assertions of sovereignty. While Canada has not explicitly denied China access, Prime Minister Trudeau has repeatedly stated that "the Northwest Passage is Canadian," reinforcing the legal position while avoiding direct confrontation (CBC News 2022).

The U.S. government's public discourse regarding China's Arctic presence has become progressively assertive, particularly under the Trump and Biden administrations, which have framed China as a revisionist power seeking to alter the international order—including in the Arctic. Prior to 2017, U.S. Arctic policy documents mentioned China only sparingly, usually in scientific or economic contexts. However, the 2019 U.S. Department of Defense Arctic Strategy was the first official statement to classify China as a "strategic competitor" in the Arctic, warning that "China's claim to be a 'near-Arctic state' is not recognized by international law" and expressing concerns about dual-use infrastructure and port investments (U.S. DoD 2019).

During a 2019 visit to Finland, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a significant speech declaring that the "Arctic is at the forefront of opportunity and abundance, but also of competition and conflict," directly accusing China of attempting to "infiltrate the Arctic to secure a foothold for its strategic ambitions" (Pompeo 2019). His rhetoric represented a significant departure from earlier, more cooperative Arctic dialogues. Under President Joe Biden, Arctic discourse became more subdued but remained wary of Chinese activities. The 2022 U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic Region references China's efforts to gain influence through "scientific cooperation, diplomacy, and investment" but stops short of the militarized language used by the

Trump administration (White House 2022). Biden emphasized allied coordination, particularly through NATO and the Arctic Council, as mechanisms to manage Chinese ambitions without escalating conflict in a broader attempt to renew US participation in international institutions.

Both Canadian and American leaders have increasingly framed China's Arctic activities as a national security issue, contributing to the broader securitization of the region. As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) write, securitization occurs when an issue is framed as an existential threat that justifies extraordinary responses. The shift in Arctic discourse from environmental and scientific cooperation to defense and sovereignty protection aligns with this framework. In Canada, the investment in Arctic military infrastructure, the reactivation of the Canadian Rangers, and increased funding for northern surveillance systems are often justified in public discourse by invoking the growing presence of "non-Arctic actors," a euphemism increasingly linked to China (Lackenbauer and Dean 2020). Similarly, the United States has increased its Arctic military exercises and established the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, with China frequently mentioned in public briefings. Yet both countries walk a discursive tightrope. While they portray China as a potential threat, neither Canada nor the United States seeks direct confrontation in the Arctic. As such, their rhetoric is characterized by strategic ambiguity—highlighting risks without provoking escalation (Byers 2019).

Chinese interest in the North American Arctic has catalyzed discursive shifts in Canada and the United States, transforming the way leaders frame the NWP and Arctic sovereignty more broadly. While China publicly projects a narrative of cooperation and shared development, Canadian and U.S. discourse increasingly frames China as a strategic competitor whose intentions are opaque and potentially disruptive. A sharp departure from the era of Arctic exceptionalism and peace for all, this rhetorical evolution reflects not only geopolitical anxieties but also deeper questions about the governance of global commons, the limits of international law, and the reshaping of Arctic security in an era of great power competition.

Chapter 3

Securitization Impacts:

The Arctic has long been regarded as a zone of peace and cooperation, particularly among NATO allies such as Canada and the United States. However, as climate change reshapes the physical and strategic landscape of the region, the question arises: Could the dispute over the Northwest Passage escalate into a source of conflict between these long-standing allies? This section explores the conflict potential of the Northwest Passage in light of increasing navigability, geopolitical competition, and shifting alliance dynamics. It evaluates the dispute using frameworks from conflict studies and international relations, while accounting for regional developments such as the securitization of the Arctic and the increased activity of non-Arctic powers like China and Russia.

At the core of the Canada–U.S. dispute over the NWP lies the legal disagreement: Canada claims the waters of the NWP as internal, while the United States regards them as an international strait (Byers 2009; Huebert 2011). While this difference has not led to open hostility, it has shaped decades of cautious diplomatic maneuvering. The 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement between the two countries allowed U.S. icebreakers to transit the NWP with Canadian consent, but it explicitly stated that neither side was waiving its legal position (Government of Canada 1988). Despite this pragmatic arrangement - a temporary diplomatic bandage - the fundamental disagreement remains unresolved. As the strategic value of the passage grows due to reduced sea ice and increased commercial interest, this dispute has the potential to reemerge as a more contentious issue. However, the likelihood of militarized conflict remains low due to three key factors: alliance structures, institutional norms, and economic interdependence.

The conflict potential in the NWP dispute must be situated within the broader Canada–U.S. alliance framework, particularly their shared participation in NATO and NORAD, and a history of close relations. According to alliance theory, states are significantly less likely to engage in conflict with formal allies due to the reputational and strategic costs involved (Snyder 1997; Leeds et al. 2000). This helps explain the absence of escalatory militarized rhetoric or military posturing over the NWP, even when Canadian sovereignty assertions have been most emphatic (Charron and Fergusson 2018). The period of historical close relations between the two powers has more recently been called into question.

Furthermore, NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) represents one of the most deeply institutionalized forms of bilateral defense cooperation in the world . Recent Arctic defense spending by both countries has prioritized joint surveillance and communication systems, such as upgrades to the North Warning System, rather than unilateral capacity building that could be perceived as threatening (Lackenbauer and Dean 2020). This suggests a security architecture that is more integrative than divisive (Charron and Fergusson 2022). That in mind, alliance restraint does not assume a lack of tension. As Walt (1987) argues, alliances are dynamic and subject to stress, particularly if burden-sharing or diverging national interests create friction. Should Canada feel that the U.S. fails to respect its Arctic sovereignty claims, or should the U.S. view Canadian regulation of international transit as protectionist, the dispute could manifest in sharper rhetorical or policy clashes.

