

# At the Front Lines of Increased Shipping and Climate Change: Inuit Perspectives on Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security

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*Discussions of Arctic sovereignty and security have traditionally centered on the interests of the state and how it impacts the nation. More recently, scholars have noted the importance of addressing the interests of other actors, in particular, Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples in the Arctic have long advocated for conceptualizing Arctic sovereignty as Indigenous sovereignty. While development in Arctic Canada has been relatively limited compared to southern Canada due to infrastructure, climate, and logistical challenges, this is all set to shift dramatically, with Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic arguably weathering the brunt of climate change risks and experiencing everything else that comes with it. An Indigenous-centered conception of Arctic sovereignty and security requires an understanding of how Inuit communities are experiencing the front lines of these changes. Thus, this paper offers a valuable contribution to Arctic sovereignty and security discourse by presenting the concerns expressed directly by members of 14 communities located in three regions of Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homeland). Our findings show that Inuit communities have concerns about many unknowns associated with the changing climate and increased shipping, including implications of increased international interest in the Canadian Arctic, which could pose threats to the ability of Inuit to protect their sovereignty and the environment they live in. Given the potential for change in the Arctic climate to make Arctic shipping a more attractive and realistic option in the future, we argue that these concerns should be considered integral to climate change discussions and decisions in the Canadian Arctic, as well as in general discussions of Arctic sovereignty and security.*

## Introduction

The Arctic is bearing the brunt of global climate change impacts and risks, with the change in temperatures increasing at three times the rate of the global average, resulting in the melting of glaciers and sea ice and having the potential to dramatically change the landscape (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program, 2021; Bush & Flato, 2019; Hassol, 2004; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2019). Melting sea ice could open up previously frozen over passages thereby increasing the potential for marine traffic, which has to date been seasonally limited. This has encouraged talks of the potential for a northern trade route through the Northwest Passage

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and has also increased global interest in potential for resource extraction in areas of the Arctic that have historically been difficult to access. While the Government of Canada, and Inuit (through Land Claims Agreements) hold sovereignty over the land mass surrounding the Northwest Passage, there is international disagreement about whether the waters and ice in the Northwest Passage fall under Canadian jurisdiction or are international waters. Despite Canada's claim of sovereignty over these regions, these civil international disputes, alongside other potential unknowns as a result of climate change and increased marine traffic in the Canadian Arctic, highlight the vulnerabilities of Inuit communities and risks to security and Inuit sovereignty. In this study, we present security and sovereignty concerns expressed by knowledge holders in 14 communities in three regions of Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homeland in Canada) (Fig. 1) who participated in the Arctic Corridors and Northern Voices research project (Dawson et al., 2020a; see [www.arcticcorridors.ca](http://www.arcticcorridors.ca)). Three key points are discussed from the findings relating to the security and sovereignty concerns shared by knowledge holders about shipping traffic in Inuit Nunangat: 1) 'Unknowns' about shipping traffic; 2) Lack of Inuit agency over shipping traffic and marine areas; and 3) Concerns in the context of Inuit agency and sovereignty. Concerns raised by community members are integral to climate change discussions and decisions in the Canadian Arctic, as well as general discussions of Arctic sovereignty and security.

## Literature review

In classic security paradigms, state sovereignty is often considered to be inextricably connected to Arctic security (Sharp, 2011; Huebert, 2011a; Huebert, 2011b). Security analyses within this paradigm, often inspired by the realist school of thought in the field of international relations (Rothschild, 1995), tend to be concerned with the nation state as its main unit of reference: threats to the state, actions of states, impacts on the state (Åtland, 2014; Huebert, 2011a; Huebert, 2011b; Johnston, 2012; Lackenbauer, 2011; Lackenbauer & Huebert, 2014; Scopelliti & Pérez, 2016; Sharp, 2011). For example, Huebert argues that the Canadian sovereign control of the Arctic allows for the protection of Canadian interests that benefit the Canadian population (2011a). A prominent focus for classic security studies is military build-up in the Arctic as a means of asserting state sovereignty (Huebert, 2011a; Huebert, 2011b).

Over time, Arctic scholars have recognized the limitations of a state sovereignty-centered classic approach to security, pointing out that focusing narrowly on the state as represented by its political elite does not account for the needs of its people, including Inuit and other Arctic Indigenous peoples in the region, thus reproducing structural colonial power relations (Broadhead, 2010; Greaves, 2011; Heininen, 2013; Heininen & Exner-Pirot, 2020). In addition, scholars have emphasized how classic security analyses' preoccupation with interstate conflict often implicitly rely on a violence-based conception of security, ignoring other sources of insecurity that people face – in other words, freedom from fear, rather than freedom from want (Broadhead, 2010; Greaves, 2011). Security should include more than the protection of Canada's territory, but also the protection of the security of the Indigenous peoples who reside there (Slowey, 2014). It follows then that a narrow state-centered security focus on sovereignty may not only be irrelevant to Arctic Indigenous peoples, including Inuit, but could at times be contrary to their needs, particularly where the regional needs of the people there may be significantly different from those in non-Arctic regions (Broadhead, 2010; Greaves, 2016a; Kukkanen & Sweet, 2020).

