

Alaska's Arctic Security Complex and Evolving Dynamics in Nome

October 2021

Authored by:
Brandon M. Boylan and Jeremy S. Speight

Contact: uaf-caps@alaska.edu



CENTER FOR
ARCTIC POLICY STUDIES

University of Alaska Fairbanks



International Arctic
Research Center

ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, scholars, practitioners, and activists have expanded the concept of security beyond strict nation-state and military definitions. Concurrent to these conceptual developments, the Arctic has become a distinct region of study, with its own environmental, cultural, political, and economic identity. In this paper, we apply a holistic interpretation of security to Alaska's evolving Arctic space. Theoretical concepts of securitization and human security inform a novel matrix of various levels and types of security. Levels range from the local and communal to the international, while types include physical, military, economic, environmental, and cultural security. The matrix serves as a tool to differentiate and synthesize security in a variety of contexts, notably in Alaska's Arctic. To illustrate the utility of the matrix, and to present a more complete picture of the security environment of the region, we analyze the current expanded port project in Nome, Alaska. In this case, we evaluate the ways in which the proposed project illustrates the complexity of and multiple perspectives on security, while also examining the new challenges of security in a rapidly changing environment with a diverse set of interests focused on the Bering Strait region. This exercise reveals how the expanded port project might remedy some security challenges but exacerbate others.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Center for Arctic Policy Studies is located at Troth Yeddha', on the traditional homelands of the Tanana Dene People. We recognize, appreciate, and honor Indigenous peoples and their past, present, and future land stewardship. We are committed to building long-term reciprocal relationships with Indigenous organizations and knowledge holders to create relevant and actionable information in support of their sovereignty and self-determination.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR ARCTIC POLICY STUDIES

The Center for Arctic Policy Studies is an interdisciplinary, globally-informed group rooted in Alaska's Interior at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and housed within the International Arctic Research Center. We recognize the historical dimensions of policy contexts, the power of collaboration across disciplines and domains, and the use of integrative approaches towards problem-solving using evidence-based practices and a positive outlook toward the future of Alaska and the Arctic.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brandon M. Boylan is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of Arctic and Northern Studies at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. *Jeremy S. Speight* is Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The authors contributed equally to the writing of this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Maureen Biermann, Amy Lauren Lovecraft, and Nicholas Parlato for their reviews, helpful edits, and comments. We particularly note Nicholas Parlato's contribution to Figure 9 in relation to Nome's scales of security. This paper is a development of the concept of multiple scales and dimensions of security for the Alaska region created by Brandon Boylan and Amy Lauren Lovecraft in response to the development of the Department of Energy Arctic Energy Office.

SUGGESTED CITATION

B. M. Boylan and J. S. Speight. 2021. Alaska's Arctic Security Complex and Evolving Dynamics in Nome. Fairbanks: Center for Arctic Policy Studies.

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION.....	4
2 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION	6
3 PROPOSED EXPANDED PORT PROJECT IN NOME, ALASKA	13
3.1 BACKGROUND ON NOME'S EXPANDED PORT PROJECT	14
3.2 MATRIX APPLICATION TO THE PROPOSED EXPANDED PORT PROJECT IN NOME	17
4 CONCLUSION.....	22
REFERENCES	25

1 Introduction

The present security context of diverse Arctic communities has been challenged in recent years by a range of interrelated environmental, cultural, political, and economic changes. The consumption of fossil fuels, emission of greenhouse gases, resultant warming temperatures, and natural resource development confront the Arctic as a region. Shifting seasonality and other features of climate change have generated a variety of concerns related to terrestrial, marine, and human security (see Figure 1).¹ Sea ice melt, permafrost thaw, and coastal erosion have rendered coastal communities in the Arctic more susceptible to flooding and other hazards. Global warming has heightened the threat posed by invasive species and jeopardized the population, health, and migration patterns of marine animals, such as whales and walrus, on which many communities in the Arctic depend. Changes in vegetation coverage have altered traditional caribou migration patterns and as a result have forced Indigenous communities to develop new subsistence practices. Heightened geopolitical competition for control over Arctic resources has reinforced the importance of military and infrastructure security in the region.² These are some of the many examples that demonstrate the need to disentangle the multiple dimensions of the meaning of security in the Arctic and understand how these security threats, as well as the policies and institutions designed to address them, interact over space and time.

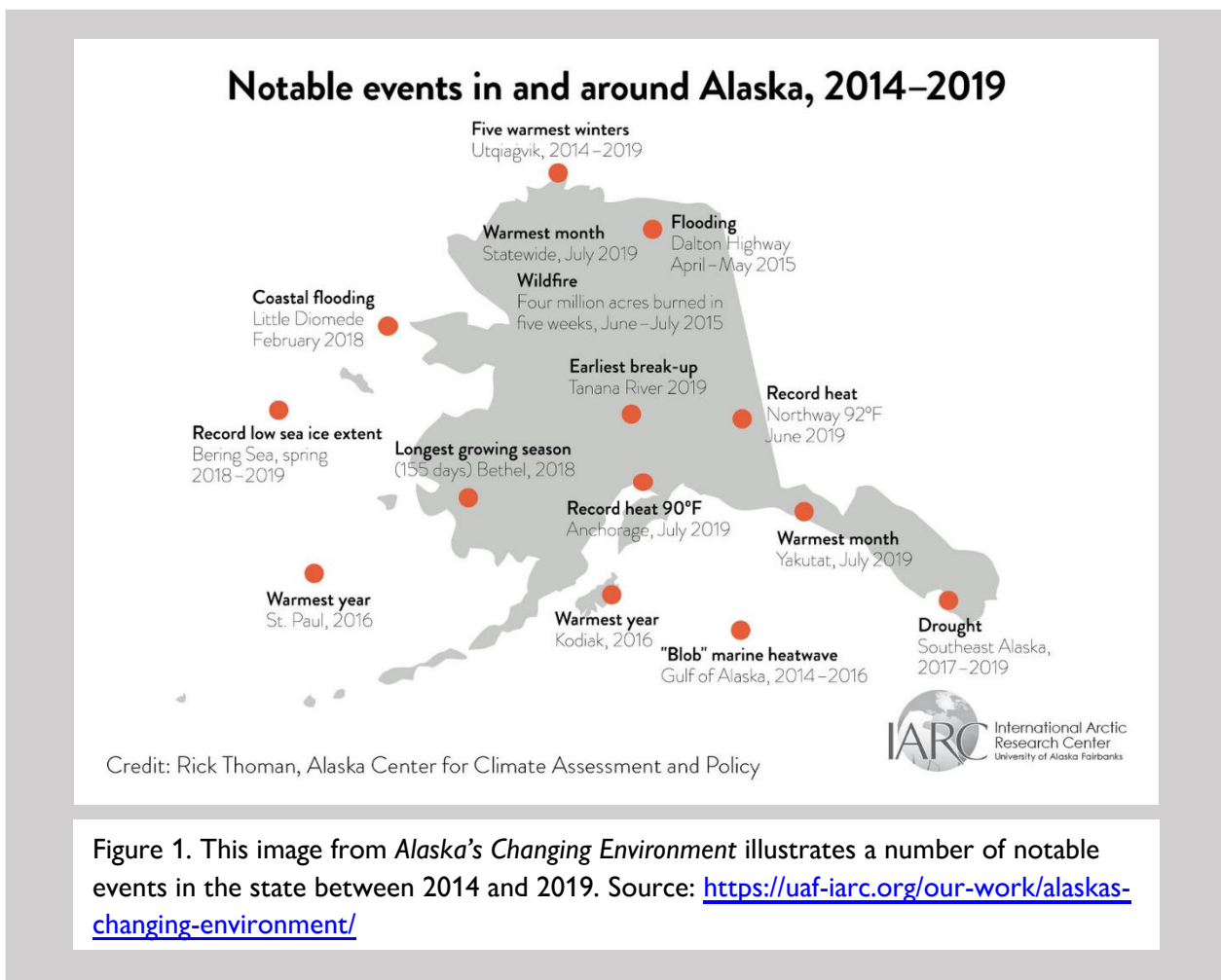


Figure 1. This image from *Alaska's Changing Environment* illustrates a number of notable events in the state between 2014 and 2019. Source: <https://uaf-iarc.org/our-work/alaskas-changing-environment/>

What does a holistic security environment in Arctic Alaska look like across scales and types? We address this question in three ways. First, we briefly summarize the existing literature on human security and securitization and differentiate these concepts from traditional understandings of security that focus on the nation-state and military. Additionally, we describe how these conceptual changes might inform debates related to the Alaska security environment. Second, we develop and present a novel security matrix that offers a snapshot of the multi-scaled and diverse security challenges presently confronting northern Alaska as a region. Finally, we present a case study of the deepwater port project planned for Nome in western Alaska to anchor the discussion of multiple security dimensions in Arctic Alaska. Although Nome is not above the Arctic Circle, the expanded port would serve as a stopping point to and from the Arctic. Given that the Arctic has multiple definitions, Alaska's northwestern coasts and the Bering Strait still fall within the Arctic region (see Figure 2).³

