

Abstract

According to latest scientific data the ice cap in the Arctic is receding. If it recedes for a long enough part of the year, it might become feasible to use the Northwest Passage for commercial shipping. That might pose a threat to Canadian claim of sovereignty over the Northwest Passage (NWP). A key component of Canadian assertion of sovereignty over the NWP is based on the concept of *functional claim* via enforcement of environmental regulations in the NWP. These environmental regulations were introduced after the voyage of American oil tanker *SS Manhattan* in 1969 through the Northwest Passage. This thesis examines these events in order to evaluate the role (and importance) of employing environmental arguments in Canadian claim over the Northwest Passage. In 2006, the new Canadian Government presented a shift in the Arctic discourse towards a more hard-line approach. Therefore, it is important to examine the implications of this shift and its impact on the environmental line of argumentation. This text argues that the environmental approach is still relevant and actually the most viable one. But also, this text argues that Canada lacks the necessary infrastructure to enforce the regulations and to provide other shipping services. Thus, it leaves the Northwest Passage in danger of being proclaimed an *international strait* if commercial shipping through the Northwest Passage was to increase.