The edited volume *Nilliajut: Inuit Perspectives of Security, Patriotism and Sovereignty* released in 2013, and its 2018 follow up report *Nilliajut 2: Inuit Perspectives on the Northwest Passage, Shipping, and Marine Issues*, alongside other texts written by Inuit (Simon, 2011), provide insight into the nuanced positions Inuit have about the concepts of Arctic sovereignty and security and what those mean to them and their communities. Inuit leaders such as Mary Simon and Aaju Peter have expressed pride in their Canadian identity and a willingness to support Canada's assertions of sovereignty in the Arctic (Simon, 2011). However, Inuit have also argued that Canada must accept Inuit use and occupation of the lands and waters in Inuit Nunangat when making such assertions of Arctic sovereignty (Simon, 2011; Peter, 2013). Peter (2013: 46) explains: "The Inuit who have occupied the Arctic for thousands of years are the only ones who can best define what "use and occupation" of Inuit Nunaat [Inuit homeland] is." After all, Inuit communities have recognized that they will be most impacted by any issues that may arise with respect to Arctic sovereignty, control, and access (Kelley, 2013). As such, it is argued that Inuit must be actively involved in discussions on their use and occupation in the Arctic during sovereignty discussions (Greaves & Lackenbauer, 2021; Peter, 2013), a topic on which community members do not feel adequately consulted (Kelley, 2013).

There have been increasing calls from Inuit and others to recognize Arctic security within the framework of *Indigenous* sovereignty, rather than state sovereignty (Slowey, 2014; Greaves, 2016a; Greaves & Lackenbauer, 2021). This approach accounts not only for what state governments perceive as security concerns in the Arctic, but what those residing in the Arctic identify and experience as security threats (Broadhead, 2010; Kuokkanen & Sweet, 2020; Nicol & Heininen, 2014). Terry Audla, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (at the time he wrote this piece) suggested that the relevant question should be: "What dangers do Inuit face in Inuit Nunangat (our traditional Arctic homeland in Canada)?" (Audla, 2013: 7). Similarly, Inuk leader Rosemarie Kuptana advocates for understanding security as being more than military actions, but ensuring a reasonable lifestyle for Inuit (Kuptana, 2013). Simon also notes that although Inuit desire a peaceful Arctic, security must be understood as a broader concept:

Just as health is more than the absence of disease, so, too, security is more than the absence of military conflict. With that view, Inuit will continue to advance what we believe are constructive and reasonable ideas for Arctic policymaking and decision-making – decision-making that respects and provides sustainable benefits to the Inuit majority of Inuit Nunangat, as well as to humanity as a whole (Simon, 2011: 891).

Inuit have also identified the limited implementation of Inuit self-government and other policies by Canada as negatively infringing on their security (Greaves, 2016a; Greaves, 2016b). For example, Zebedee Nungak highlights colonization as being one of the most significant security threats to Inuit, arguing that "the British legal system, as used by its Monarch and colonial/post-colonial governments, is the single most lethal weapon used to eradicate Inuit sovereignty over Arctic homelands in Canada" (Nungak, 2013: 13). More recently, Indigenous researcher and policy advisor, Bridget Laroque explained that "policies developed without the knowledge and wisdom of Indigenous expertise, which we bring as life-long Northerners, is nothing more than the continuation of the colonial methodology that perpetuates antagonism" (Dorough, Laroque, Kaluraq & Taukie, 2021: 19). Whitney Lackenbauer's (Kikkert & Lackenbauer, 2020; Lackenbauer and Kikkert, 2020) research examining the role of the Canadian Rangers in the Arctic shows how

the involvement of Inuit and other northerners in security and sovereignty activities can help to empower Inuit to “protect their lands and their rights in the spirit of self-determination” (Lackenbauer & Kikkert, 2020: 16). Hoogensen explains that “a critical human security perspective in the Arctic demands that a security analysis include bottom-up, lived experiences of insecurity that have been missed or ignored by state-centered perspectives” (Hoogensen, 2021: 209). In the context of Indigenous sovereignty, this would mean examining the experiences of insecurity of Indigenous peoples living in the Arctic, with consideration of Indigenous rights and self-determination.