While Canada and the U.S. are not expected to directly clash over the NWP, third-party dynamics - especially the increasing Arctic presence of China and Russia - can indirectly raise the stakes. China’s symbolic and material investments in Arctic science, infrastructure, and shipping - alongside its self-proclaimed “near-Arctic” designation - have already introduced new concerns about external actors seeking access to Arctic routes (Chater 2021). The NWP, being the most direct Arctic route from Asia to the Atlantic, is not excluded from this polar interest. In response to outside

pressures, both Canada and the U.S. have discursively securitized the Arctic, framing it as a region vulnerable to foreign encroachment. This securitization increases the salience of sovereignty and may create pressure on Canada to enforce its legal claims more assertively, particularly if Chinese or Russian vessels begin to use the passage without notification. Conversely, the U.S. could find itself in a normative bind—balancing its commitment to freedom of navigation with the strategic desire to support Canada in curbing Chinese influence in the Arctic (Exner-Pirot 2019). This external pressure makes the NWP dispute more than a bilateral matter of international law. It is increasingly nested within broader geopolitical contests over rulemaking authority in the Arctic and over who controls emerging trade corridors in a warming world.

A primary school of thinking linking climate change to conflict involves resource scarcity or resource competition (Barbier and Homer-Dixon 1999; Meierding 2013). However, the NWP case does not neatly fit this mold. The passage itself is not a resource to be extracted, but rather a route that facilitates access. The legal dispute pertains to jurisdiction, control, and regulatory power rather than ownership of oil, gas, minerals, or other goods. With the value of the NWP growing due to increasing navigability, the dispute remains within the realm of IPE.

Still, some scholars argue that climate-induced increases in accessibility can heighten conflict potential even in transit corridors. Salehyan (2008) notes that environmental changes often exacerbate pre existing tensions or institutional weaknesses, especially where legal ambiguity is involved. While Canada and the U.S. possess strong institutions, the ambiguity of UNCLOS provisions on historic internal waters vs. international straits may remain a friction point, particularly as the volume and value of Arctic traffic increases.

Beyond strategic and legal considerations, the dispute over the NWP is closely tied to symbolic politics and national identity, especially in Canada. As Lajeunesse (2016) and Grant (2010) have argued, Canadian assertions over the Arctic have deep roots in nationalism, cultural memory, and state mythology. Arctic sovereignty discourse serves as a unifying theme across party lines and

has been a focal point in Canadian elections, particularly under Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Coates et al. 2008) in the mid 2000s to 2010s. This symbolic dimension adds another contentious layer to the dispute. Even in the absence of material threats, public pressure and political incentive structures may compel Canadian leaders to assert their sovereignty in ways that test alliance patience. U.S. leaders, by contrast, are often less invested in the Arctic as a national narrative, which can lead to asymmetric perceptions of threat and importance (Powell 2020). This asymmetry could cause diplomatic miscalculations or slow responses to provocations by third parties. For example, if Canada perceives an unnotified Chinese transit as a sovereignty breach and enforces regulations, the U.S. may be placed in the difficult position of either supporting its ally or upholding international norms.

International relations scholars have extensively studied how conflict management institutions can mitigate disputes, even when legal or strategic interests clash. Tools such as confidence-building measures (CBMs), joint surveillance, shared protocols, and dispute resolution mechanisms have been shown to reduce the likelihood of escalation (Mearsheimer 1994; Hampson and Zartman 2012). The Arctic Council, while explicitly not a security organization, has played a valuable role in maintaining Arctic cooperation. The 2011 Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement and the 2018 Agreement on Enhancing Scientific Cooperation are examples of soft law instruments that have built trust among Arctic states (Young 2019). Additionally, NORAD modernization could serve as a platform for renewing bilateral Arctic dialogue, including over maritime issues (Charron and Fergusson 2022). Canada and the U.S. have not formalized a legal resolution to the NWP dispute, but their historical practice of de facto cooperation and mutual notification serves as a functional CBM. The durability of such informal arrangements will depend on the ability of both parties to manage external pressures and domestic political incentives that push toward more assertive postures.

Although the NWP dispute remains unresolved in legal terms, the prospects for militarized conflict between Canada and the United States are low. Their alliance structures, institutional ties,

and history of pragmatic cooperation act as strong conflict dampeners. However, the strategic value of the passage is rising, and both symbolic politics and external pressures could test the limits of this cooperative status quo. The potential for conflict lies less in direct hostility and more in misperceptions, third-party provocations, and the gradual erosion of norms as climate change reshapes the Arctic order - therein lies the value of the case of the NWP. While unlikely to produce interstate conflict, the dispute emphasizes potential normative and structural changes to interstate relations in a world rapidly experiencing the impacts of climate change.

Securitization: Regional Impacts

While much of the discourse surrounding the Northwest Passage (NWP) focuses on state sovereignty, strategic interests, and legal frameworks, the human security dimension - particularly the lives and rights of Indigenous Arctic populations - has often been marginalized. This omission is striking given that Inuit and other Indigenous peoples have occupied and navigated the Arctic for millennia, long before the international legal system or modern state boundaries were established. This section addresses how the evolving Canada–U.S. dispute over the NWP, amid broader trends of climate change and securitization, affects Indigenous communities in terms of governance, cultural security, economic development, and environmental risk.

The NWP cuts through territory traditionally inhabited and used by Inuit communities, particularly those in Nunavut and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in Canada. Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit (traditional knowledge) and oral histories demonstrate continuous use and occupancy of Arctic lands and waters (Aporta 2011; ITK 2008). These Indigenous connections provide not only cultural and spiritual identity but also form the basis for Inuit assertions of sovereignty, which often contrast with state-centric narratives. Indigenous governance exists both within and outside of traditional state-centric institutions (White 2023).

