

Bounding Nature: Conservation and Sovereignty in the Canadian and Russian Arctic

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Today, conservation efforts of Arctic states reflect a state-based approach. This contrasts with international conservation efforts in the post-Cold War period, which were grounded in perceiving the region as a global commons. In this article, I examine the ways in which Canada and Russia use natural conservation areas as instruments to express sovereign rights. I compare Canada's proposed Lancaster Sound National Marine Conservation Area at the eastern mouth of the Northwest Passage and Russia's recently expanded Natural System (zapovednik) of Wrangel Island Reserve at the eastern entrance to the Northern Sea Route. These two case studies allow for an examination of the domestic politics of zoning, exclusion, and access alongside Arctic geopolitics and foreign policy discourse. Both parks are complex products of domestic and foreign policy, making them densely layered spaces of contested and contingent sovereignty. Moreover, Canada and Russia draw on regimes such as UNCLOS and UNESCO's World Heritage Committee to defend their sovereignty in contested waterways. Whereas around the world, states have historically created national parks in areas without significant economic value, the conservation areas in and around Lancaster Sound and Wrangel Island lie in waters valuable for their geostrategic position and shipping potential. Yet importantly, the conservation areas are situated so as not to coincide with hydrocarbon interests. Ultimately, Russia and Canada's establishment of these two conservation areas suggests ulterior motives of sovereignty and economic interests at work, suggesting that we should be carefully attuned to scrutinizing the intentions behind environmental measures taken in the Arctic.

Introduction

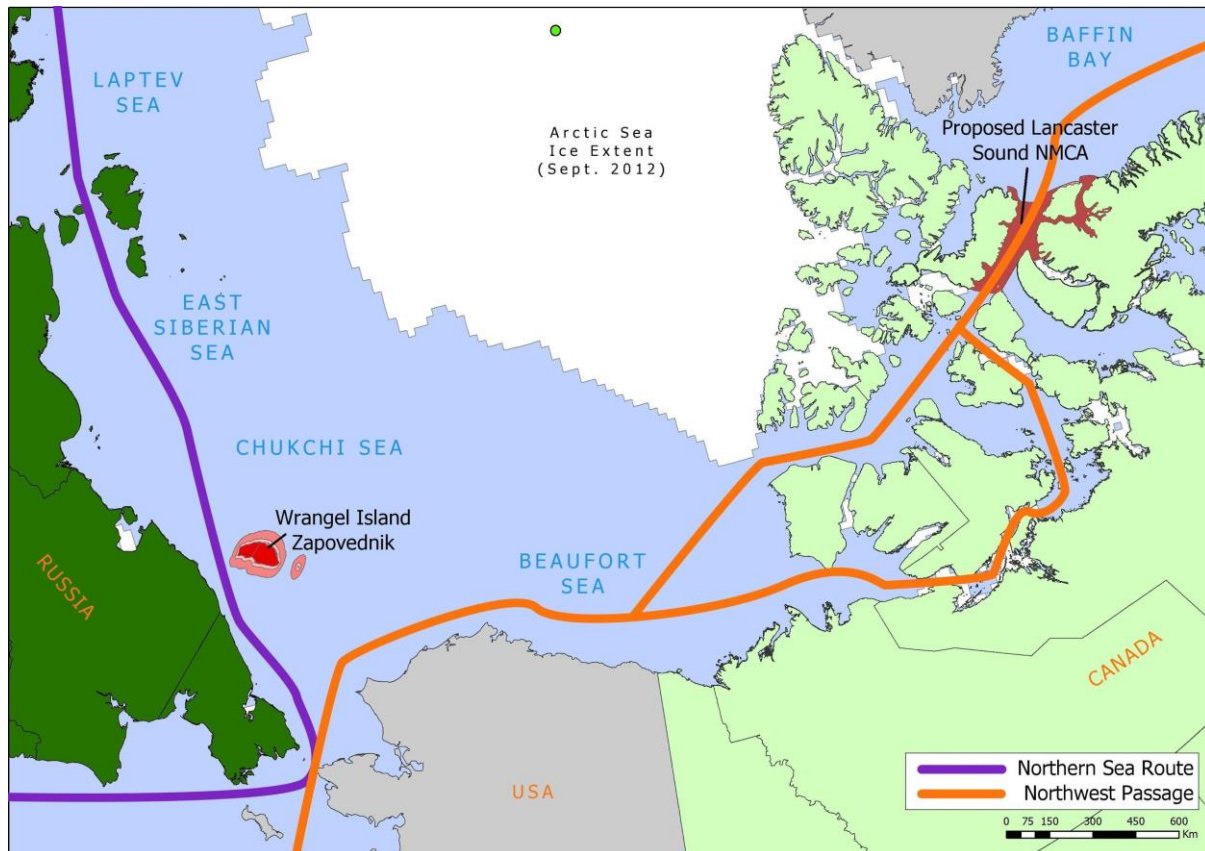
Climate change and the rising prices of commodities like oil and gas have combined to create new opportunities for economic development in the Arctic. While Arctic states are developing their northern hinterlands, they are simultaneously encouraging environmental conservation, recalling the heyday such efforts enjoyed in the 1990s. Yet whereas post-Cold War Arctic environmentalism perceived the region as a global commons, to which the creation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and Arctic Council attest, many of today's conservation efforts reflect a more territorialized, state-based approach that enrolls ideas of nature and

sustainable development to enhance sovereignty. Young (2009) rightly critiques media headlines and commentators like Borgerson (2008), who stir up worries of a new “Great Game” in the Arctic. But at the same time, growing concerns in Ottawa and Moscow over Arctic shipping and also increasingly valuable, fixed, non-renewable resources – namely oil and gas – as opposed to boundary-straddling fish or polar bear stocks have led the Arctic’s two largest littoral countries, Canada and Russia, to attempt to draw more lines in the water in the guise of national parks.