Discussions of sovereignty and security in the Arctic have therefore evolved over the past few decades from a focus on state sovereignty as a means to Arctic security, to the de-coupling of sovereignty and security. This enables the integration of other dimensions to security such as human, environmental, and economic security concerns, to the re-introduction of the connection between Arctic security and sovereignty, but with a focus on Indigenous sovereignty, rather than that of the state. This shift is also reflected in Government of Canada policy approaches to Arctic security and Inuit sovereignty. The focus of the 2019 Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) is to create “a shared vision of the future where northern and Arctic people are thriving, strong, and safe.” (Government of Canada, 2019a: para. 4). The framework was co-developed amongst federal, territorial, and provincial governments, northerners, and Indigenous governments and organizations (Kikkert & Lackenbauer, 2019). Government and Indigenous leaders worked together through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee for the development of an Inuit Nunangat chapter to guide how the framework would be implemented in Inuit Nunangat in a manner that ensures that the framework “respects Inuit rights and that an Inuit Nunangat approach is utilized in the development and implementation of federal policies and programs that are intended to benefit Inuit, creating efficiencies that in turn benefit all Canadians” (Government of Canada, 2019a: para. 9). Similarly, the 2016 Ocean Protection Plan outlines the creation of policies that support the Canadian Arctic marine environment and the communities who live there (Transport Canada, n.d.). This provides some optimism that Inuit will continue to become more involved in policy decision making regarding security and sovereignty around shipping in the Canadian Arctic. However, while the ‘Safety, Security, and Defence’ chapter of the ANPF does include mentions of increasing “...participation of Northern and Indigenous communities in the maritime management regime” (Government of Canada, 2019b: para. 44), and it also addresses the possible impacts of shipping to northern and Arctic communities, it does not make explicit reference to Inuit conceptions of security, Inuit sovereignty, or Inuit Land Claims Agreements (Government of Canada, 2019b). In order to move forward in discussions about Arctic security and sovereignty, specifically in relation to increased shipping in the Canadian Arctic, Inuit perspectives such as those shared in this paper need to be at the forefront. In this paper, we describe perspectives of knowledge holders from 14 communities throughout Inuit Nunangat regarding how Inuit security and sovereignty are impacted by Arctic shipping and may continue to be, into the future.

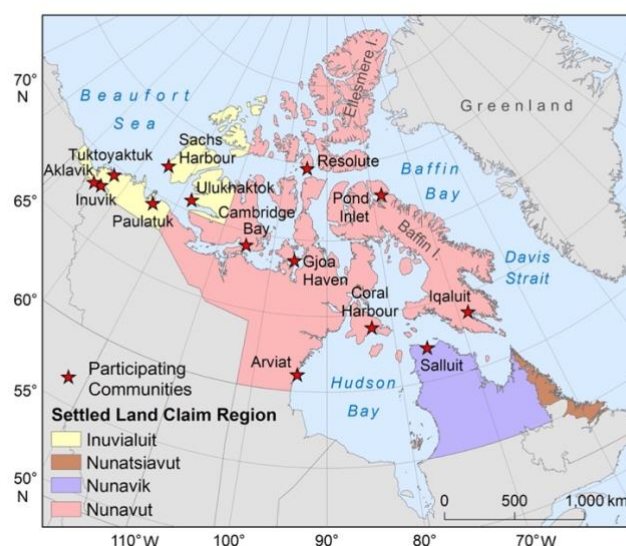
## **Methods**

### ***Study area***

Members of 14 communities in three settled land claim regions in the Canadian Arctic participated in the Arctic Corridors and Northern Voices (ACNV) project including six from the Inuvialuit

Settlement Region (ISR); Aklavik, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk, and Ulukhaktok; seven from Nunavut: Arviat, Cambridge Bay, Coral Harbour, Gjoa Haven, Iqaluit, Pond Inlet, and Resolute; and one from Nunavik (Northern Quebec): Salluit (See Figure 1). Communities involved in this study were purposely selected based on known concerns about marine vessel traffic impacts on community livelihoods (see Stewart et al. 2015; Dawson et al. 2017; 2018), and in consideration of existing research networks and collaborative relationships. Climate change has meant that the number of kilometers travelled by ships in their areas have increased in all but one of these communities since 1990 (Dawson et al., 2018) and that future growth is expected (Bennett et al. 2020; Mudryk et al., 2021). These include container ships, tankers, general cargo, bulk carriers, government icebreakers, tug and barge, fishing vessels, oil and gas exploration vessels, pleasure craft and cruise ships (Dawson et al., 2018; Pizzolato et al., 2014).