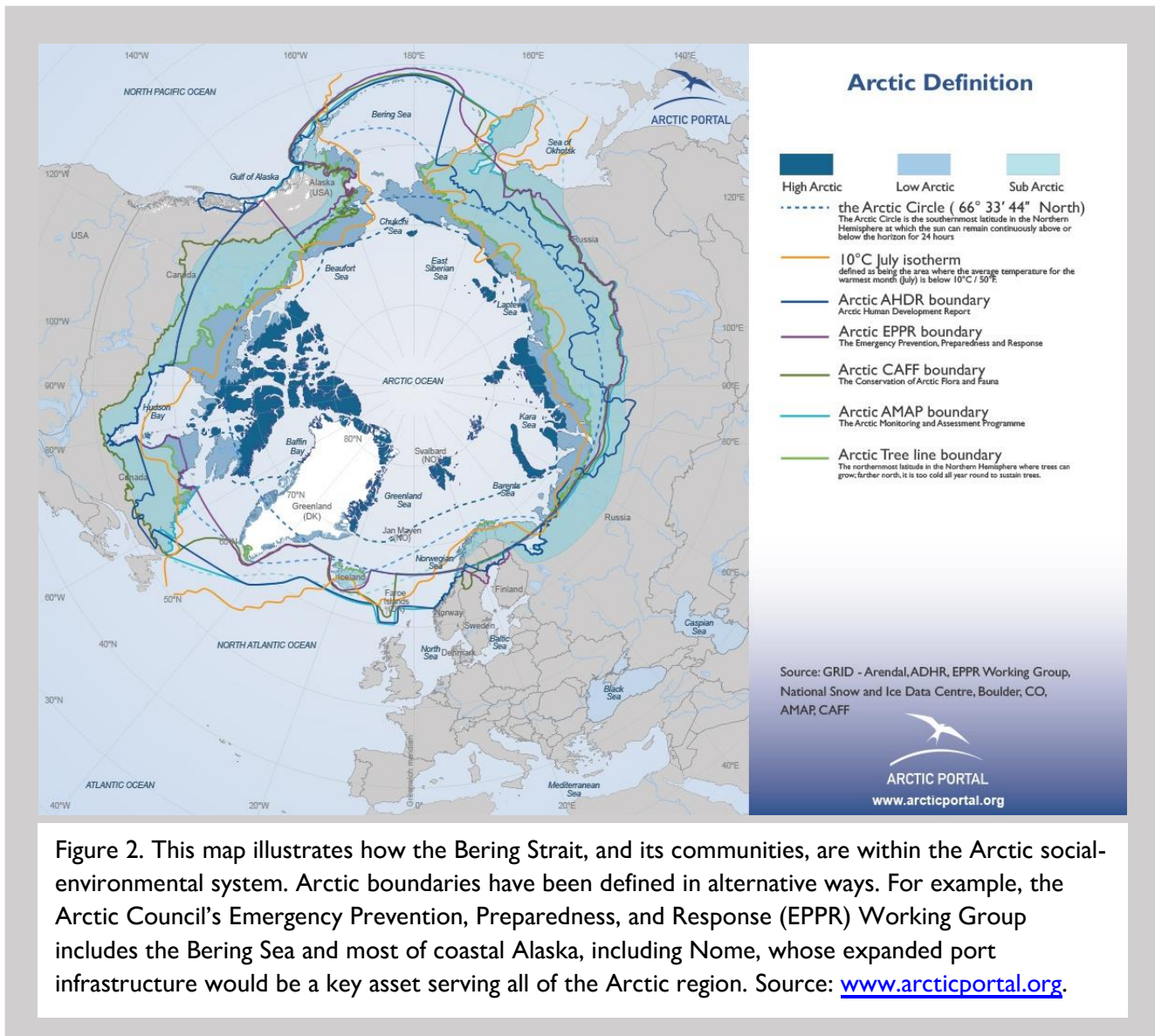


Figure 2. This map illustrates how the Bering Strait, and its communities, are within the Arctic social-environmental system. Arctic boundaries have been defined in alternative ways. For example, the Arctic Council's Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (EPPR) Working Group includes the Bering Sea and most of coastal Alaska, including Nome, whose expanded port infrastructure would be a key asset serving all of the Arctic region. Source: www.arcticportal.org.

For more than a decade, various local, state, and national actors have been interested in developing coastal infrastructure around Alaska's Arctic to facilitate the resupply of coastal communities, improve homeland and national security, and support Arctic shipping and cruise ship tourism. After a long process, in June 2020, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved a \$618 million plan to expand Nome's port; the project now awaits Congressional funding. Our aim in analyzing this case is to unpack the potential implications for the different dimensions and scales of security (local, regional, national, and international) described in the matrix and the relationships among them. We also explore various security challenges mitigated by the development of the port, while considering new security threats that the expansion project might create.

2 Theoretical Orientation

This section summarizes the main contributions of the securitization and human security literature for the purposes of framing our discussions of both the security matrix and the Nome port case study. Below, we (a) provide a brief timeline of the evolution of the human security agenda and describe how human security departs from traditional conceptualizations of security in international relations, (b) illustrate some of the tensions inherent in the shift to human security, between different dimensions of human security, and between analytic and pragmatic applications of the concept, and (c) discuss the idea of securitization as an analytic tool to understand why some political issues become security concerns and others do not, and what the implications of securitization processes are.

Since the 1980s, a coalition of advocacy groups, practitioners, and researchers have advanced the idea of "human security" to widen and challenge established state-centric definitions of security that focused primarily on military threats to the state. This changing understanding of security was first codified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report in 1994. The report criticized earlier narrow definitions of security and proposed a broadening of existing definitions to include chronic economic, environmental, and health threats to individuals and the significance of potential short-term disruptions to daily life from these issues.⁴ The report includes a number of realms of security including community, economic, environmental, food, health, personal, and political security. Since the publication of the 1994 UNDP report, scholars have responded and proposed refinements to this original definition that have emphasized various combinations of elements, including some of those discussed in the security matrix we present below.

A criticism of the UN's definition of human security has been that it includes too much, to the point that it becomes difficult to specify what definitions of human security *do not* include. Paris and Richmond both suggest that the imprecision of the definition has utility for groups advancing the human security agenda. Paris argues that this malleability has allowed a diverse set of actors with different interests to advance a shared agenda that downplays traditional state-centric definitions of security that focus on military threats.⁵ Similarly, for Richmond, the meaning of human security has been modified and employed by civil society

groups resisting power in different ways and in different contexts as part of a global emancipatory movement.⁶ In this sense, the movement away from traditional understandings of security towards human security demands a “‘democratization’ of security ... and attention to be paid to what communities themselves value in contexts under examination.”⁷ However, from a policy perspective, where national actors have access to a finite amount of resources, working from a definition of security without clear bounds inhibits effective policy development that addresses security threats.⁸

To narrow the scope of the definition of human security, Paris suggests that all efforts to move the security agenda to include more than state-centric security concerns broaden and deepen the original concept. “Broadening” refers to an expansion of issues considered to be security threats that could relate to economic security (e.g., employment and access to livelihoods, sectoral development, state spending), environmental security (e.g., climate change, coastal erosion, environmental degradation, collective action problems related to common pool resources and natural disasters), and cultural security (e.g., preservation of Indigenous languages, migration and community integration), among others.⁹ The challenge for policy makers is that these multiple dimensions of human security are often at odds with each other, as competing political actors in the same contextual environment often emphasize some dimensions of security over others, usually for political or personal purposes. Nicol and Heininen illustrate these tensions stemming from rising geopolitical competition in the Arctic and show how “there is little public discussion of how (resulting) military initiatives affect funding and programmes in other areas of the Arctic which might have social, health and educational impacts.”¹⁰ We highlight similar sorts of tensions between different dimensions of security through the case of the Nome port below. Any infrastructure or other project in the Arctic must be attuned not only to nation- and military-centric types of security but also to the entire security environment to avoid undermining communities and peoples it is meant to serve.