A growing body of literature theorizes the relationship between environmental measures and sovereignty (Young, 1989; Langlais, 1995; Kuehls, 1996; Van Amerom, 2002; Larsen, 2005; Hazen, 2008; Smith, 2011). Geographers and other scholars have also carried out a significant amount of research on the interplay between sovereignty and ocean spaces, especially in the Arctic (Steinberg, 2001; Dodds, 2010; Ebinger & Zambetakis, 2009; Gerhardt & Steinberg, 2010). Yet little scholarship has considered the intersection of these areas in the Arctic to analyze how the region’s states are enacting environmental measures to enhance sovereignty at sea through purported stewardship. Kuehls (1996) uses the term “ecopolitics” to describe border-surmounting environmental problems like climate change and sea ice melt that go “beyond sovereign territory.” He argues that the production of environmental boundaries in fact makes it possible to erode political boundaries – a transformation that is unfolding in the Canadian and Russian maritime Arctic. On the one hand, environmental boundaries adhere to an increasingly accepted international norm of sustainable development that Marong (2003) identifies as championing economic development, poverty reduction, and environmental protection. On the other hand, these environmental boundaries enhance the ability of a state to manage and secure its territory – or, in the case of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and Northwest Passage (NWP), their contested waterways. Elden (2013: 49) avers that geopolitics has become conflated with political geography and suggests we return to literally grounding ourselves in the “land, earth, world rather than simply the global or international.” In this study of how Russia and Canada determine their conservation areas, that is what I seek to do.

In this article, I first trace the recent history of environmentalism and sovereignty in the Arctic to understand how Canada and Russia have arrived at the creation of national parks as a type of performative sovereignty, outwardly demonstrating state power to audiences ranging from their own citizens to the international community. I then compare Canada’s proposed Lancaster Sound National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) at the mouth of the NWP with Russia’s recently expanded Natural System (*zapovednik*) of Wrangel Island Reserve, near the eastern entrance to the NSR. The Lancaster Sound NMCA and Wrangel Island *zapovednik* lie in waters that are valuable for their geostrategic position and shipping potential. The conservation areas have also been designed so as to avoid conflicting with oil and gas interests. The two case studies of the Lancaster Sound NMCA and Wrangel Island *zapovednik* provide a useful lens for examining domestic politics of zoning, exclusion, and access alongside Arctic geopolitics and sovereignty issues. National parks do not just simply safeguard nature: instead, they are actually complex products of statecraft, domestic policy, and even foreign policy. They are also national symbols in which citizens can take pride (Shtilmark, 2003), making them (potentially) important for building national identity (Nye, 2006). Not all citizens though, particularly indigenous peoples, are included in, respect, or even take an interest in the legitimacy of national parks, making them densely layered spaces of contested and contingent sovereignty domestically and internationally – a palimpsest of sovereignties. Moreover, both Russia and Canada draw on international regimes

such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee to actually defend their national sovereignty in disputed waterways. Scrutinizing governments' motivations behind conservation measures in the Arctic, where questions of sovereignty and ownership are crucial, is key to understanding whether genuine efforts are being made to protect the Arctic environment. Through the practice of stewardship, the state is able to securitize spaces like contested waterways by acting in the spirit of conservation. Canada and Russia in particular therefore enroll nature and the environment in their securitization strategies.



Overview of Wrangel Island zapovednik and Study Area for Proposed Lancaster Sound NMCA.

Arctic Environmentalism in Transition

There is a disparity between the regional and global scale of many of today's environmental problems, such as climate change and black carbon, and the national level at which they are tackled (Kuehls, 1996). Consequently, as with many ecosystems that cross national borders and boundaries, in the Arctic, international cooperation is necessary to protect what is one of the world's biggest continuous, largely intact ecosystems. At the height of the Cold War, Arctic states recognized the need to jointly protect the region's environment. In 1973, Canada, Denmark, Norway, the USSR, and the US signed the International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, as they recognized that due to the species' long-range, polar bears could only be adequately protected with a circumpolar agreement. Still, the responsibility to uphold the spirit of the agreement remained with the state, with "protection to be achieved through co-ordinated national measures taken by the States of the Arctic Region" ("Agreement,"

1973). Just before the collapse of the USSR, a renewed envisioning of the Arctic as a commons meriting protection took hold. Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev declared in his seminal 1987 Murmansk Speech that the Arctic should become a “zone of peace,” calling for the joint measures protecting the Baltic’s marine environment to be extended to “the entire oceanic and sea surface of the globe’s North” (Gorbachev, 1987). Gorbachev’s speech fostered a circumpolar vision of the Arctic environment and a common understanding, at least among the Arctic states, that it needed to be sustainably developed (c.f. Scrivener, 1989). Young (2009) draws attention to the post-Cold War proliferation of cooperative agreements in the Arctic. The establishment of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991, which became the Arctic Council in 1996, formalized the conceptualization of the Arctic ecosystem as more of a shared, rather than divided, space. The AEPS’ introduction explains, “[t]he Arctic countries realize that the pollution problems of today do not respect national boundaries and that no state alone will be able to act effectively against environmental threats to the Arctic” (Arctic Council, 1991).

However, promotion of the Arctic as the common heritage of mankind and support for joint management of the region has declined since the start of the twenty-first century, when rising commodities prices and melting sea ice have made resources and shipping lanes all the more valuable. At least in media depictions, the Russian expedition to plant a flag on the seabed underneath the North Pole – though privately led – epitomizes the increasing *de jure*, if not yet *de facto*, nationalization of Arctic maritime spaces. But as Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay criticized in reaction to the stunt, “This isn’t the fifteenth century. You can’t go around the world and just plant flags and say, ‘We’re claiming this territory’” (Graff, 2007). As such, in the twenty-first century, the two countries have pursued methods more in line with international norms to strengthen their Arctic sovereignty. Furthermore, in the past ten years, at the expense of environmental multilateralism, countries have expanded their claims to territory – almost all at sea (Hickman, 2010). Much of the expansion of maritime claims has been done in a legal manner in accordance with UNCLOS procedures. As Suárez de Vivero et al. (2009: 624) write, “A feature of the transition from the 20th to the 21st century has been the emergence of a new generation of State political action regarding the major maritime strategic objectives,” with maritime policies “beginning to shift and extend to the domain of internal State affairs, even developing into a territorial policy” (2009: 625). Canada and Russia champion international norms such as sustainable development and environmentalism while privileging national, rather than international, management of *their* Arctic areas. Thus, while political leaders today may repeat the rosy rhetoric of the 1990s at Arctic Council meetings, talk of mutual environmental dependency seems somewhat hollow in the face of greater efforts by Canada and Russia to create national parks in their Arctic waterways.