Figure 1. Settled Land Claim regions and Arctic Corridors and Northern Voices research project participating communities



Source: Dawson et al., 2020b

### ***Study approach and methodology***

This study was part of the broader Arctic Corridors and Northern Voices project which combined community-based research techniques with participatory mapping approaches to develop the methodology for the project. This involved conducting community workshops and individual interviews in each of the 14 participant communities. See Carter et al. (2019) and Dawson et al. (2020b) for additional details on the methodological approach. The community workshops and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions were then analyzed using an inductive-deductive coding approach (Patton, 2002). The focus of the conversations was about knowledge holder perspectives of the Government of Canada established Low Impact Shipping Corridors (LISC), where they shared their experiences with shipping traffic, the current and potential impacts of shipping traffic, and recommendations to minimize the impacts of shipping traffic into the future. During these conversations there was opportunity for unprompted discussions to develop and many of the findings presented in this paper came from these discussions. These discussions did not focus on the concepts of security or sovereignty, rather

knowledge holders were encouraged to share their perspectives on impacts of shipping traffic more broadly. As the researchers, we have grouped these discussions under themes related to issues of security and sovereignty. While the selection of coastal communities and shipping-based questions meant that knowledge holders would likely frame their concerns around shipping impacts, here we analyzed their responses to determine not just *what* communities were concerned about, but *why* (the reasons for the concerns), and *who* (who would be impacted by these concerns). In this way, the responses from knowledge holders were linked back to broader discourse about Arctic sovereignty and security. It is important to note here that knowledge holders also reflected on the opportunities and benefits related to shipping for their communities, in particular their reliance upon annual resupply ships, but here we focus on the concerns raised in regards to this topic.

The methodology used for a particular analysis influences how security concerns are identified. Greaves (2016b: 464) points out that the academic tendency to privilege settler perspectives – in particular, the state’s – over sub-altern actors such as Indigenous peoples can contribute to “the (re)production of Indigenous non-dominance [and] the erasure and denial of Indigenous histories, epistemologies, and interests”. Nicol and Heininen (2014: 84) similarly suggest:

One of the greatest unacknowledged threats to the Arctic region, besides the race for natural resources as a result of climate change, may be the continuing way in which competitive southern geopolitical and geo-economic discourses concerning northern development serve to effectively ‘re-colonise’ the north and re-marginalise its peoples. These discourses dig the hole deeper by ignoring their voice, their interests, and their expertise in shaping their own future; instead promoting a competitive paradigm cultivated by media and domestic political agenda.

The goal of this study has been to build on previous work that has utilized methodologies that provide empirical data collected directly from Inuit community members residing in the Arctic (Kikkert & Lackenbauer, 2020; Lackenbauer & Kikkert, 2020; Slowey, 2014).

### ***Positionality statement***

All authors are settler, southern-based scientists or staff at non-governmental organizations (at the time the research was conducted). We strived to maintain knowledge holder voices, and example quotes from knowledge holders are provided as context throughout.

## **Results and discussion**

Knowledge holders are concerned about increased shipping traffic because of the impact it is having, and could continue to have, on their livelihoods and communities. A knowledge holder from Sachs Harbour explained:

I’m just scared as hell about the traffic that’s going to go through there. I don’t know how it’s going to happen but I know it’s going to change our lives for sure. Change our lives big time.

Knowledge holders shared concerns about not knowing how they would continue to be able to engage in important activities integral to their livelihoods with all the risks that shipping poses to the Canadian Arctic, revealing that their concerns were rooted in security threats to their livelihood and way of life. For example, knowledge holders expressed concerns that ship traffic and pollution

or shipping-related accidents could negatively affect wildlife, and hunting and harvesting activities. These concerns about security were also intimately linked to a sense of Inuit sovereignty, as knowledge holders identified as concerns a lack of knowledge and/or a lack of control over what they were observing and experiencing in their own homeland as part of climate change and increased vessel traffic, specifically increased *international* vessel traffic. Knowledge holders were very aware and concerned about the international disagreements regarding the status of the Northwest Passage as Canada's internal waters. However, their concerns were rooted in how such disagreement would impact their way of life – their Inuit sovereignty – rather than state-focused security concerns such as how it would affect the Canadian government's sovereignty. Knowledge holders also expressed concerns about their lack of agency over these potential unknowns: perceptions were shared that if something were to happen in terms of shipping in the Arctic – for example, a shipping-related accident or even an increase in ship traffic – Inuit could not do anything to stop it from happening. As such, while some discussions such as the one described above did overlap with concerns of state (Government of Canada) sovereignty, such discussions focused more on how such concerns would impact Inuit in their homelands, rather than Canada as a state. The findings of this paper reiterate the ways in which Inuit sovereignty differs from state sovereignty, even in circumstances when the goals align.

Our findings have revealed three overarching themes relating to lack of shared information about shipping traffic: 1) “Unknowns’ of shipping traffic; a related lack of agency over the shipping traffic and marine areas”; 2) “Lack of Inuit agency over shipping traffic and marine areas in their region” and the resulting impacts on Indigenous sovereignty in the Arctic; and 3) “Concerns in the context of Inuit agency and sovereignty”.

### ***‘Unknowns’ of shipping traffic***

There was broad consensus that residents of participant communities did not feel that they had enough knowledge or available information about who is travelling through the Canadian Arctic and why. A knowledge holder from Gjoa Haven explained:

Some of them [sail boats], we're afraid of them because we don't know where they are coming from. We don't have any notification about these little sail boats or what not. And most of our Elders always wonder where they came from and what are they doing here?