“Deepening” refers to the scale of security threats that exist below, at, above, or across nation-states.¹¹ While traditional security focuses on national and international threats, human security considers a range of threats at the subnational level. Threats to security do not exist only at the national level; they emanate from different scales. Below the nation-state, they exist at the individual or community (which can be defined territorially or not) levels or at sub-state units (i.e. regions, provinces, or states). The sub-state level includes traditional concerns focusing on security from violence, but the focus is on the individual (e.g., gendered sexual violence) or the community (intra-communal violence, inter-ethnic violence, or state sanctioned violence against the population) level. Security threats can come from within nation-states, such as in the case of civil war, and can come from above from the international system. Threats might also be transnational, such as food security threats related to the movement of caribou across national borders in North America or northern Scandinavia (see Figure 3).¹²

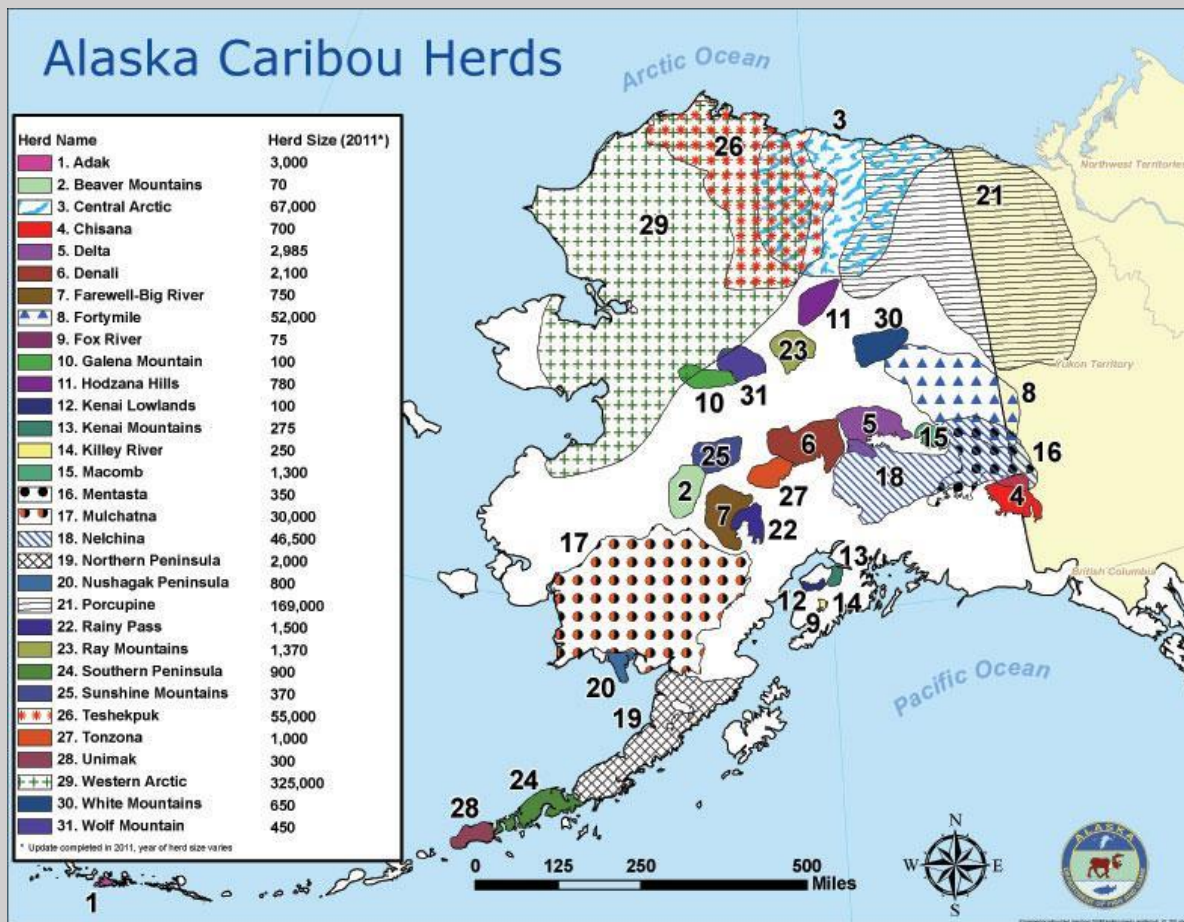


Figure 3. This Alaska Department of Fish and Game map illustrates the ranges of the 32 herds of caribou in Alaska and shows the transboundary nature of the four easternmost herds, most notably, the Porcupine herd (number 21), Alaska's second largest caribou herd. Source: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=caribou.main>

In combination, broadening and deepening security as a concept is to examine issues beyond military security or security from political violence and examine them from the perspective of analytical scales beyond the nation-state.¹³ In considering security threats beyond exclusively the threat of violence, human security perspectives refocus analytical attention towards positive rather than negative dimensions of security. Positive aspects of security highlight how individual and community security stem from day-to-day access to a variety of material, social, and cultural resources, while negative aspects of security emphasize freedom from threats, typically violence (see Table 1).¹⁴

Table 1. Examples of positive and negative security		
	Positive aspects of security	Negative aspects of security
Definition	Access “to”	Freedom “from”
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Material resources (e.g., food, shelter) ● Social resources (e.g., education, healthcare) ● Cultural resources (e.g., language, subsistence practices, religious practices) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Threats (e.g., bodily harm, illness, environmental hazards, discrimination)

While the human security agenda has sought to break International Relations scholarship out of its “Westphalian straightjacket”¹⁵ - that is, the privileged analytical attention on the state that has emerged with the rise of modern nation-states following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 - and draw attention to security threats stemming from different levels of analysis beyond the state, it also draws attention to how individual security concerns are not easily detached from the security of the wider social communities in which individuals are embedded. Human security perspectives describe non-governmental forms of security as types of societal or identity security. Given that individuals universally derive security from their memberships in larger social groups (that can be defined at varying scales, at local, sub-national, national, or transnational levels), decoupling the security of the individual from the security of the community in which they belong presents seemingly unresolvable analytical and policy challenges.¹⁶

Additionally, the multiple dimensions of human security described above are not always framed, understood, and accepted as security issues *per se* by all relevant political actors. Beginning in the 1990s, constructivist scholars of the Copenhagen School in international relations advanced the idea of “securitization” as a tool for understanding how some political problems become framed or understood as security problems in some instances and not in others, and for underscoring the subjective meaning of security as an idea in specific contexts.¹⁷ In securitization processes, actors/orators move policy issues into the security realm, while in desecuritization processes, they move them out. These processes are important because they shape policy responses to problems. Securitization matters because it can have the effect of suspending normal politics by taking “politics beyond the established rules of the game and fram[ing] the issue either as a special sort of politics or above politics.”¹⁸

For example, perceptions of migration impact policy correspondingly. In the main, U.S. national level views on migration from Mexico and Central America across the U.S. southern border are illustrative of securitization that requires tough responses: a strong military presence, wall construction, and separation of families. These views and consequent strategies

have significant security implications for the migrant populations who are the target of them. Because securitization often militarizes solutions to policy problems, it implies that the state should function as the institution that responds to security threats. As Greaves writes, “the national security discourse centred on a credible military threat limits the conceptual and policy space available for alternative, non-state conceptions of in(security).”¹⁹ In some cases, the human security of migrants can be undermined by the militarized security responses at the border. Securitization can thus lead to heightened security for one group (e.g., national security for the United States) but decreased security for another group (e.g., human security for migrants).

Whether or not specific policy issues become securitized depends not only on the choices made by political actors to employ a security discourse but also on the extent to which security “speech acts” (orations meant to move an issue from the non-security to security realm to justify security, often military, responses) are accepted and legitimized by others. Greaves has shown how different Indigenous communities in the Arctic have varied in using a security discourse as part of a strategy for addressing potential threats.²⁰ While the Inuit in Canada have been more likely to frame environmental and social challenges as security issues, the Sámi in Norway have typically refrained from using security language to describe similar problems. A significant part of the reason why this difference occurs is that, as explained above, there are tangible implications to employing a security discourse. In the case of the Sámi, memories of securitizing the Norway-Russia border during the Cold War, and its impact on cross-border herding, have limited the employment of the security frame to describe different economic, political, and social problems up until the present day.²¹ In Alaska, only recently has the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) been identified as a problem needing to be securitized.

Because securitization, or using security discourse to describe political problems, represents a speech act that frames reality in a certain way, the level of success of rhetorical strategies depends on the extent to which such acts are legitimized and accepted by others in the target audience. Wilkinson writes, “it is possible to distinguish between a successful securitization and an ‘unsuccessful’ securitization or ‘securitizing move’ (when the audience does not accept the discourse presented).”²² Certain political events become securitized when political actors choose to employ a security discourse and when these securitizing attempts are accepted by targets of these messages. Overall, contributions that understand securitization as a process show that whether different dimensions of security potentially become securitized depends on context and the agency of political actors involved in these negotiations.

To further illustrate the ideas on human security and securitization introduced above, Table 2 describes a range of security challenges of various types (columns) and at various scales (rows) currently confronting Alaska. This table is not exhaustive. Identified issues are not always exclusive to individual cells and are sometimes used as examples of multiple scales and types of security. Nonetheless, the table is an attempt to capture a snapshot of the various issues by scale and type and move our thinking about security in this region beyond traditional conceptualizations.

Table 2. Alaska's Arctic: Governance Scales and Security Challenges

	Physical Security	Military Security	Economic Security	Environmental Security	Cultural Security
Individual and Community	Physical ailments; domestic violence; sexual abuse; alcoholism; mental health issues; lack of access to food; challenges to subsistence hunting, fishing, and whaling; diseases like COVID-19 in rural and urban areas; ice melt and unpredictable ice coverage, danger of falling through ice.	Disconnects between local communities and homeland security sector (e.g., Coast Guard); potential disruptions to daily life by military and homeland security establishments.	Unemployment and underemployment; transportation barriers to market access and high cost of goods; barriers to subsistence and other ways of income generation.	Severe storms; coastal erosion; permafrost thaw; sea ice melt; pollution; toxic subsistence animals; tension between subsistence and commercial livelihoods.	Decline of cultural traditions, dance, and language; disruption of traditional/Indigenous knowledge with changing environmental conditions.
State (Alaska)	Tensions between communities and state security agencies (e.g., Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs), State Troopers); lack of state support for individual and communal issues (e.g., sexual violence, domestic assault).	Terrorism and other deliberate disasters that affect the state; issues at ports and airports; Bering Strait traffic.	Single sector economy; few options for economic diversification; geographic barriers to Internet and cell access; low population; tradeoffs between Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) and state spending.	Natural disasters like earthquakes and floods; coastal erosion; permafrost thaw; sea ice melt.	Barriers to local/regional educational opportunities, leading youth and students to travel further from home and disrupting intergenerational teaching of knowledge and cultural sharing and promoting rural out-migration and "brain drain"; decline of Alaska Native languages.