The 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and earlier 1984 Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) were landmark settlements recognizing Inuit land rights and self-governance within Canada. These agreements established Indigenous co-management regimes over marine and terrestrial resources and affirmed the Inuit's central role in Arctic governance (Rodon 2014; White 2018). While these treaties strengthened Inuit authority over internal affairs, they remain nested within the broader sovereignty framework of the Canadian state, which claims jurisdiction over the NWP—a claim the United States does not recognize.

Climate change presents a double-edged sword for Arctic Indigenous communities. On one hand, reduced sea ice increases access to remote communities, facilitates supply delivery, and creates economic opportunities such as shipping, tourism, and fishing (Ford et al. 2008; Dawson, Maher, and Slocombe 2007). On the other hand, this increased accessibility exposes communities to greater environmental degradation, cultural disruption, and political marginalization (Mallett, Leis, Brown, Codzi and Arqviq 2023). The opening of the NWP may lead to more frequent incursions into Inuit territory, including unauthorized transit by foreign ships or extractive industry vessels. While Canadian policy frames this as a threat to national sovereignty, Inuit leaders often emphasize the environmental and cultural risks associated with external traffic, such as oil spills, invasive species, and disruptions to subsistence practices (Gearheard et al. 2006; ITK 2016). Despite being framed as "defenders of Canadian sovereignty," Inuit communities have frequently had limited influence over how sovereignty is operationalized (Wilson 2020).

The growing strategic importance of the Arctic, driven in part by global competition over resources and shipping lanes, has prompted both Canada and the U.S. to increase defense spending and surveillance in the region. The modernization of NORAD, the deployment of drones and radar systems, and the construction of Arctic military infrastructure are all part of this trend (Charron and Fergusson 2018). While states frame these developments as necessary for national security and Arctic sovereignty, Indigenous communities often experience them as a reassertion of colonial

authority. The expansion of security infrastructure occurs on or near Indigenous lands, yet communities are rarely full partners in decision-making. This reproduces historical patterns of exclusion, despite recent efforts to recognize Indigenous rights under frameworks like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (Rodon and Schott 2014).

In Canada, for example, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) has expressed concern that Arctic defense policy is being conducted without adequate consultation or co-development, despite its implications for Inuit land use and governance (ITK 2019). The securitization of the Arctic may inadvertently erode Indigenous self-determination by prioritizing state-centric threat perceptions over community-defined risks and needs.

One of the paradoxes of Arctic policy is that while Indigenous peoples are increasingly invoked in symbolic terms - as stewards of the Arctic or guardians of sovereignty - this rhetorical inclusion often fails to translate into meaningful power-sharing; something not unique in the settler-colonial states of Canada and the United States (Swiffen and Paget 2023). The Canadian government has frequently framed Inuit presence as evidence of Canadian sovereignty in legal arguments regarding the NWP (Byers 2013), yet has sometimes resisted Indigenous efforts to influence the rules governing Arctic shipping and development.

This tension is also evident in Canadian Arctic governance. While co-management institutions like the Nunavut Marine Council exist, they often lack sufficient funding or legal authority to regulate cross-border issues such as international shipping or national defense (Cameron 2015). The result is a governance gap in which Indigenous knowledge and rights are acknowledged rhetorically but remain subordinate to federal prerogatives. In the United States, the situation is even more limited. Alaska Native communities have historically had fewer mechanisms for regional autonomy, and Arctic defense policy is driven overwhelmingly by federal organizations and agencies like the Department of Defense and Coast Guard (Sfraga et al. 2020). While Indigenous

consultation is nominally required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), it often occurs late in the process and lacks the depth of co-development seen in parts of Canada.

The increase in NWP shipping carries a series of environmental risks that disproportionately impact Indigenous communities. Oil spills in icy waters are difficult to clean, and ship noise interferes with marine mammals critical to Indigenous subsistence and culture (AMAP 2017). Additionally, icebreaking and vessel traffic can damage sea ice trails used for hunting and travel (Laidler et al. 2009). Indigenous observers have raised concerns that shipping regulation remains woefully inadequate, particularly regarding search-and-rescue capabilities, enforcement of emission standards, and community participation in emergency planning.

Climate-induced environmental change also threatens cultural continuity. The thinning of sea ice and changing migration patterns of animals disrupt traditional knowledge systems, making navigation and hunting more dangerous (Ford et al. 2008). These changes not only affect material well-being but also cultural and psychological health, as connections to the land and water are central to Indigenous identity and social cohesion (Kral 2016).

Despite these challenges, Indigenous communities are not passive victims. Inuit organizations such as ITK, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and various regional bodies have become increasingly assertive in Arctic governance debates. The ICC, for example, has pushed for a legally binding international agreement on Arctic shipping that centers Indigenous rights and perspectives (ICC 2020). These movements reflect a broader effort to reframe Arctic sovereignty as inclusive of Indigenous self-determination, rather than subordinate to it (Shadian 2014). Furthermore, the growing global focus on Indigenous rights, particularly through instruments like UNDRIP, has given Arctic Indigenous peoples new discursive and legal tools to assert influence over state policy. There is an emerging recognition among scholars and policymakers that legitimizing sovereignty in the Arctic requires partnership with, not domination over, Indigenous communities (Wilson and Poelzer 2022).