A knowledge holder from Salluit expressed her feelings about ‘unknown’ ships:

We had no idea that they [ships] were there. Or what they [the ships] were doing there but they were parked right inside Deception Bay. And there's no way for us to police it. Are they pirates of the sea? Are they just passing through and getting a safe shelter out of the wind? We have no idea. The increase in traffic is something to be concerned with and because we don't know where they are coming from or going to. It seems that all we can do is watch to be quite honest.

These findings reflect comments made by Inuk leader Nancy Karetak-Lindell (2018) in Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's report *Nilliajut 2: Inuit perspectives on the Northwest Passage, Shipping, and Marine Issues*. Karetak-Lindell (2018: 30) expressed that:

A sense of security is strong when we [Inuit and Northerners] know who is coming, from where, and their purpose. But our sense of security and control is eroding because not only

are we facing increased Canadian [marine] traffic, but also foreign [marine] traffic coming through. We no longer have confidence that we know who is travelling through our waters and lands or why.

This is a perspective that continues to be expressed in the responses of the knowledge holders who participated in this project. However, it is important to explore *why* this lack of shared information about shipping traffic was a concern for knowledge holders. Knowledge holders expressed that their worries about these unknown ships traveling through Inuit Nunangat were often related to their lack of agency over the activities of vessel traffic in their regions.

***Lack of Inuit agency over shipping traffic and marine areas in their region***

In these remote communities, some knowledge holders experience these unknown ‘visitors’ as an intrusion and describe feeling a ‘lack of control’ over whether and how these activities occur. One knowledge holder in Gjoa Haven explained:

They [people in unknown marine vessels] just come as they please and go wherever they please. And the certain areas where they go, you kind of wish they wouldn’t go there; I wish they would ask first. Then they just go there and to always have something like that go around that area, like a ship, if a ship comes around there it’s kind of like, I don’t know how to say it... it’s so... you get so offended even though maybe they don’t mean to. But it’s very hurtful.

This statement suggests that knowledge holders are not simply concerned about knowing *who* are on board marine vessels and *what* they are doing, but are also concerned that marine vessels are travelling through Inuit Nunangat without first asking for permission. In other words, Inuit have expressed not only a lack of shared information about shipping traffic in their region, but a lack of agency over the shipping activities that happen near their communities or harvesting areas that have direct impacts on their way of life.

Knowledge holders indicated security concerns about international presence in the Canadian Arctic. A knowledge holder in Paulatuk recalled the transit of the SS Manhattan, a US oil tanker that became the first commercial ship to cross the Northwest Passage in 1969. This voyage generated many conversations about the sovereignty of the Northwest Passage as the Canadian Government had not been asked permission prior to the transit (Byers & Lalonde, 2009).

You remember the SS Manhattan that came through the Northwest Passage, 35-40 years ago at least. Think about how big the SS Manhattan was, unregulated, unmitigated and it was a tanker...I guess their way around it was that it was international waters. Like I mentioned before, the Canadians have different views from what the Americans think about international waters.

Other knowledge holders also confirmed concerns about the pressures of increasing interests for foreign shipping traffic to travel through Inuit homeland, either as a trading shortcut or specifically to extract resources from the Arctic environment through fishing, mining, or oil extraction. A knowledge holder in Gjoa Haven explained:

Remember I had mentioned that China is building a giant icebreaker ship. I mean that could come into play in the near future too. Because right now aren’t they fighting over the Arctic, where everyone’s allowed to fish and this and that? And



then the U.S. declaring the Northwest Passage as international waters. So, security is a big issue, I guess. Future security.

Although these issues of increasing foreign interests in the Canadian Arctic can be seen as being aligned with state interests and state sovereignty, it is important to note that knowledge holders in these communities focused on how such international interests were impacting and could impact Inuit communities. Such issues were at times discussed with an implication that Inuit did not have the power to adequately respond to such foreign interests. For example, a knowledge holder from Gjoa Haven shared their perspective about the international interest in resource extraction in the Canadian Arctic:

That's another field all in itself - oil exploration. *That's something that we're not going to be able to stop too.* Mining. Oil exploration. That's exactly why the United States is saying this is international water[s]. That's what they want, right? - the oil. [emphasis added.]

Another knowledge holder in Gjoa Haven recalled an experience where a yacht travelling from Norway arrived at their community unannounced, with concerns about its impact on the community:

You have to be careful. Some of these guys [passengers of unknown marine vessels] can take away your kids. We've had these Berserkers...Norwegian Hells Angel type sailors came through Gjoa Haven and they were looking for alcohol, drugs... they asked young women to come on the boat with them.

