

BRIDGING THE GAP

STRATEGIES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND DIPLOMACY IN THE BERING
STRAIT REGION

by

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**In Collaboration with Brown University and the Coast Guard
Academy's Center for Arctic Study and Policy**



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

1. Introduction
2. Why the Arctic Matters
3. Research Questions, Problem Statement, Purpose
 - a. Research Questions
 - b. Problem Statement and Purpose
4. Historical Contextualization of the Bering Strait
 1. Treaties and Agreements
 2. Bering Strait History
 3. Recent Events
5. Data and Methods
 1. Interviews
 2. Literature Review
6. Findings
 1. Russian Government-Chukotka
 2. United States Government-Alaska
 3. Indigenous Cross-Strait Relations
 4. United States-Russia Relationship
7. Best Practices
 1. Canada
 2. US
 3. Elsewhere
8. Recommendations
 1. Use existing framework to standardize federal-tribal consultation process
 2. Appoint tribal liaisons for the federal entities working in the BSR
 3. Extend the terms of the Alaskan Coast Guard District Commander
 4. Create processes whereby traditional knowledge is included in research and policymaking for the BSR region
 5. Set the groundwork for a bilateral agreement between Russia and the US on Indigenous cultural exchange and preservation
 1. Grassroots movement recommendations
 2. Federal/state collaboration recommendations
9. Conclusions

Appendix 1: Intro Brief

Appendix 2: Meet the Authors

Bibliography

Endnotes

Disclaimer: The author conducted this study as part of his/her education at Brown University. This report is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Affairs program. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Watson Institute, by Brown University, or by any other agency.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bering Strait Region is becoming increasingly important in informing Arctic policy and regional governance. This report seeks to analyze the role of Indigenous Peoples in the policymaking process and possibilities for collaboration between the US and Russia in the region. Our findings stem from thirty interviews conducted in Nome, Anchorage and DC in February 2017. The key findings are divided into four topics.

1. Russia-Chukotka

Conditions for Indigenous Peoples are very different in Chukotka than on the US side. For Chukotkans to have meaningful dialogue with Alaskans, their relationship with the Russian government would need to undergo substantial change.

2. US-Alaska

Our interviewees consistently expressed frustration about the lack of standardization in the federal-tribal consultation process; the scarcity of tribal liaisons; the poor use of traditional knowledge in the decision making-process and the volatility of the political arena.

3. Indigenous cross-strait relationships

Russian and Alaskan tribes share a very rich common heritage and these relationships are in danger because of several factors. However, programs such as the Shared Beringian Heritage Program and the Bering Strait Messenger Network have succeeded in adding an element of hope to the possibility of revitalized relationships.

4. US-Russia

Based on our interviews, many believe that the Arctic is the best arena for Russia-US collaboration. However, several factors complicate the potential for cooperation, such as poor communication on the ground, incompatibilities when it comes to governance style and an uncertain political milieu. Nonetheless, Russian-US relations in the Arctic Council and the Coast Guard Forum are positive.

Our **recommendations** for encouraging Indigenous and local participation in the policymaking process and improving relations across the strait are as follows:

- a. To use existing framework to standardize the federal-tribal consultation process
- b. To appoint tribal liaisons for federal entities working in the BSR
- c. To extend the terms of the Alaskan Coast Guard District Commander
- d. To create formal processes whereby traditional knowledge is included in research and governance decisions for the Bering Strait Region
- e. For Russia and the US set the groundwork for a bilateral agreement on Indigenous cultural exchange and preservation through both grassroots movements and federal-state collaboration

1. INTRODUCTION

Maritime traffic in the Bering Strait has doubled in less than a decade.¹ Scientists expect 2017 to yield record high temperatures in the Arctic, leading to record low ice coverage in the Arctic Ocean.² As Arctic ice melts, it will be easier for tourists, cargo ships and speculators looking to extract Arctic natural resources to enter the region. Changing environmental conditions will drive greater human activity throughout the Bering Strait Region (BSR). For communities in the region, the opening of the Arctic offers many new opportunities, but also presents new threats and challenges.

Many view increased maritime traffic as an opportunity for growth. However, it will cause challenges to the ways of life of the communities in the region. Increased traffic means that crowded waterways could hamper local and Native fishing, harm vulnerable sea life, and raise the risk of oil spills. Policymakers will need to address these oncoming challenges in a way that is informed by both experts and those who live and depend on the Bering Sea. They will also have to consider how to involve the Russian Federation, which borders the US in the Bering Strait, without whom effective governance will not be possible.