Conclusion

The Canada–U.S. dispute over the Northwest Passage cannot be fully understood without examining its implications for Indigenous peoples. As states navigate sovereignty claims, securitization, and climate-induced change, Indigenous Arctic communities face both threats and opportunities. They are increasingly caught between national security imperatives and environmental vulnerability, while simultaneously mobilizing to reclaim authority and shape policy. Moving forward, the question is not merely who governs the Northwest Passage, but how governance can be made inclusive, equitable, granted a history of settler-colonialism, and responsive to the voices of those who live along its shores. Ensuring that Indigenous communities are not just invoked but meaningfully empowered is essential to building a just and stable Arctic order.

Securitization and the Limits of Federal Policy in the Arctic

The North American Arctic has undergone a profound transformation in the early 21st century. Climate change, new economic opportunities, and a resurgence of geopolitical competition have prompted Canada and the United States to reevaluate their Arctic strategies. A central feature of this reevaluation has been the securitization of the region—recasting Arctic issues as matters of national security rather than environmental protection, economic development, or Indigenous rights. While securitization aims to assert control over the Arctic and manage perceived threats, it often results in rigid, state-centric policy frameworks that limit adaptability, exclude non-state actors, and sideline Indigenous governance structures.

This section examines how securitization is evolving in the North American Arctic and how it constrains federal policy options in both Canada and the United States. It draws on securitization theory, defense policy analysis, and critical Arctic studies to argue that treating the Arctic primarily as a security space undermines long-term governance goals, weakens community trust, and narrows the scope of cooperative diplomacy in contested areas such as the Northwest Passage (NWP).

Securitization theory, as developed by the Copenhagen School, argues that when an issue is framed as a security threat, it is moved from the realm of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, justifying extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). In this framing, state actors (especially political elites and military leaders) are the primary agents of securitization, and their success depends on the audience accepting the framing of an issue as existential. Applied to the Arctic, securitization has emerged through discursive practices in which states justify surveillance, military buildup, and regulatory controls in response to perceived threats from climate change, foreign powers (especially Russia and China), and unregulated resource extraction (Lackenbauer 2021; Chater 2021). This framing enables and legitimizes policy choices that prioritize sovereignty, territorial integrity, and defense preparedness—often at the expense of environmental or Indigenous concerns.

Canada's Arctic policy has long been driven by a sovereignty-through-occupation model, wherein the presence of infrastructure, patrols, and Indigenous settlement is used to bolster legal claims to sovereignty (Huebert 2011). The melting of sea ice and increasing interest in Arctic shipping have intensified Canadian concerns over the Northwest Passage, which it claims as internal waters. This concern is often framed not just in legal or economic terms, but in explicitly security terms. Canadian federal policy since the 2000s reflects this securitized posture. The 2009 Canada First Defence Strategy and subsequent Strong, Secure, Engaged (2017) defense policy underscore

the Arctic as a core national interest requiring enhanced surveillance, military capability, and international cooperation under NORAD (Charron and Fergusson 2018). The construction of new Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS), expansion of the Canadian Rangers, and investments in satellite and radar systems are material expressions of this framing.

However this security emphasis limits the scope of policy debate, focusing federal resources on defense infrastructure rather than community needs, climate adaptation, or Indigenous governance. As Wilson (2020) and Coates and Holroyd (2012) argue, securitization in Canada has reinforced hierarchical governance in which Indigenous voices are invoked rhetorically but sidelined in practice. Even as documents such as the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) pay lip service to reconciliation, their implementation remains shaped by sovereignty imperatives.

While historically less active than Canada in Arctic affairs, the United States has in recent years adopted a more assertive Arctic posture, driven by increasing geopolitical competition with Russia and China. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) now considers the Arctic a strategic frontier, as reflected in the 2022 National Defense Strategy and the Arctic Strategy for Homeland Defense (2023). These documents frame the Arctic as a contested space requiring enhanced deterrence, domain awareness, and joint force readiness (U.S. DoD 2023). Key initiatives include upgrading the North Warning System, investing in new icebreakers, and modernizing the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in partnership with Canada. The U.S. Coast Guard has also expanded its Arctic footprint through seasonal deployments and the Polar Security Cutter program (Moore, Williams, and Harris 2024). These investments are designed to ensure freedom of navigation and assert U.S. interests in increasingly accessible polar waters, including the NWP, which the U.S. continues to regard as an international strait. While this approach bolsters defense preparedness, it also reflects a securitized vision of the Arctic that limits interagency flexibility and civil engagement. Agencies focused on environmental stewardship (e.g., NOAA) and Indigenous consultation (e.g., BIA) are often subordinated to military priorities in budgetary and institutional

terms. As Rogers et al. (2013) note, U.S. Arctic governance remains fragmented, with insufficient mechanisms for monitoring integrated regional planning.

One consequence of securitization is that it narrows the policy lens through which Arctic challenges are addressed. By emphasizing sovereignty, deterrence, and domain control, security frameworks treat non-traditional issues—like climate migration, cultural loss, or food insecurity—as secondary. This tendency creates blind spots in policy formulation, particularly in relation to long-term resilience and sustainability. Securitization undermines diplomatic flexibility in disputes like the NWP. While Canada and the U.S. continue to disagree on its legal status, their cooperation under NORAD and mutual defense arrangements has historically defused tensions. This occurred primarily during a period of mutual securitization, an agreement between the United States and Canada on the potential threat of the Cold War to the referent object - the Arctic. However, a heavily securitized approach makes compromise politically costly. Any concession risks being interpreted as a sovereignty loss or national vulnerability—limiting the space for creative legal or joint-management solutions (Byers 2013; Lalonde 2007).

Securitization also limits cross-border collaboration with Indigenous organizations, who increasingly seek a central role in Arctic governance. While treaties and agreements recognize Indigenous rights, their implementation is constrained by national security doctrines that centralize decision-making in federal agencies. As Shadian (2014) and Wilson and Poelzer (2022) emphasize, meaningful reconciliation and sustainable governance require policy tools beyond those offered by a security lens.