This incident was detailed in a newspaper article with respect to a group that called themselves the 'Norwegian Vikings' and were subsequently ordered to be deported by the Canada Border Services Agency after they arrived in Cambridge Bay in 2007 (Curry, 2007). One of the sailors argued in a deportation hearing that they did not feel the need to let Canadian officials know about their plans to travel through the Northwest Passage as they believed those were international waters (Curry, 2007). This incident further exemplifies concerns that knowledge holders shared, not only relating to a lack of information about who is traveling through Canadian Arctic waters and the intentions of these unknown vessels, but also how international border disputes affect Inuit directly.

For other knowledge holders, these pressures also included international military actions in the Canadian Arctic. Knowledge holders from four participating communities shared accounts about seeing submarines travelling throughout Inuit Nunangat 30 to 40 years ago. This reflects a widely held belief that Russian and American submarines may have travelled through the Canadian Arctic during the Cold War era (Byers, 2010). See Huebert (2011) for more details about the actions of foreign submarines in the Canadian Arctic. While these instances are shrouded with such secrecy that these accounts have never been confirmed by state governments, what is clear is that Inuit experiences during the Cold War era continue to be reflected in the concerns some of the knowledge holders shared about the Canadian Arctic today, specifically in relation to questioning the intentions and activities of unknown foreign ships. Knowledge holders in Ulukhaktok described an incident where a yacht from Hong Kong docked in their bay – where community members have their fishing nets – without prior permission from the community. One knowledge holder explained:

You're not going to see any of us boating in Hong Kong and going into their bay and then come back. Just stuff like that, they said it probably wouldn't really affect the fish or the seals or whatever but it's like, what are they disposing of that we don't know? They could drop old dead batteries [in the water] for all we know.

Knowledge holders were likely talking about a sailor from Hong Kong who had travelled the Northwest Passage via sailboat in 2016. A newspaper article states that this sailor did inform Canadian authorities of his intentions to travel in this area, however, it is unclear whether he contacted communities prior to arrival (Brend, 2016). This is an important distinction to make, as per knowledge holder responses, communities often lack information about the intentions of 'visitors' particularly those who travel in smaller passenger vessels or pleasure craft, even if the activities of these visitors can have significant impacts on these communities, such as hunting and harvesting. Most recently, Inuit marine monitors of Cambridge Bay observed a yacht captained by a New Zealander travelling through the Canadian Arctic in August 2020. This occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic when the Government of Canada had banned all cruise ships and most pleasure craft<sup>1</sup> from Canadian Arctic waters in a bid to "reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in remote and vulnerable Arctic communities" (George, 2020: para 5). Inuit marine monitors notified Transport Canada of this vessel and Transport Canada had directed the vessel "to depart Canadian waters and not make landfall." Despite these requests, the sailor continued to travel through the Northwest passage and responded that: "Canada has no legal right to apply Canadian law to a foreigner in [an] international waterway" (George, 2020).

These findings reflect the perspectives of community members in Kinngait as shared in the work by Karen Kelley (2013) in the first *Nilliajut* volume. These community members felt it was unclear who was responsible for regulating shipping in Arctic waters and therefore expressed concerns about the Arctic as an international waterway used by ships for whatever purpose they please, and potentially resulting in foreign operators developing a sense of ownership over that water (Kelley, 2013). The perspectives shared by Inuit community members of Kinngait and by knowledge holders in this project suggest a disconnect between state level decision-making and what is experienced by and communicated to Canadian Arctic coastal communities who would be affected by such issues, indicating a lack of Inuit involvement.

### ***Concerns in the context of Inuit agency and sovereignty***

Knowledge holders in our project also raised concerns about the lack of agency over regulations, and lack of enforcement over the regulations that do exist. They explained that while some regulations exist, no adequate monitoring (nor enforcement) system exists that ensures vessels abide by regulations. One knowledge holder in Sachs Harbour explained: "We have to develop our own standards, I think. But again, who's going to enforce it? Where are the resources? Where are those [resources] going to come from? Where's our infrastructure to get to the ships?"

Concerns about a lack of enforcement over activities within Canada's jurisdiction in Arctic waters aligns with state sovereignty concerns with respect to Arctic security. However, it is important to note the distinction that knowledge holders were less overtly concerned with state sovereignty interests (such as the rule of law and respecting state jurisdictions), and were more concerned about how this lack of enforcement could impact their communities and their way of life. This focus in turn can be seen as impacting Inuit goals of sovereignty. For example, one knowledge holder in Cambridge Bay expressed:

I think we have to look at future considerations that are in talks right now. Let's say the Bathurst Inlet port and also the Grays Bay, so these will be under construction very soon but we need to look at the effects that these will be [having] because supply ships and oil, gas, ships will be coming through...I've been [in] these hearings many times and there are a lot of questions that they need to answer to the Inuit of Bay Chimo, Bathurst [Inlet] and also Cambridge Bay so we have to look at the proposed projects for the future because they will be carrying oil and gas, supply ships, you know...We need to start looking at these ports so that we have something in place *for our people in the future* (emphasis added).