Table 2. Alaska’s Arctic: Governance Scales and Security Challenges (Cont’d)

	Physical Security	Military Security	Economic Security	Environmental Security	Cultural Security
National	Challenges in securing federal support for a host of issues (e.g., community relocation efforts (Shishmaref), funding to combat sexual assault and domestic violence).	Threats to the U.S. homeland and its assets and facilities in Alaska (e.g., concerns over Russia and China expansion in the Arctic).	Fluctuations in federal spending in Alaska (e.g., military bases, national parks).	Climate change; natural disasters like earthquakes and floods; concerns over increased traffic around Alaska (e.g., port security); military preparedness and readiness given an evolving climate.	Decline of Native languages; tensions between extractive industries that shore up national and economic security but may undermine cultural security.
International	Slow progress in meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.	Tense US-Russia relations; China's growing involvement in the Arctic; lack of international security institution in the Arctic.	US-China trade war and its effects on Alaska's economy; fluctuating commodities prices; decline of tourism and other market changes due to COVID-19.	Incomplete participation in Paris Agreement and responses to climate change; slowness in preparing for and adapting to climate change in the Arctic and beyond; Arctic Council's lack of environmental enforcement mechanisms.	Challenges in upholding the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); Arctic Council's lack of enforcement mechanisms to preserve cultural identity and traditions.

3 Proposed Expanded Port Project in Nome, Alaska

In this section, we illustrate the multiple dimensions (scales and types) of security from the above matrix in the context of a developing infrastructure project in Alaska's Arctic: the proposed expansion of Nome's port. This anchors the various dimensions of security in a real-world case and explore various security challenges potentially mitigated by the development of the port and new security threats that the expansion project might create.

Nome and the Bering Strait region are under enormous pressure, from local to global. As warming temperatures throughout the circumpolar North reduce sea ice coverage, ships and other vessels can more easily navigate Arctic waters (see Figure 4).²³

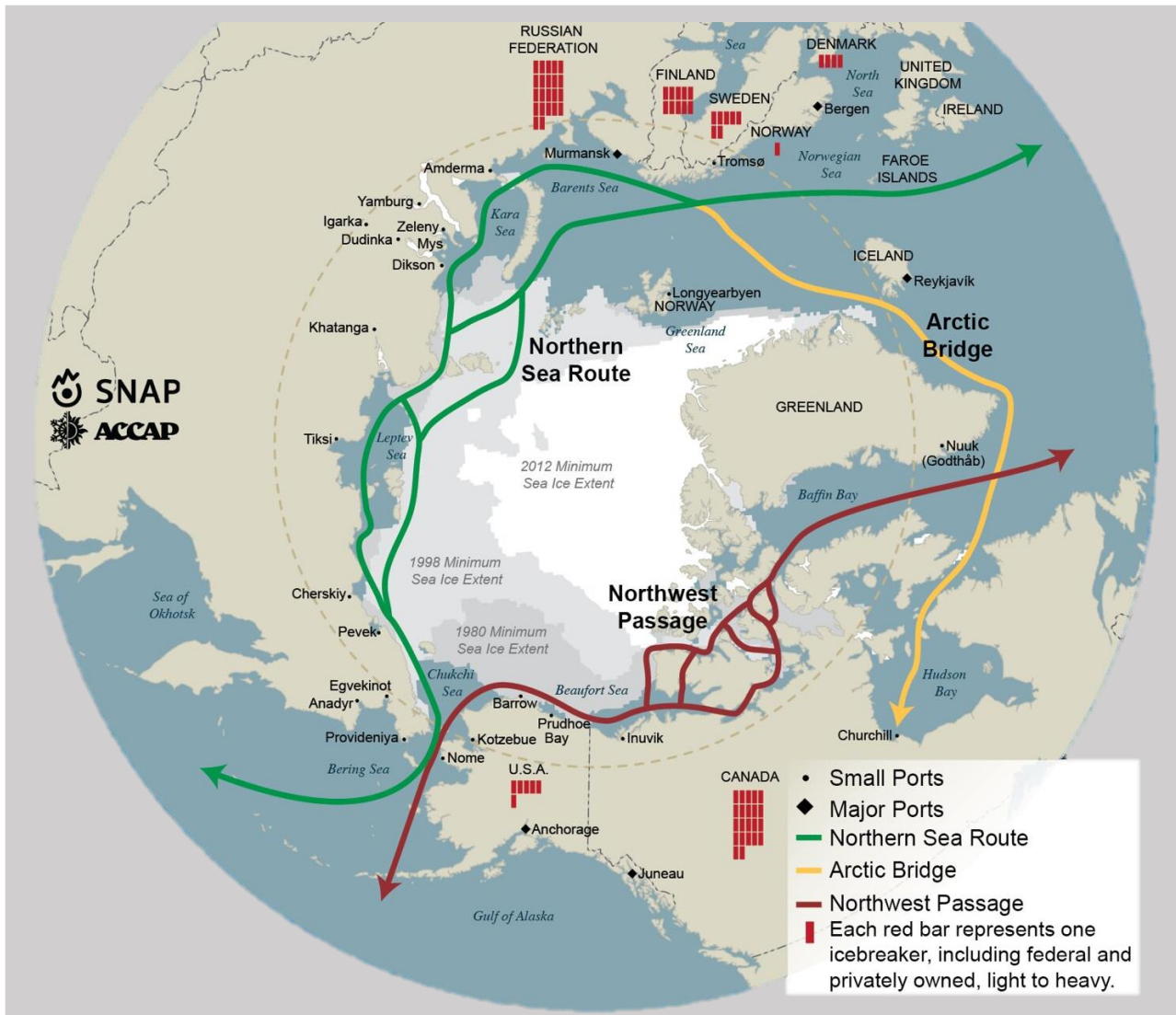


Figure 4. Changing minimum sea ice extent (1980, 1998, and 2012) mapped against Arctic shipping routes, ports, and icebreaker capacities of various nations. As sea ice extent continues to decrease and Arctic transit becomes less challenging, Arctic shipping is expected to rise. Source: SNAP/ACCAP <https://www.flickr.com/photos/iarcgroup/8738989073/>.

Intra-regional, destination, and trans-Arctic (especially Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage) shipping is on the rise.²⁴ Increasing traffic is impacting the Bering Strait. The Nome port project is meant both to support vessel traffic and to address the host of security concerns arising from it. This context has precipitated a process in which Nome and the region have become securitized. Once far from the national and international spotlight, Nome is now commanding attention from a range of actors. As one example, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finalized its report on the feasibility of modifying Nome's port, Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK) commented, "The Port of Nome ... is positioned to play a critical role in ensuring the United States is a leader in the Arctic region in terms of national security, international trade, and geopolitical influence."²⁵ Local actors agree that the port and region are of increasing security importance. As one Nome media outlet states, "[t]he port is expected to strengthen national security in the Arctic, given its strategic location on the Pacific Rim. The port is also expected to reduce shipping costs and make access to cargo and fuel cheaper for Western Alaska communities."²⁶

3.1 Background on Nome's Expanded Port Project

Nome is a small city located on the southern coast of the Seward Peninsula in western Alaska. Isolated from the Alaska road system, it serves as a regional hub for communities in western and northern Alaska and a gateway to mining operations, offshore oil and gas exploration, and shipping in the region.²⁷

Originally built in 1917, with upgrades in 2006, Nome's current port has a causeway with a length of 2,700 feet and a maximum depth of 22.5 feet (see Figure 5).²⁸ The port serves tugs and barges; fuel tankers; landing craft; government, research, and recreational vessels; cruise ships; commercial fishing boats; and gold dredges.²⁹ However, some vessels, like large cargo boats, tankers, and cruise ships, cannot dock directly at the port. They must anchor offshore and use smaller boats to deliver cargo and tourists. Currently, Dutch Harbor on Amaknak Island in the Aleutian archipelago, over 700 miles south of Nome and over 1,200 miles south of Utqiagvik, is the only deepwater port in western Alaska capable of accommodating large vessels.³⁰

For some time, Nome, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) Alaska District, the Bering Strait Native Corporation, the State of Alaska, Alaska's Congressional delegation, and the commercial sector have been interested in expanding the port. As the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers states, "The intent of the completed project is to relieve congestion in the Port of Nome, allow larger vessels to dock at Nome, and improve emergency response for marine spills and vessels in distress."³¹ Meanwhile, as climate change in the Arctic region creates new opportunities for maritime navigation through the Bering Strait and on to the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage, various stakeholders see a growing role for Nome as a place to support shipping, regional maritime travel, and transit traffic. National security is also of concern as Russia continues to develop military capabilities in its Arctic region and China becomes increasingly more interested in the Arctic.