Recent scholarship calls for desecuritization—a shift that repositions Arctic issues within the realm of normal politics, thereby enabling more inclusive and flexible governance (Young 2019; Chater 2021). This approach emphasizes multilateral cooperation, environmental protection, and Indigenous-led governance. Tools for desecuritization include co-management institutions, integrated planning frameworks, and legal mechanisms that embed Indigenous and ecological

considerations in Arctic policy. Canada's ANPF and the U.S. Arctic Strategy (2022) show tentative steps in this direction, with increased references to “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approaches. However, unless securitization is actively challenged, such language risks being symbolic rather than structural. De-emphasizing security discourse will require rethinking Arctic identity—not as a frontier to be defended, but as a region to be shared and collectively governed.

The securitization of the North American Arctic has shaped the policies of both Canada and the United States in recent decades. While national security concerns are not without merit, particularly in a rapidly changing geopolitical context, an overemphasis on sovereignty and defense has narrowed the policy imagination and constrained more holistic human security approaches. For both federal governments, a critical reassessment of securitization's consequences is necessary to ensure that Arctic policy serves not only national interests but also the environmental, social, and political well-being of those who call the region home.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis has explored the evolving relevance of the Northwest Passage (NWP) in light of climate-induced transformations and shifting geopolitical interests. Specifically, it posed the question: As climate change renders the Northwest Passage increasingly navigable, is the dispute between Canada and the United States over its legal status becoming more relevant, and how do the parties articulate their interests in discourse? Through a mixed-method approach—comprising historical policy analysis, discourse analysis, and a single case study—this study has examined how

Arctic governance, sovereignty claims, and strategic behavior are shaped by the twin forces of environmental change and geopolitical recalibration.

Chapter 1 established the theoretical and methodological foundation. It justified the utility of a single case study approach for investigating nuanced, context-specific issues and addressed critiques regarding generalizability. The chapter also explained the value of analyzing historical Arctic security policies and public discourse as entry points to assess the evolution of the Canada–U.S. dispute. Chapter 2 conducted a detailed discourse analysis of statements made by Canadian Prime Ministers and U.S. Presidents from 1988 to 2024. It revealed notable shifts in tone, content, and emphasis, particularly as climate change moved from being a peripheral concern to a central geopolitical issue. Canadian leaders have persistently emphasized sovereignty and stewardship, often framing the NWP as a matter of national identity and environmental responsibility. In contrast, American administrations have consistently articulated the NWP as an international strait, prioritizing principles of freedom of navigation and global trade. Notably, the rise of Chinese interest in Arctic affairs has added complexity, prompting intensified security-oriented rhetoric in both countries.

Chapter 3 reflected on the implications of these findings. It argued that while the likelihood of outright military conflict remains low due to strong bilateral ties and institutional cooperation through organizations like NORAD, securitization is increasingly shaping the policy space. This trend risks marginalizing Indigenous communities, whose governance rights and climate vulnerabilities are too often overlooked in high-level strategic dialogues. Moreover, as both states continue to harden their respective positions amid growing international interest in Arctic routes, the political relevance of the NWP is escalating even in the absence of open hostility.

This thesis finds that climate change is indeed amplifying the strategic and symbolic importance of the Northwest Passage. This amplification is manifest in political rhetoric, policy formation, and international engagement. The dispute over the NWP, once primarily legal and

symbolic, now carries deeper implications for national security, international law, and Indigenous sovereignty. Climate change has not only melted ice; it has also reshaped interests, identities, and imaginaries in the Arctic. This carries significant evidence of relationships challenged between allied states due to a changing climate and contributes to literature on environmental security.

Further Research

While this thesis offers a substantive foundation for understanding the impact of climate change on the Canada–U.S. Northwest Passage dispute, it also opens several avenues for further scholarly investigation. The Arctic is a fast-evolving region - physically, politically, and economically - and future research should be adaptive, intersectional, and transdisciplinary. Future research could adopt a comparative framework to examine how other Arctic coastal states (e.g., Russia, Norway, Denmark/Greenland) articulate sovereignty and manage environmental shifts - particularly in contested or challenged spaces like Greenland or Svalbard. Comparative studies would allow scholars to assess whether the securitization and discourse patterns identified in this thesis are unique to the Canada–U.S. dyad or indicative of a broader trend in Arctic geopolitics in the 21st century. Such research could deepen understanding of regional cooperation and conflict potential across the circumpolar North. Additionally, while during the period studied the United States and Canada have enjoyed a close interstate relationship, more recent political and economic strain between the two states primarily during the second administration of U.S. President Donald Trump warrants greater study. It remains too early to confidently assert a departure from the long history of Arctic cooperation but a deterioration of relations between the two states may further accelerate the heating of the disputed NWP.

While this thesis included references to increasing navigability due to melting sea ice, it did not conduct a technical or in-depth empirical assessment of vessel traffic or infrastructure

expansion in the Northwest Passage. Future work could employ shipping registries and port development records to offer a grounded, quantitative picture of Arctic economic activity. This would provide crucial data for policymakers evaluating the NWP's real versus perceived strategic value.