In 2008, the Arctic’s five littoral states issued the Ilulissat Declaration, underscoring the role of sovereignty and national rights in dealing with the Arctic’s environmental problems. The declaration stated that the existing framework of international law “provides a solid foundation for responsible management by the five coastal States and other users of this Ocean through national implementation and application of relevant provisions” (2008: 1-2). Though the littoral states pledge to cooperate with each other, each state ultimately determines its own national environmental laws, recalling the preeminence of the state in the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. Since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, the nation-state has been increasingly linked to the territory that it occupies, a relationship reproduced through

public education and citizenship (Lefebvre, 1991). Territory, going beyond mere mountains, tundras, and oceans, is a “rendering of the emergent concept of ‘space’ as a political category: owned, distributed, mapped, calculated, bordered, and controlled” (Elden, 2007: 578). These material and symbolic linkages make it theoretically difficult for states to share territory on land or at sea, as that would threaten the supposed power and inviolability of the nation-state. Overall, the Arctic littoral states’ demonstrations of sovereignty, such as with the creation of national parks, challenge popular proclamations that globalization is causing the deterritorialization or retreat of the state (Ohmae, 1995; 1999; Strange, 1996). In fact, Russia and Canada are trying to cement and signify state power as international flows become a stronger force in the Arctic.

National Regulations over Arctic Waterways

In broad terms, the evolution of international maritime law since the 1980s has actually fostered national sovereignty. UNCLOS, which was adopted in 1982 and entered into force in 1994, allows ratifying states like Russia and Canada¹ to extend their territorial seas up to 200 nautical miles from their baselines as exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and potentially even farther depending on scientific data and agreement with other countries regarding the extent of their continental shelves (Articles 76 and 77). UNCLOS Article 56 allows states the right to protect the environment and conduct scientific research in their EEZs, while Article 234 permits states to enact special regulations pertaining to marine pollution from vessels in ice-covered areas. Taken together, these two articles represent the legal point of departure from which I investigate Canadian and Russian actions in the Arctic.

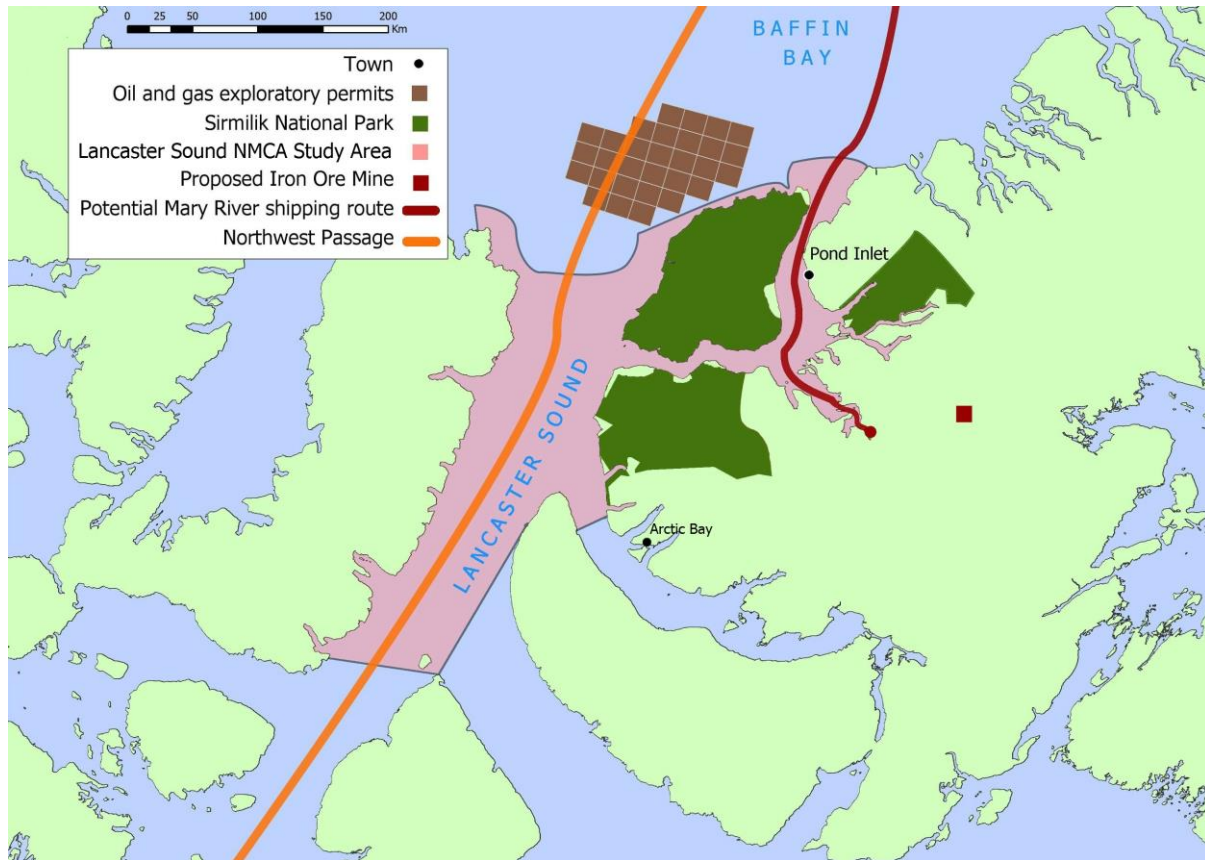
Canada and Russia seek to expand their sovereignty in their Arctic shipping passages because of both the aforementioned growing regionalization of maritime space and specific, perceived threats to their control, especially as shipping traffic increases.² Moscow and Ottawa view the NWP and NSR, respectively, as internal waters. By contrast, it is in the interest of government officials from the world’s major economies, such as the United States, China, and the European Union, to promote Arctic waterways as international straits in order to ensure freedom of navigation for their large commercial fleets. Canada, in particular, has a history of enacting environmental legislation when it perceives challenges to sovereignty in its seas. After the American icebreaking oil tanker SS *Manhattan* controversially transited the NWP in 1969 and 1970, the Canadian Parliament assertively responded by passing the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act (AWPPA). This set strict rules for ships coming within 100 miles of Canada’s Arctic coastline at a time when international law only allowed states to claim territorial seas twelve nautical miles from shore. The AWPPA was thus an environmental measure designed to demonstrate national sovereignty, largely to its powerful southern neighbor. Not only did the Trudeau government take advantage of a perceived threat to Canadian Arctic sovereignty to pass the AWPPA; during the late 1960s and early 1970s, environmentalism was also a growing force worldwide, making Canada’s move justified in light of changing international norms. The US, however, was not convinced of the merit of Canada’s supposed environmental concerns. Washington issued a diplomatic note to protest the AWPPA, stating that if Canada could enact pollution regulations on the high seas, other countries could “assert the right to exercise jurisdiction for other purposes, some reasonable and some not, but equally invalid according to international law” (Byers, 2009: 47).