Figure 5. Existing infrastructure of the Nome port shown above. Photo courtesy of the US Army Corps of Engineers. Source:

<https://media.defense.gov/2012/Jun/11/2000757890/1366/740/0/080815-A-CE999-001.JPG>.

The process through which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District has investigated the feasibility of an Arctic port capable of handling larger vessels, with the eventual recommendation of expanding Nome's port, began over a decade ago. In January 2008, ACE and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) held a conference in which attendees decided to commission a study to establish the baseline information needed for a statewide plan for Arctic Alaska maritime infrastructure.³² In November 2010, ACE and DOTPF sponsored another conference in which stakeholders discussed progress since 2008, reviewed the findings of the 2010 Alaska Regional Ports Study, and developed criteria for a statewide investment approach for Alaska's ports and harbors.³³ Shortly thereafter, in January 2011, Northern Economics released a report, "Planning for Alaska's Regional Ports and Harbors," in which it summarized the work of the partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District and the State of Alaska on planning for the new maritime infrastructure in Alaska's Arctic, incorporating feedback from the November 2010

conference.³⁴ Another conference followed in Anchorage in May 2011, the aim of which was to continue to plan for the development of ports in Alaska's Arctic.³⁵

After several years of securing federal permission, in 2012, Shell began drilling in the Chukchi Sea to explore for oil and gas deposits. As a result, the Alaska District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began to study the feasibility of improving Nome's port to support oil and gas exploration in western and northern Alaska. A follow-up to the March 2013 report, the Alaska District's draft report from February 2015, the Alaska Deep-Draft Arctic Port System Study, laid out a \$210 million plan to dredge Nome's outer harbor to 28 feet, extend the causeway around the harbor by approximately 2,150 feet, and build a new large vessel dock (see Figures 6).³⁶ Nome was chosen out of a short list of coastal communities due to its existing port infrastructure, airport, hospital, and fuel supply facilities.³⁷ However, owing to disappointing results and formidable operational and regulatory challenges, Shell suspended its exploratory efforts in the Chukchi in 2015 (with a loss of \$4 billion), and the Alaska District paused its feasibility study of the expanded port as a consequence.

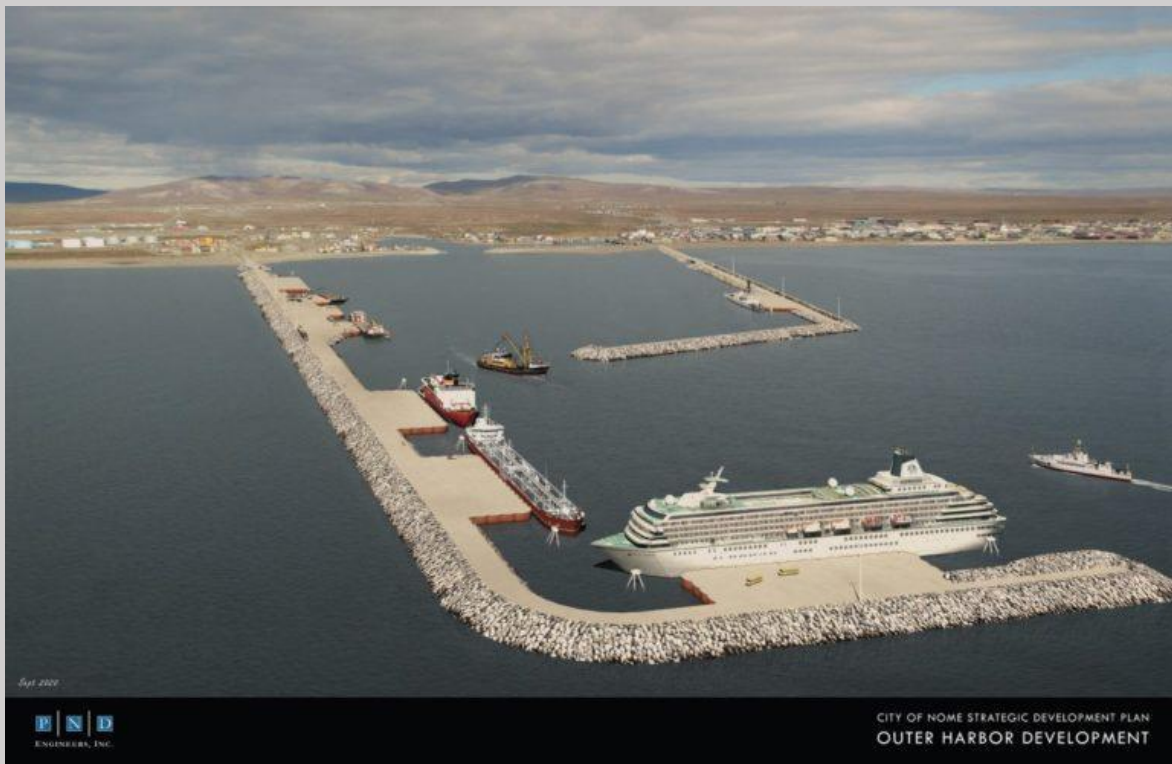


Figure 6. Artistic rendering of expanded Port of Nome. Source: <https://www.alaskapublic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/City-of-Nome-Strategic-Development-Plan-Outer-Harbor-Development-ALT-8B-9-17-2020-2-768x497.jpg>.

Interested actors remained undeterred. The Alaska Congressional delegation pushed to add language to the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (both 2016) that spotlights the importance of the development of a deepwater port in Alaska's Arctic.³⁸ These laws allowed for the continuation of a feasibility study of an Arctic port to address a host of commercial and national security interests in the region.³⁹

Following, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officially terminated the Alaska Regional Ports Feasibility Study in January 2018 and began a new investigation of the Nome port expansion project in February 2018 that would consider a host of commercial and national security interests, thus responding to and perpetuating a new securitization process. ACE and the City of Nome agreed to split the cost of the approximate \$3 million feasibility study.

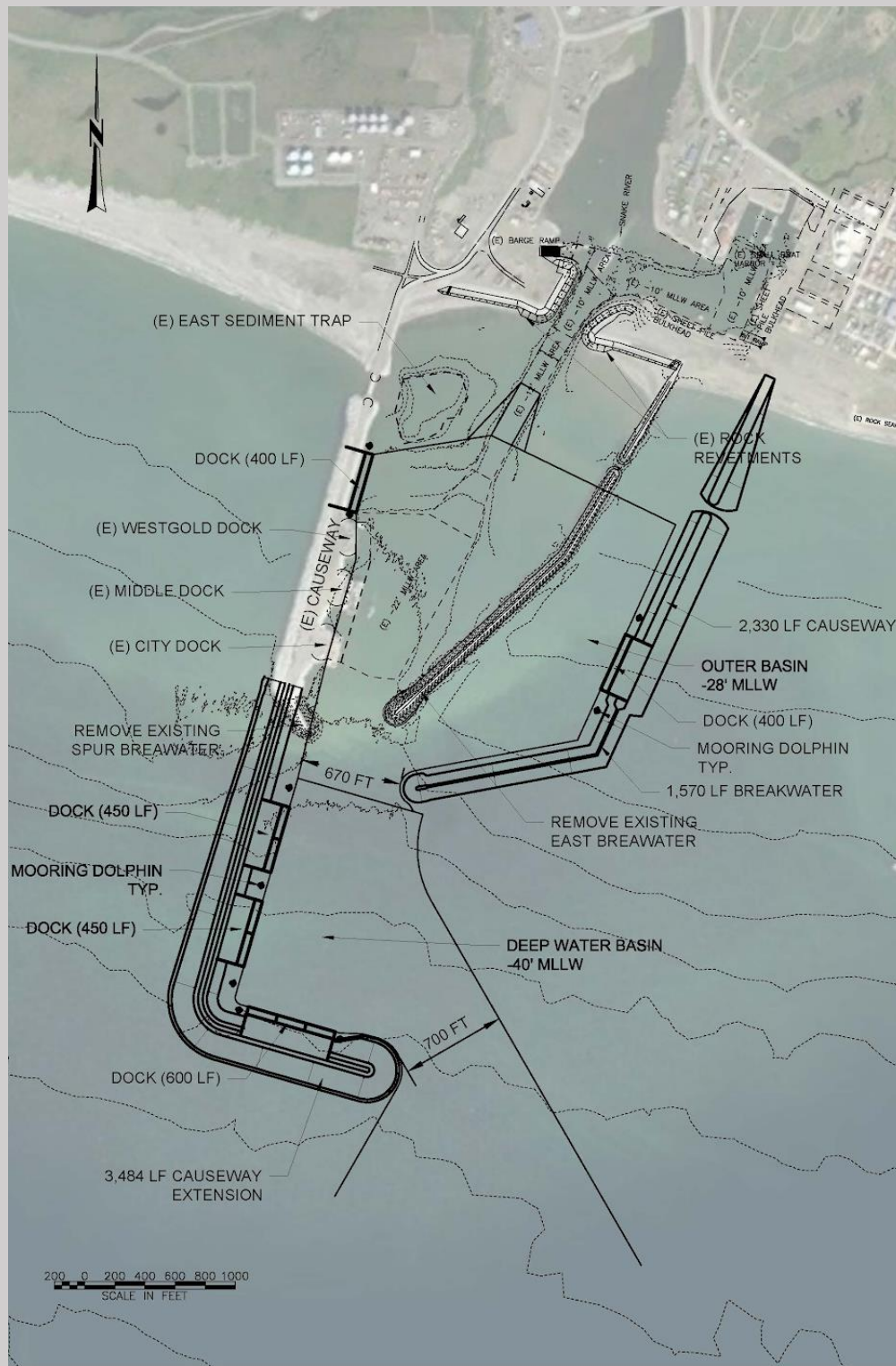
In December 2019, ACE released its Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study. In June 2020, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commander Lieutenant General Todd Semonite approved the \$618 million plan to expand Nome's port. In addition to serving large vessels and providing more dock space, the expanded port would be the first refueling and resupplying port in the U.S. Arctic for deep-draft vessels (see Figure 7).⁴⁰ In January 2021, Congress authorized \$2.7 million for the project's preconstruction, engineering, and design phase.⁴¹