References

- Aporta, Claudio. 2011. "Shifting Perspectives on Shifting Ice: Documenting and Representing Inuit Use of the Sea Ice." *The Canadian Geographer* 55(1): 6–19.
- Bacchi, Carol. 2009. *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to Be?* Sydney: Pearson.
- Baker, Betsy. 2013. "Filling an Arctic Gap: Legal and Regulatory Possibilities for Canadian-U.S. Cooperation in the Beaufort Sea." *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 46(4): 1141–1190.
- Barbier, Edward, and Thomas Homer-Dixon. 1999. "Environmental Change, Social Conflict, and Limits to Adaptation in Developing Countries." In *Environmental Change, Adaptation, and Security*, 335–47.
- Barnett, Jon. 2003. "Security and Climate Change." *Global Environmental Change* 13(1): 7–17.
- Berbrick, Walter, Joshua Conley, and Jeffrey Van Abel. 2020. *America's Arctic Moment: Great Power Competition in the Arctic to 2050*. U.S. Naval War College.
- Bergmann, Max and Otto Svendsen. 2024. Time Magazine.. "The Coming Battle Over the Arctic." <https://time.com/7004330/arctic-us-russia-china>
- Berkes, Fikret. 2012. *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Borgerson, Scott G. 2008. "Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming." *Foreign Affairs* 87(2): 63–77.
- Brady, Anne-Marie. 2017. *China as a Polar Great Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bueger, Christian, and Timothy Edmunds. 2021. "Blue Crime: Conceptualising Transnational Organised Crime at Sea." *Marine Policy* 128: 104469.
- Busby, Joshua W. 2008. "Who Cares About the Weather? Climate Change and U.S. National Security." *Security Studies* 17(3): 468–504.
- Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

- Byers, Michael. 2009. *Who Owns the Arctic? Understanding Sovereignty Disputes in the North*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Byers, Michael. 2013. *International Law and the Arctic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Byers, Michael. 2017. "Crises and International Cooperation: An Arctic Case Study." *International Relations* 31(4): 375–402.
- Byers, Michael, and Suzanne Lalonde. 2009. "Who Controls the Northwest Passage?" *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 42(4): 1131–1212.
- Canada Crown-Indigenous Relations. 2019. "Arctic and Northern Policy Framework." <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca>.
- Canada DFAIT. 2010. "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy." <https://www.international.gc.ca>.
- Canada, Global Affairs. 2024. "Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy." *GAC*. <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/transparency-transparence/arctic-arctique/arctic-policy-politique-arctique.aspx?lang=eng> (February 28, 2025).
- Canada, Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. 2019. "Arctic and Northern Policy Framework." <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587> (May 28, 2025).
- Canada PMO. 2007. "Prime Minister Stephen Harper Announces Expansion of Canadian Forces Facilities in the Arctic." <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news>.
- CBC News. 2022. "Trudeau Reaffirms Canada's Sovereignty over Northwest Passage." <https://www.cbc.ca/news>.
- Charron, Andrea. 2005. "Canada and the Northwest Passage: Sovereignty Issue." *International Journal* 60(2): 457–73.
- Charron, Andrea. 2015. "The Northwest Passage Dispute: A Manifestation of Arctic Sovereignty." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 21(3): 233–45.
- Charron, Andrea, and James Fergusson. 2018. "Beyond NORAD and Modernization to North American Defence Evolution." *International Journal* 73(4): 598–611.
- Charron, Andrea, and James Fergusson. 2022. *NORAD: In Perpetuity and Beyond*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

- Chater, Andrew. 2021a. "China's Ambitions in the Arctic and What They Mean for Canada." <https://arcticyearbook.com>.
- Chater, Andrew. 2021b. "Climate Change and the Canadian Arctic: Security and Sovereignty in an Era of Change." <https://arcticyearbook.com>.
- Chater, Andrew. 2021c. *Politics and Governance in the Arctic: The Nordic States and the European Union*. London: Routledge.
- Coates, Ken S., P. Whitney Lackenbauer, William R. Morrison, and Greg Poelzer. 2008. *Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North*. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers.
- Comiso, Josefino. 2012. "Large Decadal Decline of the Arctic Multiyear Ice Cover." *Journal of Climate* 25: 1176–93.
- Dawson, Jackie, Patrick Maher, and D. Scott Slocombe. 2007. "Climate Change, Marine Shipping and the Canadian Arctic: Opportunities and Challenges for Northern Communities." *Marine Policy* 31(4): 389–99.
- Dodds, Klaus. 2010. "Flag Planting and Finger Pointing: The Law of the Sea, the Arctic and the Political Geographies of the Outer Continental Shelf." *Political Geography* 29(2): 63–73.
- Eckstein, Harry. 1975. "Case Study and Theory in Political Science" eds. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby. *Handbook of Political Science* 7: 79–137.
- Exner-Pirot, Heather. 2012. "Human Security in the Arctic: The Foundation of Regional Cooperation." <https://arcticyearbook.com>.
- Exner-Pirot, Heather. 2019. "The Arctic in International Affairs in 2018." <https://arcticyearbook.com>.
- Exner-Pirot, Heather. 2020. "Between Militarization and Disarmament: Challenges for Arctic Security in the Twenty-First Century." In *Climate Change and Arctic Security: Searching for a Paradigm Shift*, eds. Lassi Heininen and Heather Exner-Pirot., 91–106. doi:[10.1007/978-3-030-20230-9_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20230-9_6).
- Ford, James D. et al., 2008. "Climate Change in the Arctic: Current and Future Vulnerability in Two Inuit Communities in Canada." *The Geographical Journal* 174(1): 45–62.
- Gearheard, Shari and others. 2006. *Unikkaaqatigiit: Putting the Human Face on Climate Change*. Ottawa: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