Yet the international community ultimately supported Canada's view by including Article 234, the so-called Canadian clause (Huebert, 2001), in UNCLOS. Canadian policymakers continue to claim that it is in foreign countries' best interests to have well-regulated, well-patrolled shipping lanes. A legislative summary of a failed bill to expand AWPPA's covered areas to extend out to 200 nautical miles explains, "Canada seeks recognition of its claim that the Northwest Passage is an internal waterway in order to impose and enforce safety and marine standards that protect Canadian interests, including those relating to the environment and Inuit. Absent Canadian regulation, the waters would be subject to less stringent standards under international law" (Becklumb, 2009).

The issue of whether the NWP or NSR constitute internal waters is not a high priority for the US given its preoccupation with other areas like the Middle East. Post-9/11, however, concern over possible terrorist threats emanating from the north has elicited some attention from the former U.S. Ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, who observed about the NWP in 2004: "[w]e are looking at everything through the terrorism prism...Our top priority is to stop the terrorists. So perhaps when this...is brought to the table again, we may have to take another look at this" (Byers & Lalonde, 2009: 1190). Before either the NWP or NSR can be brought to the table again, though, Canada and Russia are trying to defend their sovereignty at sea not through bilateral negotiation with the world's largest shipping nations or even through multilateral discussions at the Arctic Council, but rather by adhering to international values such as environmentalism through the creation of maritime national parks and reserves. As the waters become more trafficked, the flows of international cargo, capital, and people seemingly weaken states' grips on their watery national spaces and even claims to polar heritage and identity. Since closing their northern waterways or loudly proclaiming that they are internal waters would arouse the ire of many of the world's major seafarers and economies³ – most of all the US – Canada and Russia are instead using environmental bounding and zoning to demonstrate presence, ownership, sovereignty, and title.

Lancaster Sound NMCA

The bundling of the environment and sovereignty has a relatively long heritage in Canada, as the 1970 AWPPA illustrates. Whereas Trenin and Baev (2009) argue that Russia's "offensive" approach to the Arctic contrasts with the West's environmental concerns about "polar bears," Arctic sovereignty and capacity building are actually paramount for Ottawa. In 1985, similar to the 1969 and 1970 transits of the SS *Manhattan*, the USCGC *Polar Sea* icebreaker controversially sailed through the NWP without permission. In response to the incident, Governor General Jeanne Mathilde Sauvé stated in her 1986 Throne Speech, "[t]he government asserts complete sovereignty over the Canadian Arctic and recognizes that sovereignty requires a vigorous national presence...Other measures have been taken or will be initiated to support this vital national purpose, including more research on polar conditions, defense training exercises in the Arctic, and the establishment of a National Park at Ellesmere Island" (Sauvé, 1986). The government followed through and set up Quttinirpaaq National Park in 1988 on Ellesmere Island's northeastern corner.⁴



Overview of Study Area for Proposed Lancaster Sound NMCA

Today, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's similar capacity-based view of sovereignty also informs the government's decisions surrounding use of the Canadian Arctic. Ottawa materializes sovereignty, attempting to infuse it into the northern territories through investments in physical capacities like Arctic/offshore patrol ships, ports, and research stations. In 2007, Harper famously quipped that in the Arctic, it's "use it or lose it" (Prime Minister of Canada, 2007), and he promotes both historic and current presence in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago to bolster sovereignty. Even before Harper took to office, Parks Canada turned into something of a shipwreck-finding shop. The agency has led expeditions since the 1980s to discover the lost ships of British polar explorer John Franklin. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has even designated the lost ships *Erebus* and *Terror* as a national historic site despite Parks Canada's failure to locate them (Craciun, 2012), a near caricature of affirming presence in the Arctic. Harper's administration, unable to deliver on many of its promises for new infrastructure in the Arctic, is instead putting up plaques and national park signs, least of all in Lancaster Sound.

While the park's specific boundaries have not yet been determined, the NMCA would sit within Lancaster Sound, at the eastern end of the NWP. The 2002 Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act (CNMCAA) established the concept of NMCAs. They can be located within Canada's internal waters, territorial seas, or EEZs and are meant for protecting marine areas while, importantly, still allowing sustainable development but prohibiting oil and gas exploration and undersea mining (Bill S.C. 2002, c.18, 2002). Lancaster Sound is home to a wealth of Arctic biodiversity, and three Nunavut communities rely on the area for sustenance

(Pew Charitable Trust, 2013). The Inuit and Parks Canada are working together to outline the NMCA's boundaries decades after Indian and Northern Affairs Canada first recognized the biological importance of the area and proposed protecting some 48,000 square kilometers. As I will show is also the case in Russia, science, the military, and conservation all contribute to muscular displays of northern sovereignty in Lancaster Sound. During a 2009 meeting of the Canadian Parliament's Standing Committee on National Defense to discuss Arctic sovereignty, Paul Kaludjak, president of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, openly asserted that Lancaster Sound is "an area where environmental conservation and sovereignty assertion go hand in hand" (2009). Similarly, the 2009 memorandum of understanding signed by Parks Canada, the Government of Nunavut, and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association regarding the undertaking of a feasibility study to create a NMCA in Lancaster Sound states, "[t]he establishment of a NMCA in the Lancaster Sound Marine Region would contribute significantly to protecting Canada's Arctic environmental heritage, strengthen Canada's sovereignty, promote economic and social development and improve Northern governance as envisioned in Canada's Northern Strategy" (Parks Canada et al., 2009). Canada is effectively attempting to anchor permanent boundaries to a fluid waterway. Yet the Northern Strategy, a document that is designed for both domestic and, importantly, foreign audiences, only mentions Lancaster Sound as an "important marine protection initiative" (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2009) and avoids calling attention to its economic and strategic value to Canada.