For this knowledge holder, the potential increase in shipping traffic in the Canadian Arctic is important to consider, not because of the implications to the Canadian state, but because of the impacts on the communities in the region.

Although Inuit have made clear their aspirations for self-determination and sovereignty through various venues such as Land Claims Agreements (e.g. Nunavut Agreement, Inuvialuit Final Agreement; Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement), these security concerns about marine shipping traffic could have a direct impact on their ability to achieve their goals of self-determination and sovereignty, particularly if they do not feel that they have adequate information about or control over such activities happening in their area. Knowledge holders expressed concern that Inuit currently had little power over what happens in marine areas. An Inuvik knowledge holder shared: "On land we've got lots of power but on water we're fighting against any obstacle that comes our way. We need to get that legislation there...I mean *it is our land* [in reference to marine areas]" (emphasis added).

Some knowledge holders noted that their Land Claims Agreement does not ensure their rights over the marine environment; only over land. A knowledge holder from Tuktoyaktuk expressed:

I think we have through the ISR [Inuvialuit Settlement Region] no more rights. Every creek, if it's a navigable waterway, you [marine vessels and their occupants] automatically get 100 foot from the waterway on the shore that you [Inuit] can't do anything anyway even if it's under the ISR. Even on our private lands the waterway is just for everyone. It's for the whole world.

This comment suggests discomfort from some knowledge holders about this arrangement set out in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, which they perceived as leaving them with inadequate control over activities happening in their area. The Inuvialuit Final Agreement provides Inuit with a right of access on Inuvialuit lands "to the extent of 100 feet of land from the edge of the water of the sea coast and navigable rivers and navigable lakes that can be entered from such rivers" (Inuvialuit Final Agreement, 2005, Article 7(14)). The public may access unoccupied Inuvialuit land without prior notice for a number of reasons, including for recreational use that is casual and individual in nature, so long as there is no "significant" damage or mischief committed on the lands, or "significant" interference with Inuvialuit use of the lands (Inuvialuit Final Agreement, 2005, Article 7(14) and (15)).

When discussing the activities of marine research vessels, one knowledge holder from Sachs Harbour described that Inuit were perceived as 'second-class citizens':

[Research vessels] always say they're going to stay away from local hunters but they don't care, because their scientific [research] trumps our natural way of living...Because you know to them, we're second-class citizens. I mean their research is more important than our livelihood and our well-being which shouldn't be the case.

This sense of lack of power and a perceived lack of recognition of Inuit sovereignty was shared by a knowledge holder from Salluit, their response to the question about what areas they would like ships to avoid:

Like I say, there is not much we can do. Our voices are too small. It's not like we can get the media up here with cameras and everything you know. They [ship operators] will say it's too expensive...native people are treated differently, very much... I got nothing against whites or any color but when it comes to this, it's like Inuit, Indians we're put under [down]...we see that, we're not stupid.

A knowledge holder from Gjoa Haven shared their experiences of not being listened to when recommending where marine vessels should or should not travel:

Even when we raised the concern of don't go that way [through Peel Sound], the government does not listen to us, that's one of our most important areas between Resolute and Gjoa Haven for the whales and bears and...We have raised this issue in the past but it has fallen on deaf ears. But at the same time, we do not want them to increase their shipping route for the cost issue and that [cost of community resupply that arrives on sealift vessels]. That's why we've never...we just want to put it on record that it's a fact that we want heard but probably nothing will happen, but we just want to make them aware of this issue where Peel Sound normally should be out of bounds so to speak. But it's a cost issue that's why I guess you would say we tolerate it where actually we don't have a choice about where the ships go. We say they can't go by there, but they won't listen. They're going to go by there anyways. It's a short cut!

Inuk leader Rosemarie Kuptana derides the lack of effective and meaningful participation of Inuit in the framing of Arctic territorial disputes involving Canada, particularly with respect to the Northwest Passage, arguing that “The current discussion of arctic sovereignty and security lies in the realm of mythology and the exclusion of Inuit with regard to the Inuit Sea [e.g. Northwest Passage] discussions, both by Canada and players from abroad, is not only an immoral and shameful exercise of out-dated and discredited colonialism but also illegal in light of the contemporary developments in law” (Kuptana, 2013: 10). She notes how the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ignores the way Inuit have occupied and used the sea as water and ice as part of their way of life. She also argues that the position articulated by the United States and European countries of the Northwest Passage as constituting international waters ignores Inuit rights to the Inuit sea, and reflect “earlier and discredited European colonial practices” (Kuptana, 2013: 11).