Preparing for a new climate means grappling with policy problems on every level of governance, from Indigenous village communities to the United Nations. This report seeks to provide insight into Bering Strait stakeholders' perceptions and concerns for the future of this critical region. It also offers suggestions for the facilitation of increased input from local and Indigenous communities and how their historical, cultural and familial links across the strait could set the foundation for future policy. Local and tribal involvement in policymaking will serve to improve regional governance and to aid efforts to collaborate with Russia.

In the past, Indigenous relations across the strait were a catalyst for rapprochement between the US and Russia. The events following the Cold War demonstrated the enormous potential that this region possesses when it comes to improving these collaborative ties.³ At a time when there is much uncertainty regarding the future of US-Russia relations, the BSR could be the ideal place for a first step towards co-operation. Closer ties between both countries will result in increased stability in regional governance and a more efficient division of responsibilities for joint search and rescue (SAR) and oil spill response missions. The common heritage across the strait provides an opportunity to insulate this Russian and American issue from political upheavals elsewhere. A stronger working relationship between the two countries should thus be encouraged to create a better, safer environment for the peoples of Alaska and Chukotka.

The BSR is poised on the brink of seismic change. The responses of policymakers in the next few years will have far-reaching repercussions, but will affect local and Indigenous

communities on both sides of the Strait the most. This is a chance for policymakers to act instead of react. It is crucial for local and Indigenous Peoples to have the opportunity to influence these critical decisions. The new changes that are taking place in the region present an opportunity for policymakers to plan for and shape the future of the Bering Strait Region.

2. WHY THE ARCTIC MATTERS

All recent American presidents have expressed a desire for a ‘reset’ with Russia. Fortunately, the present-day situation presents a new opportunity for the region.⁴

Russia and the United States have achieved strong collaboration in the BSR. Nuclear negotiations, territorial disputes and accusations of espionage overshadow the fact that Russia and the United States share a maritime border. The waters of the BSR and its communities bind Russia and the US. The common values and commitments that both nations share are exemplified by the family ties on either side of the BSR. The Arctic, like space, could serve as an area to foster cooperation between the two nations.

The residents of the BSR will face threats to their food sources, villages and ways of life. Some communities have already petitioned the federal government for funds to move their villages inland, away from coastal erosion.⁵ If the US and Russia cannot reach resolutions on how to manage the fish stocks and marine mammals these villages depend on, it will present an added challenge. The costs of relocating these communities on the taxpayer is astronomical: it costs between \$80 and \$130 million to move the critical infrastructure of a standard Native village.⁶ The better strategy is to invest in the sustainability of these communities’ livelihoods.

The Bering Strait Region may not only provide the chance for diplomatic rapprochement in coming years, but will also showcase the two countries’ ability to coordinate when circumstances demand. In this report, we advocate for the use of soft diplomacy to encourage effective governance of a critical waterway.

The changes that are taking place in the Arctic will greatly impact American society. Melting sea ice will alter Arctic shipping, fishing, tourism, resource development and military operating capacity. The next decade will change maritime conditions, perhaps reducing travel time between North America and Asia. Ships will be able to access this coveted route through the Bering Strait, meaning control of the region could easily translate to economic leverage. At the same time, half of the United States’ fish supply comes from Alaskan waters. As temperatures warm, these fish stocks are migrating north and they will be bottlenecked in the Bering Strait. Proper planning and coordination with the Russian government and local communities could therefore help ensure America’s fishing stocks.

Finally, it is no secret that the United States is behind when it comes to investing in the Arctic. American policy officials have estimated that Russia’s Arctic infrastructure far exceeds that of the US.⁷ Russian presence in the Arctic means that they stand the best

chance of safely extracting the region's rich resources and solidifying their territorial claims. By not pursuing its Arctic interests, the United States risks losing its existing stake in the region and neglecting the American communities in Alaska. A far better alternative is to engage the Russian government by emphasizing cultural connections and approach these changing conditions as allies.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PURPOSE

3.a. Research Questions

The Bering Strait Region presents an opportunity for the United States and Russia to cooperate and work with Indigenous Peoples to lay a foundation for improved governance and collaboration in the Arctic.