3.2 Matrix Application to the Proposed Expanded Port Project in Nome

We have designed a matrix to explain how one can analyze Nome's expanded port project and its diverse and complicated impacts on security. In this section, we highlight the potential effects, both positive and negative, of the project according to different scales of action and types of security. We have filled out the cells using primary and secondary sources, and while confident in our information, we note that we have not yet ground-truthed this matrix fully with Nome residents. However, this process of considering security in different ways at different scales of action shows both the utility of the matrix and how the project might remedy some security challenges while creating others.

Individual / Community Level and Physical Security

With an expanded port, larger vessels can dock at Nome, carrying higher quantities of commodities important to the region, reducing the number of resupply trips necessary for the community, as well as associated transportation costs. Such commodities include packaged goods and fuel used for boats, snow machines, and ATVs in support of subsistence activities. Thus, a larger port can reduce food costs and food insecurity for people and communities in the region. If the port leads to an increase in the permanent and transient population in Nome, services and infrastructure would be under pressure, necessitating improvements and new developments. Improved healthcare and educational services and investments in hospitals and schools would help to address security related to individual and communal physical and mental health.



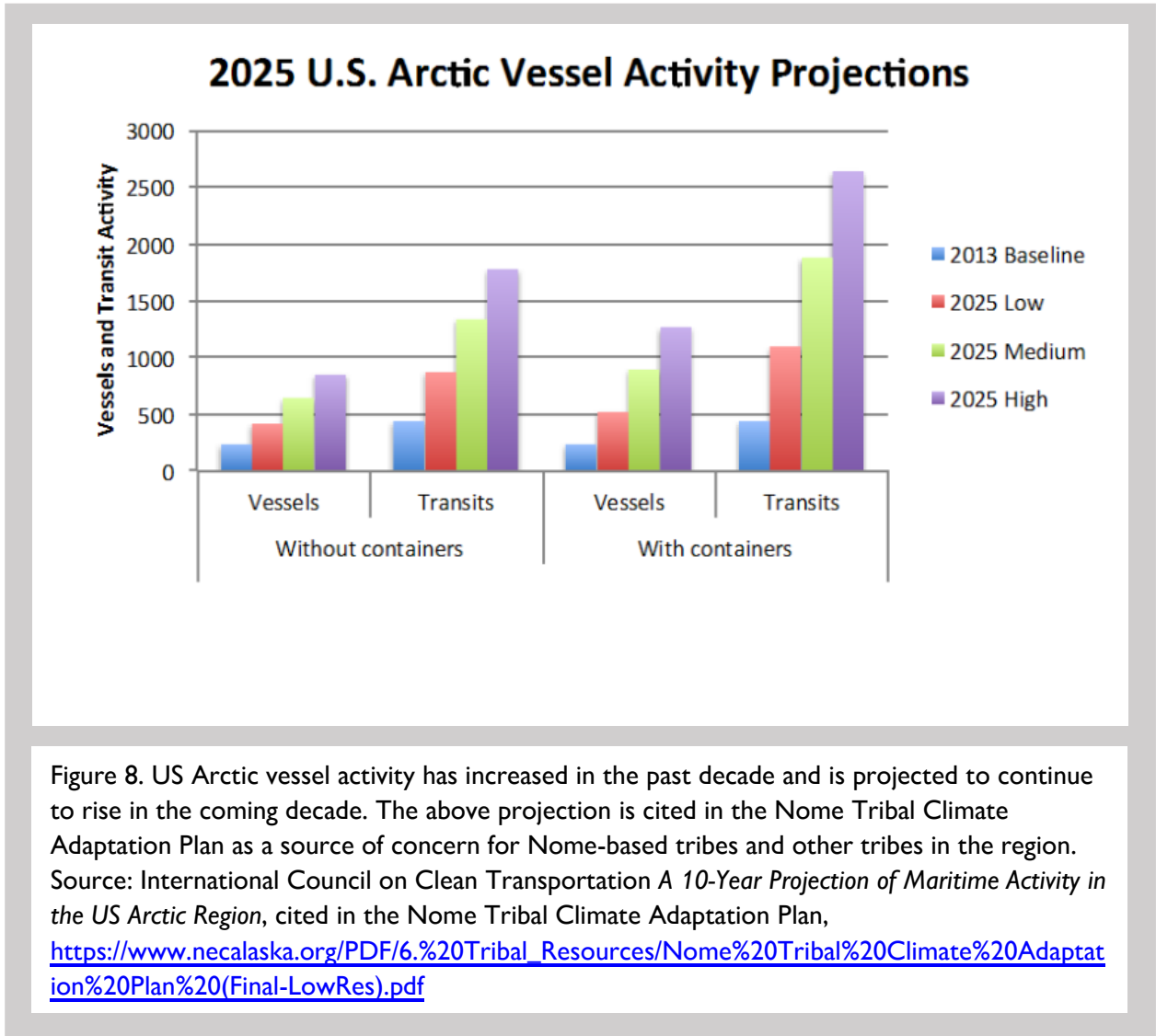
US ARMY CORPS
OF ENGINEERS
ALASKA DISTRICT

ALTERNATIVE 8B
PORT OF NOME MODIFICATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

24

Figure 7. Draft of port expansion. Source: US Army Corps of Engineers, <https://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Portals/34/docs/civilworks/publicreview/portofnome/FinalNomeIFREA29May2020signed.pdf?ver=2020-06-02-192545-533>.

However, more vessel traffic and larger ships in the region (see Figure 8)⁴² could affect food security and maritime subsistence activities, like fishing and whaling, in a number of ways. First, more vessels and larger ships might change the behavior and migratory patterns of marine animals in the region. Nome and other communities may or may not be able to adapt to these changing patterns. Second, more and larger vessels might increase the number of strikes on subsistence maritime animals, thus jeopardizing the continuance of their presence in the area. Third, they might cause more fuel and wastewater spills, jeopardizing the health of subsistence animals. Fourth, with larger ships in the region, smaller maritime vessels might be squeezed out from commercial and subsistence fishing opportunities, or larger vessels might jeopardize the safety of local activities. Finally, the Army Corps of Engineers notes, “The construction of the ‘L’ shaped extension of the West Causeway would increase wave height outside of the Port of Nome through wave reflection. Depending on wave conditions, this increased wave height may impact maritime subsistence use to the west of the Port of Nome by reducing the number of days a small subsistence vessel could safely travel westward out of the Port.”⁴³



Thus, while the expanded port might remedy challenges at the individual / communal level in some ways (e.g., larger and more frequent resupply efforts), it could also jeopardize subsistence activities in the community. At the local scale it also raises questions of “substitute goods.” Relying on store-bought food may seem like a caloric substitute for subsistence foods, but in fact this food is not interchangeable both in terms of nutrition and of enculturation and traditional Alaska Native stewardship. A bridge between physical and economic security is that development of the region, in particular if it is large-scale and extractive or military, poses threats to women in particular. “Man camps” and other disruptive aspects of rapid and externally generated economic development that pushes new, and overwhelmingly male, people into a small rural location generally increases levels of violence against women and children.

Individual / Community Level and Economic Security

Employment and other economic opportunities would come with the expansion and maintenance of the port, opportunities that would benefit local people in Nome and the surrounding region, the Bering Straits Native Corporation, and a host of other actors. As a regional hub for commerce, healthcare, and transportation, Nome would be able to increase its support of nearby communities and their development. As one example, Nome is the hub for the commercial fishing industry in the Norton Sound. Fishers harvest crab, salmon, and halibut each season. In 2014, the estimated gross earnings from commercial fishing in the area was \$4.4 million.⁴⁴ Norton Sound Seafood Products (NSSP) is the main fish processor in the region. The extended port, able to accommodate more fishing vessels, should bolster the fishing industry. And as the region continues to warm, cod, pollock, and other species historically confined to the southern Bering Sea are migrating north. An expanded port would better facilitate fishing fleets as they capture the increased number of fish in the area.