When push comes to shove, however, Canadian politicians have vocally defended their country's northern sovereignty. Statements and activities in the present must back up historic maps and claims. In 2007, in reaction to the Russian planting of a flag on the seabed under the North Pole, former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay emphasized the linkage between waters and national ownership. He declared, "There is no question over Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic... We've established a long time ago that these are Canadian waters and this is Canadian property" (Smith & Giles, 2007). But sovereignty lacks inertia in the porous and permeable sea, where it must be continually produced and reproduced regardless of the depth of history behind any claims. While countries might be readily able to demonstrate presence in offshore areas designated for oil and gas exploration with fixed infrastructure such as oil platforms and pipelines, displaying sovereignty is more difficult in the fluid chokepoints of shipping routes. Consequently, to complement plans for new icebreakers and submarines, Russia and Canada have resorted to the erection of conservation areas. Deleuze (1994: 385) writes, "[i]t is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire exterior, over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon." Increasingly navigable straits are bringing more and more ships to the Arctic, although the narrow, icy, and twisty NWP still lags significantly behind the more developed NSR. While Canada still has no deep water port along the NWP, Russia maintains an icebreaker fleet and numerous ports along the NSR and is already building ten search and rescue stations (Pettersen, 2011). Although the increase in maritime traffic may seemingly dilute a country's grip on its oceanic space, it also creates a perception within the international community of a greater need for regulation. Canada and Russia instrumentalize this belief to bolster support for their creation of national parks and environmental protection laws, which in turn permit greater surveillance and monitoring. Local and regional communities and

governments, however, do not always support the protection and regulation of these spaces, especially when existing communities are evicted or they lose former access rights like hunting.

Since the aims of conservation and development are often at odds in the Arctic, where commodities are one of the few feasible avenues to economic growth, Canada sets aside specific areas for oil and gas exploration, while others are given over to conservation. Economic interests have long colored Ottawa's perception of the environment, reflecting the Western tendency to link ecological and economic rationality (Yanitsky, 2001: 41). The actual decision to conserve a site is consequently based on more than environmental factors. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association (2012), for instance, states, “[b]oundary selection requires consideration of several features such as; well-being and interests of communities, traditional ecological knowledge, ecologically sustainable use of living marine resources and mineral and energy potential.” Just as important as where a conservation area is located, then, is where it is not. In Lancaster Sound, the proposed NMCA lies just to the east of Shell’s offshore oil and gas leases (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012), a convenient delineation of the sound’s space. The areas for resource extraction and conservation are therefore carefully mapped so as not to conflict, but only on paper; a static, two-dimensional map cannot adequately portray the consequences of a potential oil spill next door to a conservation areas. Similarly, the strictly zoned conservation areas fail to illustrate how transiting ships, which can pollute the waters, may be allowed through the NMCA. Yet stricter regulation of increased shipping is likely one of the chief reasons motivating the NMCA’s establishment. Baffinland, a mining company, has proposed to ship iron ore from Baffin Island, south of Lancaster Sound, to Rotterdam and other ports in Europe. Original plans had the ships sailing north through Milne Inlet and Eclipse Sound – areas home to thousands of marine mammals and included in the proposed boundaries of the Lancaster Sound LNCMA. The plan was scrapped after consultation with indigenous peoples and the ships’ planned trajectories were rerouted to the south, through Pond Inlet. In a change of plans, Baffinland is now again proposing to ship the iron ore north through Milne Inlet and Eclipse Sound (Madsen, 2013), so it is unclear how the waters will ultimately be delineated to fulfill competing environmental, strategic, and economic interests.

Aside from trying to render maritime spaces more “permanent” through the affixation of environmental boundaries, Canada tries to “affix” indigenous peoples to conservation areas, too. Ottawa views the presence of indigenous peoples as strengthening sovereignty claims, distinguishing it from Moscow, as I will later show. In the 1950s, during a time of acute governmental concern over sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, Ottawa forcibly relocated indigenous peoples to permanent settlements along the NWP (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994). Though the government later apologized for the resettlements (AANDC, 2010), it still uses indigenous presence and activity on northern lands and waters to legitimize sovereignty claims, especially in national parks. One of the objectives of the Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement for Auyuittuq, Quttinirpaaq and Sirmilik National Parks is “to recognize that Inuit are an integral part of the ecosystems of the Parks” (Parks Canada and Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 1999). In Sirmilik National Park, a terrestrial park lying on Lancaster Sound’s southern shore, the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement grants indigenous peoples access for traditional subsistence activities like camping, hunting, fishing, and trapping (Parks Canada, 2012). Such ethnicity-based access undermines Canada’s attempts to use national parks to foster

national identity. Prime Minister Stephen Harper averred, “Canada's Arctic is central to *our* identity as a northern nation” (Prime Minister of Canada, 2007, emphasis added). But whereas national parks in the U.S. became an important tool in the formation of a national civic identity in the twentieth century (Nye, 1996), especially since many citizens could access places like the Grand Canyon on classic American road trips, national parks in Canada’s Arctic are difficult to reach due to the expense and difficulty of travel to such remote northern locations. Of course, national parks, even if only rarely frequented by people, can still appeal to the national imagination. Conservation areas like the Lancaster Sound NMCA can help foster a northern national identity, particularly amongst southern Canadians who might otherwise have little or no connection to their country’s Arctic reaches. But ultimately, these conservation areas may serve an equally important role in international positioning.