- Government of Canada. 1992. "Canadian Defence Policy."
https://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2012/dn-nd/D3-7-1992-eng.pdf.
- Government of Canada. 2008. "Canada First Defence Strategy."
<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canada-first-defence-strategy-complete-document.html>.
- Government of Canada. 2010. "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy."
<https://www.uaf.edu/caps/resources/policy-documents/canada-statement-on-arctic-foreign-policy.pdf>.
- Government of Canada. 2017. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy."
https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/mdn-dnd/D2-386-2017-eng.pdf.
- Government of Canada. 2019. "Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework."
<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca>.
- Griffiths, Ranklyn. 2003. "The Shipping News: Canada's Arctic Sovereignty Not on Thinning Ice." *International Journal* 58(2): 257–82. doi:[10.1177/002070200305800202](https://doi.org/10.1177/002070200305800202).
- Griffiths, Franklyn. 2011. "Toward a Canadian Arctic Strategy." In *Canada and the Changing Arctic*, , 181–226.
- Hall, Alex. 2004. "The Role of Surface Albedo Feedback in Climate." *Journal of Climate* 17(7).
https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/17/7/1520-0442_2004_017_1550_trosaf_2.0.co_2.xml.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas F. 1999. *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hoogensen, Gunhild, and Havard M. F. Kristoffersen. 2007. "Gender, Arctic Security and Environmental Securitization." In *Security in Practice: New Tools for Unpacking Securitisation*, eds. Carsten Bockstette and Enrique Mendizabal. London: International Alert, 73–93.
- Huebert, Rob. 2001. "Climate Change and Canadian Sovereignty in the Northwest Passage." *Isuma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2(4): 86–94.

- Huebert, Rob. 2011. "Canada and the Newly Emerging International Arctic Security Regime." In *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change*, ed. James Kraska. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 193–217. doi:[10.1017/CBO9780511994784.013](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511994784.013).
- Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). 2009. "A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic." <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com>.
- Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). 2020. *Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic*. Anchorage.
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK). 2008. *Inuit Perspectives on Arctic Sovereignty*. Ottawa.
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK). 2016. *Position Paper on Shipping Policy*. Ottawa.
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK). 2019. *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework Submission*. Ottawa.
- Jacobsen, Marc, Ole Waever, and Ulrik Pram Gad. 2024. "Introduction: Analyzing Greenland in Arctic Security." In *Greenland in Arctic Security: Desecuritization Dynamics under Climatic Thaw and Geopolitical Freeze*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kashiwase, Haruhiko, Kay I. Ohshima, Sohey Nihashi, and Hajo Eicken. 2017. "Evidence for Ice-Ocean Albedo Feedback in the Arctic Ocean Shifting to a Seasonal Ice Zone." *Scientific Reports* 7(1): 8170. doi:[10.1038/s41598-017-08467-z](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-08467-z).
- Keil, Kathrin. 2014. "The Arctic: A New Region of Conflict? The Case of Oil and Gas." *Cooperation and Conflict* 49(2): 162–190.
- Klare, Michael T. 2001. *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Knecht, Sebastian. 2023. "Arctic Ambitions Revisited: The Biden Administration's Arctic Strategy and the Politics of Presence." *Polar Journal* 13(1): 56–74.
- Kral, Michael J. 2016. *The Return of the Sun: Suicide and Reclamation among Inuit of Arctic Canada*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Labossiere, Andre. 2024. "Securing the Canadian Arctic: A Path-Dependent Analysis." Master's Thesis, McGill University. <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/downloads/nz806581p?locale=en>
- Lackenbauer, P. Whitney. 2011. "From Polar Race to Polar Saga: An Integrated Strategy for Canada and the Circumpolar World."

- Lackenbauer, P. Whitney. 2021. "Canada and the Polar Silk Road: Navigating Between China's Arctic Ambitions and Northern Indigenous Rights." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 27(2): 194–212.
- Lackenbauer, P. Whitney, and Heather Exner-Pirot. 2020. *Arctic Security and Canada's Defence Policy: Hardening the Ice Curtain*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.
- Lackenbauer, P. Whitney, and Rob Huebert. 2014. "Premier Partners: Canada–United States Arctic Security Cooperation." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 20(3): 320–33.
- Lackenbauer, P. Whitney, and Adam Lajeunesse. 2018. "China's Arctic Ambitions and What They Mean for Canada." *China Brief* 18(4): 7–12.
- Lackenbauer, P. Whitney, and Suzanne Lalonde. 2017. "Searching for Common Ground in Evolving Canadian and American Arctic Strategies." In *Canadian Arctic Operations, 1941–2015*, ed. P. Whitney Lackenbauer. Fredericton: Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, 371–401.
- Lajeunesse, Adam. 2016. *Lock, Stock, and Icebergs: A History of Canada's Arctic Maritime Sovereignty*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Lajeunesse, Adam. 2020. "China's Arctic Interests and Canada's Northern Strategy: Conflict or Cooperation?" *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 26(3): 248–62.
- Lalonde, Suzanne. 2023. The Debate over the Legal Status of the Northwest Passage. Policy Primer.
https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/23sep-Lalonde-NWP_Policy-Primer.pdf
- Lalonde, Suzanne, and Ted L. McDorman. 2009. "Inuit and the Ice: International Law, the Law of the Sea, and Climate Change." *Journal of Maritime Law and Commerce* 40(1): 1–38.
- Lassinantti, Johanna. 2019. "Strategic Significance of the Arctic." *International Journal of Transcontinental Discoveries* 11(1): 54–70.
- Lindsey, Rebecca, and Michon Scott. 2022. "Climate Change: Arctic Sea Ice Summer Minimum | NOAA Climate.Gov." NOAA.
<https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-arctic-sea-ice-summer-minimum>.