Other local economic opportunities could arise. Nome is in proximity to gold mining and offshore petroleum operations, and thus the expanded port can support the economic growth of these industries (if companies decide to explore and extract resources). As shipping increases in the area - with vessels sailing through the Bering Strait to resupply coastal communities or voyage on to the Northern Sea Route or Northwest Passage - ships can stop in Nome to refuel, boosting the local economy. Moreover, cruise ship tourism is growing, and Nome can expect to benefit from this industry’s development. Cruise ships would be able to dock directly at the larger port. As one example, in 2016, the *Crystal Serenity* stopped in Nome during its voyage from Seward through the Northwest Passage to New York City. Although it had to anchor offshore and transport passengers from the ship to the current dock with smaller vessels, future ships would be able to dock directly at the port.

Finally, given that Nome has a sales tax (a 7% seasonal rate, with a 5% non-seasonal rate), increases in purchases would raise tax revenue for the city. However, as traffic increases in the region, and vessels dock at the expanded port, Nome can expect to receive more visitors, workers, and tourists; managing them will cost money. This might pose a threat to the

city's commercial and public security. Nome would need to employ more police and security officers, and local businesses would also need to improve their security measures.

State Level and Economic Security

In addition to the Nome region's economy, the State of Alaska's economic security could also improve from the project. The health of Alaska's economy has rested on natural resource development, federal expenditures, commercial fishing, and tourism. The project could affect all these areas. The port could serve as a staging point to explore offshore oil reserves in the Bering and Chukchi Seas, and facilitate additional mining in the Seward Peninsula. Licensing fees would matriculate to the state, while revenue derived from discovered oil and minerals would be subjected to state tax. With larger permanent and transient population, and an increased number of visitors, revenues from "sin" (alcohol, tobacco, marijuana), motor fuel, and other state taxes would increase. Moreover, the project would require resources from the State of Alaska, including port and infrastructure maintenance costs and various expenses related to climate mitigation and adaptation projects.

National Level and Military Security

The expanded port would likely play an important role in improving national security. Currently, the U.S. Coast Guard covering eastern and northern Alaska is stationed on Kodiak Island. The Coast Guard can use the expanded port as a refueling station, at a minimum. It could potentially also use Nome as a location from which to respond to emergencies and conduct search and rescue (SAR) operations in the Bering Strait and marine areas in the North, especially given the large number of oil and gas transport vessels in the region. Current facilities are limited in supporting clean-up activities if a spill occurs at sea or during fuel transfer.⁴⁵ It might also be possible for Nome to host the United States' two current icebreakers (the *Polar Star* and the *Healy*) and the planned fleet of three heavy and three medium icebreakers.⁴⁶ As the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers states in its March 2020 modification feasibility study, "The project should accommodate the international and US-based icebreaker fleet that frequents the area, and other vessels important to National Security."⁴⁷ As China and Russia expand their activities in the region, icebreakers strategically located in Nome could be important.

However, more and larger vessels in the region could also increase the risk to regional security and the environment. These risks include maritime traffic accidents and fuel and wastewater spills. Various actors would need to decide on the level of Coast Guard, National Guard, and other search-and-rescue capabilities necessary for the region. China and Russia are increasing their maritime activities in the Bering Strait and broader Arctic region. The United States must decide to what extent it will increase its presence in the Arctic as a result. If the United States allows Chinese and Russian vessels to use the port, a host of security actors, including the Coast Guard, would likely need to be in the region. With domestic, and potentially foreign, vessels using the expanded Nome port, authorities would need to improve port security. In 2017, the City of Nome received a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant to install 21 security cameras at the port.⁴⁸ Authorities would need to expand the

security system with more and larger vessels docking at the port. Additionally, if homeland security actors arrive in Nome, they would likely need to partner with local community members to ensure that traditional, cultural, and daily practices are not jeopardized.

International Level and Environmental Security

An expanded port, and the traffic that it would attract, would have implications for international environmental security, without clear designations on which actors would be responsible for the environment and ecosystems of the Bering Strait and beyond. More traffic in the Bering Strait will cause an increase in the emissions of climate-warming carbon dioxide and black soot.⁴⁹ Additionally, increasing traffic and inadequate regulations are leading to elevated levels of trash, sewage, grey water, and oily discharges into the ecosystem.⁵⁰ Between these types of pollution, concerns are mounting over traffic-related accidents and fuel spills. These accidents, coupled with the formidable environment in which these potential spills might occur, challenge clean-up and search-and-rescue (SAR) operations. As a result, transnational communities in the region, the Seward Peninsula and western Alaska, and eastern Siberia would be impacted.

Although the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has adopted the United States and Russia's joint proposal for a sequence of vessel routes that are free of hazardous sea conditions as well as precautionary areas in the Bering Sea and Strait,⁵¹ other global and regional environmental efforts are currently limited. The Paris Agreement is young, and reductions in greenhouse gases are not yet significant. The United States has not ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). The Arctic Council, the premier intergovernmental forum to discuss environmental and Indigenous issues in the circumpolar North, does not produce international environmental law or have environmental regulatory capabilities.

Figure 9 illustrates the potential diverse and complicated impacts of the Nome port expansion on multiple types of security at multiple scales, which we have discussed in this section. This matrix serves as a tool to explain how one can analyze Nome's expanded port project and its diverse and complicated impacts on security.

4 Conclusion

This paper is an initial effort to describe and unpack the complicated and diverse experiences of security Alaskans have today. In doing so, we began by summarizing the major contributions to the field of security studies over the past 30 years. This section highlighted the advancement of the ideas of human security and securitization and as key concepts in the field of security studies. Human security emphasizes problems that include, but go well beyond, traditional security concerns focused on the threat of the state's use of organized violence. Human security approaches emphasize other dimensions of security such as environmental, economic, and cultural security. Each dimension contains essential features of human survival and capacity to thrive. Human security approaches also examine problems from different scaled

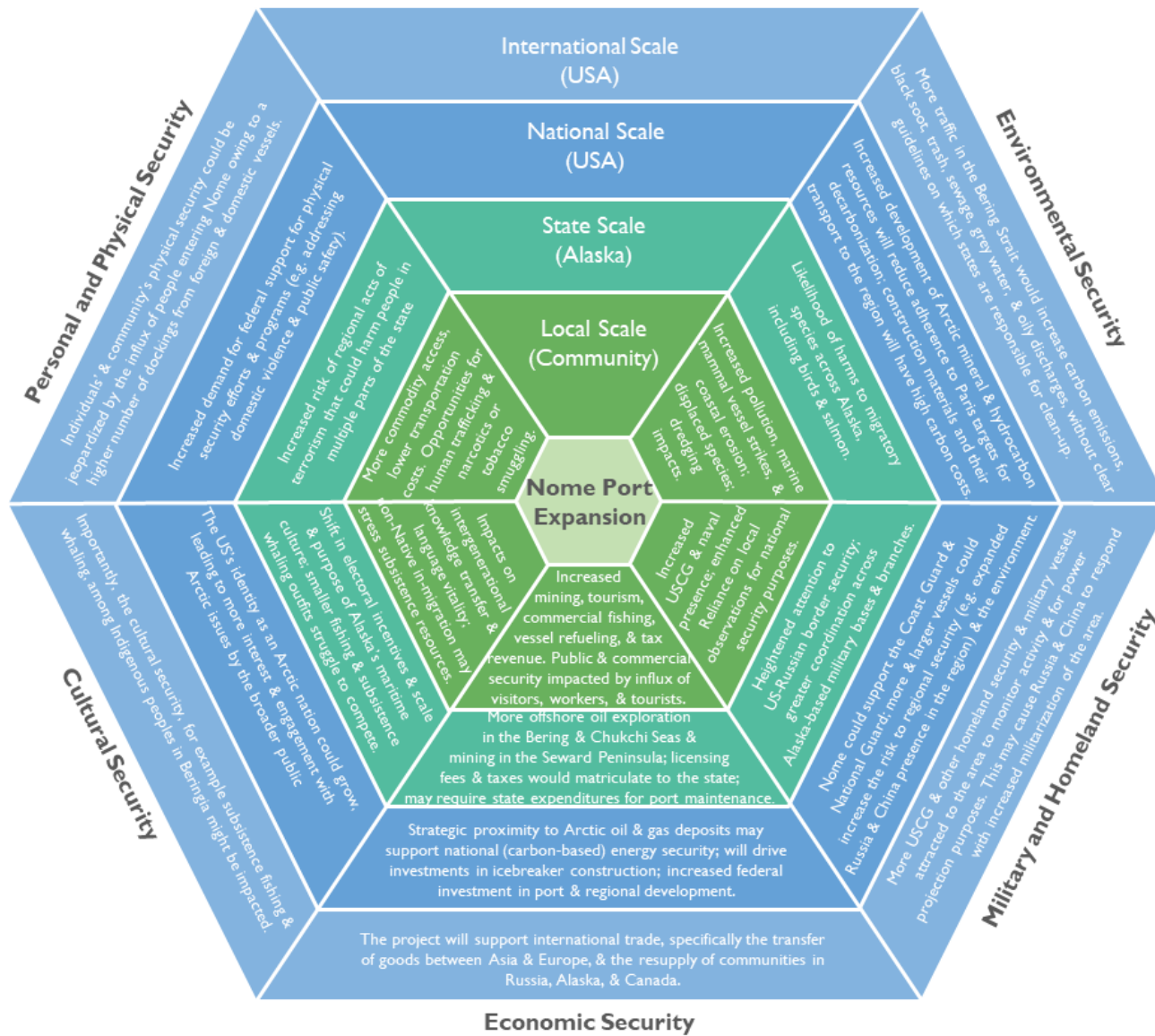


Figure 9. Nome's Expanded Port Project: Examples of Scales and Types of Security

perspectives beyond the nation-state, from the individual to international levels. Securitization refers to the rhetorical strategies by political actors to frame issues as security problems. These perspectives explain differences in how policy issues, such as migration, become security issues as a result of both the strategies of actors who choose to securitize an issue (or not), and by the receptiveness of target audiences to these claims. Whether or not issues become security problems matters because it strongly influences who typically responds to them (e.g., a government) and how (e.g., through coercive measures).