Due to the challenges in turning northern national parks into uncontroversial national symbols, especially in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago where both indigenous peoples and extractive industries have interests, it is often easier to convince international organizations such as UNESCO of the value of conserving certain sites. The CNMCAA states that Parliament wishes for Canada to contribute “to international efforts for the establishment of a worldwide network of representative marine protected areas” and “provide opportunities for the people of Canada and of the world to appreciate and enjoy Canada’s natural and cultural marine heritage” (Bill S.C. 2002, c.18., 2002), emphasizing the international dimension of national conservation efforts. Legal scholar and vocal supporter of Canadian sovereignty, Michael Byers, recommends that the government link the creation of the NMCA with an effort to win UNESCO designation, as it would tie the domestic to the international “in a mutually supportive way” (2010: 73). If Lancaster Sound were to be named a World Heritage Site, it would likely be easier for Canada to regulate shipping in a passage recognized as ecologically sensitive (Byers, 2010) and actually keep out parts of the world it deems undesirable, like certain ships or military vessels. In sum – and no different from Russia – Canada is marshaling international organizations and norms to cement national power. Yet even places that are listed on UNESCO World Heritage lists are not everybody’s to equally cherish and celebrate, as they can keep out certain groups of people. Though UNESCO might one day decree Lancaster Sound to possess “cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value” (UNESCO, 1972), the universality of that heritage is ambiguous when thanks to the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement, the Inuit could potentially enjoy greater access rights to the park than non-Inuit Canadians.

Wrangel Island *zapovednik*

On paper, Russian conservation attempts are more strictly dedicated to science than in Canada, where they are often joined up with economic interests of both Ottawa and indigenous groups. In 1956, the Soviet Academy of Sciences established the concept of the *zapovednik*, literally a “forbidden area” designated for natural sciences research where there is the “complete withdrawal of an area of land – or water, air, underground site – from any economic use, including such non-traditional or extensive kinds as any form of tourism and recreation” (Pryde, 1995: 45). But in reality, a consumerist attitude towards nature prevailed in the USSR. The environment was something to be used rather than preserved (Zaharchenko, 1985). This is an attitude that appears to have persisted throughout the twentieth century and into the present day.



Overview of Wrangel Island zapovednik

Zapovedniks were not really pure and unpolluted realms of nature; instead, they were “complex organisations, mostly comprising unskilled labourers, drivers, metal-workers, mechanics, electricians, boilermen and the like” (Shtilmark, 2003: 147). Environmental interests became further subordinated to economic interests in 2000, when President Vladimir Putin abolished the State Committee for Environmental Protection (*Goskomekologiya*). The agency, which had been similar to the US Environmental Protection Agency (Zaharchenko, 1985), had enacted environmental regulations since its establishment in 1988. Yet under Putin’s aegis, the Ministry of Natural Resources⁵ has taken over its functions, arguably eroding environmental regulations in favor of natural resource development and foreign investment (Peterson & Bielke, 2001). Furthermore, in Russia’s Arctic strategy through 2020, the first listed national goal is “the expansion of the resource base of the Arctic zone” (Security Council, 2008). Resource development precedes environmental conservation. Even the section pertaining to ensuring environmental security states that one of the chief priorities is the elimination of the “environmental consequences of economic activity in the face of increasing economic activity and global climate change,” demonstrating that as industry grows, only its consequences should be curtailed, rather than industry itself. Whereas both Canada and Russia view their northern regions as potential economic engines, the need to develop resources is stronger in Russia as the oil and gas resources that fuel the economy dwindle in other parts of the country. Development in Canada’s Arctic, at least according to the Northern Strategy, is partly meant to make local communities self-sustainable, while in Russia, development is sought to help foster *national* economic growth. In 2008, the Russian Arctic was already generating between 15 and 20% of

national GDP, while the Canadian Arctic's contribution to national GDP was in the single digits (Mäenpää, 2008).

In light of this anti-environmental, development-focused climate in Russia, the creation and recent expansion of the Wrangel Island *zapovednik* requires scrutiny. Few Russian politicians are devoted to environmental questions (Tynkkynen & Massa, 2001: 11), but Wrangel Island and nearby Herald Island have managed to attract policymakers' attention. The two islands, located in the Chukchi Sea, have the highest level of biodiversity anywhere in the high Arctic and are home to endangered species such as polar bears and walrus (UNESCO, n.d.). There are also remnants of Neolithic camps, mammoths, and furry rhinoceros (UNESCO, n.d.). But Russian policymakers are likely largely interested in the islands' preservation for geopolitical reasons based on their nature and location, or what we might call "naturalizing geopolitics." Nature informs geopolitical decisions, and geopolitics inform conservation strategies, which, in turn, often determine the fate of nature. Wrangel and Herald Island are near the eastern entrance to the NSR, a route which Putin has said the country is "planning to turn it into a key commercial route of global importance" (Putin, 2011), and close to the American boundary. Indeed, the Wrangel Island *zapovednik* was partly born out of foreign policy posturing during the Cold War in 1976, at a time when the NSR was closed to international shipping due to security concerns and British and American claims to islands in the east, including Wrangel Island. The NSR's closure demonstrates how Soviet enactments of sovereignty involved the exclusion of other states from strategic areas, an issue that might be explored more with an investigation of the country's closed cities. Yet with the warming of relations between Russia and the West in the 1990s, the Russian Federation reopened the route to navigation, Washington and Moscow briefly considered establishing a joint national park straddling the Bering Strait and the *zapovednik* grew in size.⁶ In 1997, the government extended the original size of the park – from reaching five nautical miles out to sea to twelve nautical miles, and it followed suit in 1999 extending the park boundaries another twelve miles. In 2004, UNESCO voted to designate Wrangel Island *zapovednik* a World Heritage Site on the basis of its high biodiversity (UNESCO, 2013).