Other scholars have also called for recognizing Arctic security within the framework of Indigenous sovereignty (Slowey, 2014; Greaves, 2016a), by examining what Indigenous peoples residing in the Arctic perceive as security threats (Audla, 2013; Broadhead, 2010; Kuokkanen & Sweet, 2020; Nicol

& Heininen, 2014). Through this study, Inuit frustrations with the lack of information about the local marine vessel activities, and a lack of control and agency over these activities have emerged as security concerns that threaten Inuit sovereignty.

## Conclusion

Knowledge holders in the Canadian Arctic articulated security concerns, which included lack of information about marine shipping traffic in their areas, and lack of agency over these marine shipping activities. Some of these security concerns, such as increasing international interests in the Canadian Arctic and the disputed status of the Northwest Passage, have also been shared by security scholars who write about the way in which Arctic security is intertwined with state sovereignty (Huebert, 2011b; Sharp, 2011; Johnston 2012). The findings from this study builds on previous work and statements made by Inuit (Audla, 2013; Dorrough et al, 2021; Karetak-Lindell, 2018; Kuptana, 2013) which shows that the knowledge holders in this study framed their security concerns in the context of *Inuit* sovereignty: how such security issues impact the well-being of Inuit communities, rather than simply the interests of the state.

Knowledge holders in these communities were concerned about not knowing which marine vessels were entering their territory because of how such actions could impact their communities' way of life, and to highlight how they did not have adequate agency over such activities, creating barriers to Inuit aspirations for self-determination and sovereignty. Inuit sovereignty is intertwined with feelings of security. These findings reinforce the need to continue to support Inuit sovereignty over marine areas. In the first *Nillajuit* volume Kuptana (2013: 12) argued: "The rest of the world, if it has the courage to look beyond its colonial mentality, must know and recognize that jurisdiction over the Inuit Sea continues to lie with the Inuit who have been the stewards of the Arctic for a very long time".

While there may appear to be surface-level commonalities between what a state-centered analysis and an Indigenous-centered analysis may consider to be a security concern, the question of *why* a particular issue constitutes a security concern will vary, depending on the focus and the methodology of the analysis. Disagreements over the status of the Northwest Passage and increasing international interests in Arctic shipping are popular topics because of how they may threaten the Canadian state's sovereignty over its jurisdiction. Inuit share this concern because of how the domestic/international waters debate impacts their communities, their way of living, and their own sovereignty. These concerns come from a variety of directions: commercial, military, exploration, and colonization, and have come about as a result of Inuit experiencing a lack of knowledge and control over what is happening in the marine areas in Inuit Nunangat. Lackenbauer and Kikkert (2020) have shown that while the Department of National Defence (DND) continues to stress that Canada does not "face any imminent conventional military threats to its Arctic" (Lackenbauer & Kikkert, 2020: 17), they have started to acknowledge that "new risks and threats may emerge" as a result of climate change and growing interest in the Canadian Arctic. The responses in this study reveals that the fear and lack of trust among knowledge holders continues as a result of both previous encounters and these new risks and threats. Thus, while a couple of tourist ships travelling through the Northwest Passage may not be viewed as a security issue from a state security perspective, it is perceived differently by those living in the region and experiencing it directly.

The development of recent government policies such as the Oceans Protection Plan and the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework provide a hope that many of the concerns shared in this study can be addressed. For example, the Oceans Protection Plan acknowledges that “Indigenous and coastal communities expect that more local data on marine traffic (who is doing what and where) will be shared in a user-friendly way that meets their needs” (Transport Canada, n.d.: 1). There is also a recognition of needing to engage with Indigenous and coastal communities in order to develop marine shipping policies in those areas. While there is a growing number of marine policies and programs that include Inuit in decision-making, that acknowledge Inuit rights through Land Claim Agreements, and that work to support Inuit livelihoods, additional research is needed to consider how these policies work on the ground and to consider what gaps remain.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge that positions Inuit perspectives at the forefront of security discussions in the Arctic (Greaves, 2016a, 2016b; Slowey, 2014). It also highlights the importance of prioritizing Inuit perspectives when discussing Arctic security and sovereignty with a recognition that state sovereignty is not the same as Inuit sovereignty. As change in the Arctic climate (and other drivers such as technology, economics, and political will) continues to increase international interest in Arctic shipping, these perspectives should be integral in such discussions. As Audla (2013) expressed: “We have lived with insecurity in the past. We are living with new forms of insecurity now. We will no doubt face other forms of insecurity in the future...With that awareness, Inuit are committed to making Inuit Nunangat, all of Canada, and our world, a more secure place for all of us” (Audla, 2013: 9).

## Notes

1. “These restrictions do not apply to pleasure craft used by local communities, or used for purposes such as essential transportation or subsistence fishing, harvesting and hunting.” (Transport Canada, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/transport-canada/news/2020/05/the-government-of-canada-announces-new-measures-for-pleasure-craft-in-northern-communities.html>)

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