- “Legislation | US Arctic Research Commission.” <https://www.arctic.gov/legislation/> (May 28, 2025).
- Levy, Marc A. 1995. “Is the Environment a National Security Issue?” *International Security* 20(2): 35–62.
- Mallett, Alexandra, Jessica Leis, Rosa Brown, David Codzi, and Jimmy Arqviq. 2023. “Sustainable Energy in Canadian Territorial Communities: An Opportunity for Transformative Change or Stalled on the Margins?” In *Sustainable Energy Transitions In Canada*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 149–87.
- McRae, Donald, and D. M. Goundrey. 1982. “Environmental Jurisdiction in Arctic Waters: The Extent of Article 234.” *University of British Columbia Law Review* 16(2): 197–227.
- Meierding, Emily. 2013. “Climate Change and Conflict: Avoiding Small Talk about the Weather.” *International Studies Review* 15(2): 185–203.
- Meierding, Emily. 2020. *The Oil Wars Myth: Petroleum and the Causes of International Conflict*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Moore, Nathan A., Dustin R. Williams, and Amanda L. Harris. 2024. “Arctic Governance: U.S. Coast Guard Presence and Leadership in the Region.” *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 48: 59.
- National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC). 2023. “Arctic Sea Ice News & Analysis.” <https://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/>.
- Pharand, Donat. 2007. “The Arctic Waters and the Northwest Passage: A Final Revisit.” *Ocean Development and International Law* 38(1–2): 3–69.
- Pharand, Donat. 2007. *Canada’s Arctic Waters in International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pincus, Rebecca. 2020. “Three-Way Power Dynamics in the Arctic.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 14(1): 40–63.
- Pompeo, Mike. 2019 “Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus - United States Department of State.” <https://2017-2021.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>.
- PRC State Council. 2018. “China’s Arctic Policy.” <http://english.gov.cn>.

- “Presidential Decision Directive 26 (PDD/NSC-26) - Collection Finding Aid · Clinton Digital Library.” <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/48946> (May 28, 2025).
- Rahbek-Clemmensen, Jon, and Gry Thomasen. 2020. “Learning from the Ilulissat Initiative: State Power, Institutional Legitimacy, and Governance in the Arctic Ocean 2007–18.” *Marine Policy* 113: 103801.
- Rashid, Shiblee. 2021. “Geopolitics of the Arctic: Through the Lens of State Securitization.” *Journal of Global Politics and Contemporary Debates*
- Reagan, Ronald. 1983. “Statement on United States Oceans Policy.”
- Rodon, Thierry. 2014. “‘Working Together’: The Dynamics of Multilevel Governance in Nunavut.” *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 5(2): 250–70.
- Rodon, Thierry. 2021. “Land-Use Co-Management in Canada: A Mixed Experience.” In *Finnmarksloven - En Milepæl? - Samerett i Møte Med Norsk Politikk*, Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 286–310.
- Rodon, Thierry, and Stephan Schott. 2014. “Towards a Sustainable Future for Nunavik.” *Polar Record* 50(3): 260–76.
- Rogers, T. S., J. E. Walsh, T. S. Rupp, L. W. Brigham, and M. Sfraga. 2013. “Future Arctic Marine Access: Analysis and Evaluation of Observations, Models, and Projections of Sea Ice.” *The Cryosphere* 7(1): 321–32. doi:[10.5194/tc-7-321-2013](https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-7-321-2013).
- Rothwell, Donald R. 2015. *The Arctic in International Law and Policy*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Schindler, Trent L. 2022. “NASA Scientific Visualization Studio | Annual Arctic Sea Ice Minimum Area 1979-2022, With Graph.” *NASA Scientific Visualization Studio*. <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/5036>.
- Sheehan, Rebecca, et al. 2021. “The Northwest Passage in the Arctic: A Brief Assessment of the Relevant Marine Transportation System and Current Availability of Search and Rescue Services.” *Logistics* 5(2): 23. <https://doi.org/10.3390/logistics5020023>
- Sørensen, Camilla T. N., and Ekaterina Klimenko. 2017. “Emerging Chinese–Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Possibilities and Constraints.”
- Steinberg, Philip E., and Klaus Dodds. 2015. “Geopolitics, Territory, and Security in the Arctic.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105(2): 312–22.

- Swiffen, Amy, and Shoshana Paget. 2023. "Introduction: Indigenous Peoples in Federal Contexts." In *Indigenous Peoples and the Future of Federalism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 3-10.
- The White House. 2009. "NATIONAL SECURITY PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE/NSPD -- 66." <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.pdf>.
- The White House. 2022. "National Strategy for the Arctic Region." <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Defense. 2019. "Report to Congress: Department of Defense Arctic Strategy." <https://media.defense.gov>.
- US Department of Defense. 2024. "2024 Arctic Strategy." <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF>.
- U.S. White House. 2009. "National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-66." <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>.
- Wæver, Ole. 1995. "Securitization and Desecuritization." In *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz. New York: Columbia University Press, 46–86.
- White, Graham. Vancouver. *Indigenous Empowerment through Co-Management – Land Claims Boards, Wildlife Management, and Environmental Regulation*. UBC Press.
- White, Graham. 2023. *"We Are In Charge Here": Inuit Self-Government and the Nunatsiavut Assembly*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- White House. 2022. "National Strategy for the Arctic Region." <https://www.whitehouse.gov>.
- Young, Oran. 2009. "The Arctic in Play: Governance in a Time of Rapid Change." *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law* doi:[10.1163/157180809X421833](https://doi.org/10.1163/157180809X421833).
- Young, Oran R. 2009. *Whither the Arctic? Conflict or Cooperation in a Changing Region*. Washington, DC: Arctic Governance Project.
- Young, Oran R. 2019. "Is It Time for a Reset in Arctic Governance?" *Sustainability* 11(16): 4497. doi:[10.3390/su11164497](https://doi.org/10.3390/su11164497).