Perhaps given the environmental protections already in place for the Wrangel Island *zapovednik*, in 2000, an employee of Russia's Central Marine Research and Design Institute posited that one of the most likely conflict areas between NSR activities and Russian environmental protection legislation would be the "coastal waters of the Wrangel Island and Chukot Peninsula" (Semanov, 2000: 103). Yet it appears that the Kremlin has found a way to make environmental legislation and commercial shipping interests mutually supportive. In December 2012, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree expanding the park to include Wrangel Island's one formerly inhabited village and extend the *zapovednik*'s buffer zone out to a total of 24 nautical miles, which the UNESCO World Heritage Committee had recommended upon awarding the "World Heritage" designation in order to further strengthen the protection of the area's biodiversity (Gruzdev & Ovsyanikov, 2012). Similar to Canadian justifications for creating the Lancaster Sound NMCA, Wrangel Island *zapovednik*'s director and the Deputy Director for Science explain in a memorandum: "[t]he protected sea area and the buffer zone around the islands of Wrangel and Herald have geopolitical significance and allow better control of the traffic of ships along the Northern Sea Route" (Gruzdev & Ovsyanikov, 2012).⁷ The Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment will manage the new buffer zone, revealing the entanglement of commercial and environmental interests. Further revealing the deliberate

nature of zoning in the Russian Arctic, just months after the expansion of the *zapovednik*'s borders, Rosneft and Exxon-Mobil agreed to explore three license areas for hydrocarbons in the Chukchi Sea. The latter company declared these and four other areas "among the most promising and least explored offshore areas globally" (ExxonMobil, 2013); indeed, the East Siberian and Chukchi Seas have been estimated to hold 100 billion barrels of oil equivalents (Verzhbitsky et al., 2013). As in Canada, oil and gas activities literally juxtapose conservation efforts. Governments strictly zone and bound waters for certain purposes even as ocean currents, fish and marine mammals, ships, and potentially oil spills flow through. Zoning treats the waters as a flat, two-dimensional space when in fact they are dynamic and three-dimensional. An exploration of the verticality of Arctic sovereignty may be in order given the many recent studies of spatial topology (Belcher et al., 2008; Secor, 2012) and the geometry, verticality, and dimensionality of sovereignty (Sloterdijk, 2009; Williams, 2011; Elden, 2013).

Along the entire NSR, there is a connection between not just sovereignty and conservation, but actually militarization and conservation. The Kremlin, aware that sovereignty requires more than drawing lines on a map, has crafted what Ivan Kratsev (2007) refers to as "sovereign democracy," with the government defining sovereignty as capacity. Andrey Kokoshin, the chairman of the Duma committee on ex-Soviet countries, stated, "[w]e will have to stand up, I think, for our interests in an active fashion, especially in the Arctic...We need to reinforce our Northern Fleet and our border guards and build airfields *so that* we can ensure full control over the situation" (Smith & Giles, 2007: 4, emphasis added). Kokoshin's statement reflects the logic of preparedness and national security that drives many of the Kremlin's actions, including environmental legislation. In Russia, the military and the quality of the environment have been closely interlinked since World War II (Heininen & Segerstahl, 2001), and this does not seem to be coming to an end. Although Russia has generally banished civilian use of *zapovedniks*, it has granted scientists and the military certain access rights, speaking to the continuation of the Soviet military-civilian divide. On Wrangel Island, the military's presence first takes the form of rusting infrastructure left over from the Soviet era, whose continued existence, however harmful to the environment, actually helps to visibly signify Russian claims of historical ownership and use. Second, along the NSR, the government is establishing new sites to station Russian Navy warships and border guard vessels (Patrushev, 2012), which will inevitably patrol the waters near Wrangel and Herald Islands given that control of the NSR from the enlarged *zapovednik* is a stated aim.

Despite the commercial and militaristic undertones of the Wrangel Island *zapovednik*, Russia trumpets a discourse of multilateralism and environmental protection in the Arctic to garner support for its enclosure of geostrategic areas. In his 2010 address to the International Arctic Forum, President Vladimir Putin declared, "[i]f you stand alone you can't survive in the Arctic. Nature makes people and states to help each other" (Harding, 2010), endowing nature with a surprising amount of agency. The creation of national parks, however, subtly contests the idea of international cooperation, as it shows that Russia does in fact want to stand alone, at least in the NSR. At the same time, by acting on the suggestions of an international organization to expand the *zapovednik*'s extent, Russia legitimates its actions to enhance its sovereignty. Moscow allegedly views international relations as a zero-sum game (Jensen, 2010) and carefully chooses the international organizations with which it aligns itself depending on how it will benefit its national

interests. Certainly, Ottawa behaves in a similar fashion: note its marshaling of international environmental norms and potential use of UNESCO to support its enclosures of spaces in the Northwest Passage. In the cases of Russia's Wrangel Island *zapovednik* and Canada's Lancaster Sound NMCA, UNESCO and UNCLOS support national goals. Yet protections granted by Article 234, which allows countries to enact environmental legislation to protect ice-covered seas, may soon be questioned if melting sea ice turns into open water. In this case, nature, a rapidly changing entity, could actually end up destabilizing traditional national agendas of sovereignty and security rather than enabling them. Alterations in the Arctic environment's status quo could cause governments to try to quickly enact artificial boundaries to make up for the disappearing ice. To alter Putin's turn of phrase, then, nature could actually make people and states obstruct each other, or at least each other's movements. Policymakers in Canada and Russia may be anxious to enact environmental regulations to maintain state control in the face of possibly contested international law and fast changing seas. But it is exactly the melting ice that elicits international calls for urgent action, granting Russia and Canada the leeway to regulate and protect Arctic waterways whose ownership some states dispute.

The Wrangel Island *zapovednik* is now free of any human presence except for park rangers. As the nature reserve expanded during the 1990s, the inhabitants of the local village, which park boundaries had initially circumvented, were forced to relocate. In contrast to Canada, which has forcibly moved indigenous peoples to remote lands to establish presence, Russia removes local inhabitants. Furthermore, while Ottawa involves local communities in creating national parks, Moscow excises them from such discussions. Historically, in Siberia, protected areas were created in areas where there were only ethnic Russians; otherwise, indigenous peoples were forced to leave (Poirier & Ostegren, 2002). After the collapse of the USSR, it appeared that indigenous peoples might have a say in management of the NSR. Osherenko (1992: 128) notes that in the aftermath of the USSR's collapse, governmental and non-governmental organizations alike made several proposals to establish national parks, ethno-ecological parks, and ethnic status territories in the Arctic and subarctic. But any drive to promote indigenous rights has come to a halt. In fact, in November 2012 the Kremlin temporarily shut down the country's primary indigenous peoples' organization, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), allegedly over disputes about a local jade mine (Caven, 2012). This action illustrates the government's efforts to centralize decision-making and eradicate debate over possible uses of space. Like Canada, Russia marshals environmental values, geopolitical strategy, and a need for shipping regulation to justify the expansion of a conservation area, but it noticeably differs in its discounting of local inhabitants and indigenous peoples.