Drawing on these theoretical insights, the second half of this paper creates a security matrix to disentangle different types of security problems confronting Alaskans across different levels of analysis: individual and community, state, national and international. We illustrated these different components of security through a case study of the Nome port in western Alaska. This case highlights some of the tensions inherent in addressing these different types of security problems. Port development could address different dimensions of insecurity by initiating increased infrastructure development or lowering fuel costs, but it could also disrupt maritime subsistence activities and expose residents to new diseases and other threats from rapid externally-driven development. Developing the port to support American strategic interests could increase the local population and as a result could make ensuring local security more difficult without investment in local and state policing and other social services. Identifying specific policy responses to these problems is challenging because decisions intended to shore up security in one domain, may detract from it in another. In situations where resources are finite, policy decisions to improve one dimension of security may mean limiting the amount of resources available to address others.

A key policy takeaway from this paper is that in addressing security challenges in Alaska (and beyond) policy processes might matter most, rather than policy design *per se*. Various policy actions have different effects on multiple stakeholders, contributing to the shoring up dimensions of security for some, while detracting from the security of others. Debates about security inevitably lead to questions regarding institutional design, authority in specific settings and *who* gets to make decisions and why. As a general goal, policy development should incorporate as many stakeholders as possible to represent interests across the different scales and dimensions of security examined above.

References

- ¹ Rick Thoman and J. E. Walsh. *Alaska's changing environment: documenting Alaska's physical and biological changes through observations*. H. R. McFarland, Ed. Fairbanks: International Arctic Research Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2019. <https://uaf-iarc.org/our-work/alaskas-changing-environment/>.
- ² Heather N. Nicol and Lassi Heininen, "Human Security, the Arctic Council, and Climate Change: Competition or Co-existence?" *Polar Record* 50, no. 252 (2013): 80-85.
- ³ "Arctic Definitions Combined," Arctic Portal, April 2016. <https://arcticportal.org/maps/download/arctic-definitions/2426-arctic-definitions>.
- ⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ⁵ Roland Paris, "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" *International Security* 26, no. 2 (2001): 94.
- ⁶ Oliver P. Richmond, "Human Security and Its Subjects," *International Journal* 68, no. 1 (2012-2013): 205-225.
- ⁷ Gunhild Hoogensen, Dawn Bazely, Julia Christensen, Andrew Tanentzap, and Evgeny Bojko, "Human Security in the Arctic - Yes, It Is Relevant!" *Journal of Human Security* 5, no. 2 (2009): 1.
- ⁸ Paris, "Human Security," 92.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.
- ¹⁰ Nicol and Heininen, "Human Security, the Arctic Council, and Climate Change," 83.
- ¹¹ Paris, "Human Security," 97.
- ¹² "Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) Species Profile," Alaska Department of Fish and Game, accessed October 15, 2021, <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=caribou.main>.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 96-100.
- ¹⁴ Hoogensen et al., "Human Security in the Arctic," 2.
- ¹⁵ Claire Wilkinson, "The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Usable outside Europe?" *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 1 (2007): 7.
- ¹⁶ Kamrul Hossain, Gerald Zojer, Wilfrid Greaves, J. Miguel Roncero, and Michael Sheehan, "Constructing Arctic Security: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Security in the Barents Region," *The Polar Record* 53, no. 1 (2017): 53.
- ¹⁷ See Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 45-86.; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); and Michael C. Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 511-531.
- ¹⁸ Wilkinson, "The Copenhagen School," 9.
- ¹⁹ Wilfred Greaves, "Arctic (In)security and Indigenous Peoples: Comparing Inuit in Canada and Sámi in Norway," *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 6 (2016): 476.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 473.
- ²² Wilkinson, "The Copenhagen School," 9.
- ²³ SNAP-ACCAP Sea Ice Story, IARC, accessed October 15, 2021, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/iarcgroup/8738989073/>.
- ²⁴ Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment, "The Increase in Arctic Shipping, 2013-2019," Arctic Shipping Status Report (ASSR) #1. March 31, 2020.
- ²⁵ Dan Sullivan United States Senator for Alaska Press Release, "Alaska Delegation Applauds Major Progress for Port on Nome," May 29, 2020, <https://www.sullivan.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/alaska-delegation-applauds-major-progress-for-port-of-nome>.
- ²⁶ KNOM Radio, "Nome Port Plans Approved as Navy Announces Arctic Focus," February 1, 2021, <https://www.knom.org/wp/blog/2021/02/01/nome-port-plans-approved-as-navy-announces-arctic-focus/>.

-
- ²⁷ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District, *Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study: Nome, Alaska*, January 2019, 6.
- ²⁸ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District, accessed October 15, 2021, <https://media.defense.gov/2012/Jun/11/2000757890/1366/740/0/080815-A-CE999-001.JPG>.
- ²⁹ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District. *Alaska Deep-Draft Arctic Port System Study*. Draft. February 2015.
- ³⁰ Elwood Brehmer, "Army Corps Approves Long-Sought \$618 Million Plan to Expand Port of Nome," *Anchorage Daily News*, June 11, 2020.
- ³¹ U.S. ACE Alaska District. *Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study*, 2020, 209.
- ³² U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, "2008 Alaska Regional Ports and Harbors Conference," Anchorage, Alaska. January 10-11, 2008.
- ³³ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, "2010 Alaska Regional Ports Conference Summary," Anchorage, Alaska, November 18, 2010.
- ³⁴ Northern Economics, Inc., "Planning for Alaska's Regional Ports and Harbors," prepared for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, January 2011.
- ³⁵ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities 2011.
- ³⁶ Elwood Brehmer, "US Army Corps of Engineers Suspends Nome Port Study," *The Alaska Star*, October 28, 2015; McDowell Group, "Port of Nome Strategic Development Plan," Prepared for City of Nome, January 2016, <http://www.mcdowellgroup.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/1555-Port-of-Nome-Strategic-Development-Plan-Final.pdf>.
- ³⁷ Dan Joling, "Alaska Deep-Water Port Proposed for Vessels in Arctic Waters," *Associated Press*, February 5, 2018.
- ³⁸ Tyler Stup, "WIIN and NDAA Make an Arctic Deep Draft Port More Likely," *Alaska Public Media*, January 11, 2017.
- ³⁹ Elwood Brehmer, "Army Corps of Engineers Expands Plan for Nome Port," *Anchorage Daily News*, January 8, 2020.
- ⁴⁰ Diana Haecker, "U.S. Army Corps Signs Off on Port of Nome Expansion," *The Nome Nugget*, June 5, 2020; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District, *Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study: Nome, Alaska*, March 2020, vi, <https://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Portals/34/docs/civilworks/publicreview/portofnome/FinalNomeIFREA29May2020signed.pdf?ver=2020-06-02-192545-533>.
- ⁴¹ Alaska Business, "Congress Funds Array of US Corps of Engineers-Alaska District Projects in 2021," January 27, 2021, <https://www.akbizmag.com/industry/construction/congress-funds-array-of-us-corps-of-engineers-alaska-district-projects-in-2021/>.
- ⁴² N. Kettle, J. Martin, and M. Sloan. 2017. Nome Tribal Climate Adaptation Plan. Nome Eskimo Community and the Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy. Fairbanks, AK https://uaf-accap.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Nome-Tribal-Climate-Adaptation-Plan_2017.pdf.
- ⁴³ U.S. ACE Alaska District. *Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study*, 2020, 232.
- ⁴⁴ McDowell Group, "Port of Nome Strategic Development Plan".
- ⁴⁵ U.S. ACE Alaska District. *Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study*, 2020, 10.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.; Malte Humpert, "U.S. Looking to Acquire 10 Additional Icebreakers, Possibly from Finland," *High North News*, July 14, 2020.
- ⁴⁷ U.S. ACE Alaska District. *Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study*, 2020, 12.
- ⁴⁸ Zoe Grueskin, "Security Cameras Installed at Port of Nome," *KNOM Radio Mission*, November 3, 2017.
- ⁴⁹ Jonathan Saul, "As Arctic Ice Melts, Polluting Ships Stream into Polar Waters," *Reuters*, August 27, 2020.
- ⁵⁰ Eleanor Huffines, "In the Arctic, Increased Vessel Traffic Brings Concerns over Pollution," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, October 16, 2018.
- ⁵¹ "IMO Authorizes New Bering Sea Routing," *The Maritime Executive*, May 26, 2018, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/imo-authorizes-new-bering-sea-routing>.