At the same time, Russia realizes that an empty reserve is not effective enough in demonstrating sovereignty. The country seeks to employ patrols, tourists, and scientists to reveal active use and capacity. An official decrying the lack of science and research facilities on the island once remarked, "[w]e didn't take the island from the Americans just to turn it into a model example of Arctic desert" (Shtilmark, 2003: 231). The Wrangel Island *zapovednik* has strayed from its original concept of being a nature reserve free from "any kind of tourism and recreation," as eco-tourism is now a stated goal (Gruzdev & Ovsyanikov, 2012). Tourists, more so than confrontational locals, are the "right" kind of presence in Russian conservation areas and are an acceptable flow of people in an otherwise regimented national space. They help reinforce, too, the notion that Wrangel Island is Russian sovereign space. The Wrangel Island *zapovednik* enhances sovereignty

and regiments activities in an aqueous area subject to international flows of goods, capital, and people. It even banishes oil and gas exploration, even though the harmful after-effects from the industry next door could flow right in, too.

Thus, the protected areas of Lancaster Sound and Wrangel Island are more than just watery spaces for whales and ecotourists. Wrangel Island *zapovednik* is neither an untarnished “laboratory of science” nor a “complex organization,” as fellow reserves were during the USSR (Shtilmark, 2003: 147). Instead, it is a laboratory of sovereignty. The conserved areas become carefully calculated and delineated territory where nature - and even the terrain itself - is enrolled to securitize the space. As former president Dmitry Medvedev stated, “[t]he continental shelf is our national heritage” (“Kremlin,” 2008), lumping the terrain into the same category as Tolstoy, Stravinsky, and the Bolshoi Ballet. The continental shelf is terrain taken to an extreme, transformed ultimately into a territory with political and cultural significance despite the fact that it sits unseen hundreds of meters below the sea. As Elden (2013: 49) observes, “[j]ust as the world does not just exist as a surface, nor should our theorisations of it; security goes up and down; space is volumetric.” Conservation areas in maritime spaces do not just cover the water’s surface: they attempt to control, manage, and regulate the flows and space both across and below as well.

Conclusion

An analysis of the Lancaster Sound NMCA and Wrangel Island *zapovednik* reveals the multiple ways in which sovereignty and legitimacy are contested and reinforced at the domestic and international levels in the two national parks. Canada and Russia use national parks as geo-political tools. In the face of the increased international presence of vessels including liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers, tourist boats, and naval ships seeking innocent passage, Russia and Canada feel a greater need to demonstrate national presence. Rhetorically, they invoke ideas of sustainable development and conservation. Legally, they enlist these ideas – grounded in international laws and organizations like UNCLOS and UNESCO – to create national parks. Materially, they employ naval and coast guard patrols, scientific vessels, and, in the case of Canada, indigenous use. While Canada includes indigenous peoples in its attempt to affirm its claims to historical presence and sovereignty in the NWP, Russia actively excludes them, suggesting two different kinds of biopolitical models. In both cases, when aiming their discourse at international audiences, the governments promote environmental conservation as their main motivation for establishing national parks. Since the international status of Canada and Russia’s political boundaries in the NWP and NSR, respectively, is in dispute, the countries have erected less controversial environmental boundaries in their stead. Russia and Canada make use of multilateral regimes and organizations in a counterintuitive manner, using their support to actually bolster nationalist aims. This rhetoric veils ulterior motives more openly expressed on the domestic front, such as sovereignty and economic interests.

In the Arctic, although states are setting aside areas for environmental protection, they are not doing so for purely ecological reasons. Political and economic interests and ecological and societal interests inform each other. National parks are drawn in areas that merit conservation, but also merit the attention of defense and security agencies. If the Arctic ecosystem is to be conserved in a sensible manner – difficult to do already because of the sheer size and cross-

border nature of the environment – then piecemeal attempts to conserve areas primarily for their geopolitical value rather than their importance to the overall ecosystem will not suffice. Significantly, conservation decisions based on non-environmental values may even extend beyond the Arctic’s two arguably most assertive states to countries normally lauded as environmental paragons. As a Norwegian living in Longyearbyen remarked about Svalbard, “[w]e Norwegians pretend to have real sovereignty here but we know we don’t. Instead we use the treaty to blanket the islands with nature reserves. That is the only way we can keep people out and stop the Russians building more and more mines. It’s a trick” (Anderson, 2009: 129). Though the Norwegians are engaging more in environmental stewardship, which differs from the logic of sovereignty and security that Canada and Russia follow, international concerns may still be informing their conservation practices. Thus, in the Arctic, conservation areas are more than the reserves teeming with narwhals and polar bears that glossy park brochures make them out to be. Instead, they are actively produced territories crucial to enacting sovereignty in the contested spaces of the Arctic.

Notes

1. Russia ratified UNCLOS in 1997, while Canada did so in 2003.
2. Arctic shipping, particularly along the NSR, is increasing, with 46 vessels transiting the entire route in 2012 compared to a mere four in 2010 (Pettersen, 2013).
3. The Canadian Parliament did, however, vote to rename the NWP the “Canadian Northwest Passage” in 2009 (Lasserre & Pelletier, 2011).
4. For an in-depth discussion of Quttinirpaaq National Park, see Langlais (1995).
5. The Ministry of Natural Resources became the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment in 2008.
6. In 1990 former President George H.W. Bush and Premier Mikhail Gorbachev together discussed creating a transborder Beringia National Park between Alaska and Chukotka. Although the plans fell apart with the collapse of the USSR (Liskin, 2010), in September 2012, the U.S. and Russia issued a Joint Statement on Pursuing a Transboundary Area of Shared Beringian Heritage (U.S. Department of State, 2012), suggesting renewed efforts to promote a common culture and environment. The two countries, however, still shy away from jointly managing the territory.
7. The memorandum was translated from Russian to English using a combination of Google Translate and the author’s interpretation.

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