How can local and Indigenous communities and organizations in the region continue to contribute to improved regional governance through utilizing and enhancing community, cultural, and family relationships that span the Bering Strait?

Sub-questions:

- (1) How can existing cross-strait relationships among BSR communities serve as a foundation to enhance collaboration with Russia?
- (2) How might these relationships and networks serve as a foundation for the creation of a shared vision and guiding objectives by US and Russian responsible agencies?
- (3) How can local and Indigenous communities and organizations in the BSR better contribute and have a voice in the policymaking process?

3.b. Problem Statement and Purpose

The Bering Strait Region is home to a wide range of Indigenous Peoples and local organizations whose livelihoods will be affected by the increase in human activity in the Arctic.⁸ The BSR's close ties to Russia mean that it is critical for effective regional governance. Throughout history, the people from the Bering Strait Region have maintained community, cultural and family connections with their counterparts across the strait.⁹ The case of Little Diomed and Big Diomed shows how closely intertwined US and Russian communities are in the Arctic, with only an invisible border and a narrow channel separating them. The American Department of State recognizes these deep ties and allows travel without visas for Indigenous Peoples between Russia and the United States.¹⁰ Therefore, it is key to maintain a good working relationship between the

US and Russia in the Arctic not only for the sake of security, but also for cultural wellbeing.

However, the Russian Federation and the US government have diverging ideological and structural approaches to governance. This complicates the potential for greater cooperation in the BSR. Indigenous ties across the strait, an element that binds Russia and the US together, could therefore serve as a basis for improved diplomacy between the two countries.

As McKenzie et al. have asserted, it is imperative that both nations remain committed to their Arctic relationship, regardless of the other strains in their relations.¹¹ This has been tested recently by the Crimean crisis, disputes in Ukraine and the war in Syria. Even in these tense diplomatic periods, the United States and Russia have continued to cooperate in the Arctic. Both governments should seek to maintain this composure in the future, and allow the knowledge and ties that the Indigenous Peoples in the region share to inform their policies in the BSR.

One issue that will inform regional governance in the near future is Alaskan Indigenous leaders actively seeking a seat at the table with policymakers. Indigenous Peoples want to be informed, and they want to participate in the decision-making processes that directly affect their communities. Failing to amplify their voices will dampen the potential for improved cross-strait relations.

The purpose of this report is therefore to recommend strategies for the United States to increase participation of local and Indigenous Bering Strait communities in the policymaking process, thereby improving regional governance through enhanced relations with Russia.

4. HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE BERING STRAIT REGION

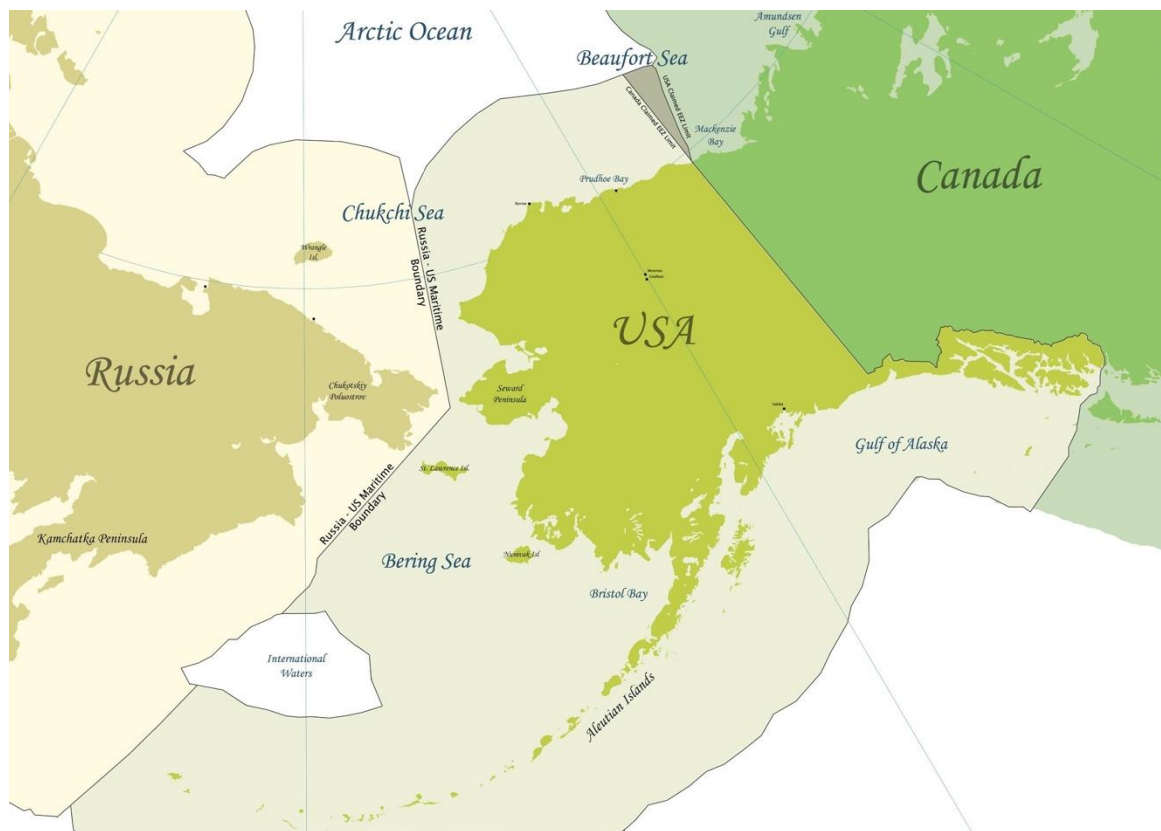
4.a. Treaties and Agreements

4.a.i. Treaties and Agreements between the US and Russia

Russian and American collaboration in the BSR is key for improved regional governance. Although it might seem complicated for both countries to cooperate at an international level, the Arctic has proven to be an arena where the two countries can set aside their differences to work together. The treaties and agreements below show examples of collaboration between the US and Russia on issues concerning the Arctic, and could serve as models to be followed in the future.

In 1973, Canada, Denmark, Norway, the USSR and the USA signed the *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears*.¹² These Arctic nations took an important step to fight for the legal protection of one of the most endangered mammals in the north, also recognizing Indigenous subsistence rights. Within the agreement, these countries emphasized their commitment to the protection of the flora and fauna of the Arctic region and particularly that of the precarious state of polar bear populations, in an effort to foster more cooperation in Arctic affairs. Although this was a multilateral agreement, it constituted an important example of nations with as different outlooks as those of the USSR and the USA during the Cold War putting their issues aside and working together. This highlighted the fact that the Arctic presented a very unique arena, where Russian and American collaboration was possible despite political differences.

UNCLOS, or the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, was concluded in 1982 and came into force in 1994.¹³ It introduced several provisions, of which the most significant dealt with setting limits for territorial and internal waters, establishing exclusive economic zones, continental shelf jurisdiction and guidelines for scientific research and settlement of disputes, thus making it extremely relevant to US-Russian relations in the Arctic. Although UNCLOS has been ratified by more than 160 states, the US has yet to take the step because of opposition to Part XI of the Convention. Part XI established the ISA (International Seabed Authority), which would serve to authorize the exploration and mining of seabeds, as well as to deal with the collection and distribution of royalties from said mining. Arguing that this has detrimental effects on the economy and security of the United States, UNCLOS has never been formally ratified, although all other provisions of the Convention are accepted by the US as customary international law.



ARCTICECON "UNITED STATES – RUSSIAN MARITIME BOUNDARY AND EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES." ARCTICECON. JANUARY 11, 2012. ACCESSED MARCH 16, 2017. [HTTPS://ARCTICECON.WORDPRESS.COM/2012/01/11/UNITED-STATES-RUSSIAN-MARITIME-BOUNDARY-AND-EXCLUSIVE-ECONOMIC-ZONES/](https://arcticecon.wordpress.com/2012/01/11/united-states-russian-maritime-boundary-and-exclusive-economic-zones/)

Several years later, in 1988, the US and the USSR signed an agreement on mutual fisheries relations.¹⁴ Previous agreements between the US and the USSR in 1976 and February of 1988 on related fishery issues had been successful, so both countries signed yet another agreement further regulating the countries' cooperation in the field of fisheries.¹⁵ This would then serve as a basis for the so-called "Donut Hole Agreement" in 1994, referenced below.

In 1990, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics reached a landmark agreement regarding their maritime boundary.¹⁶ The *Agreement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Maritime Boundary* defined the boundary between the nations in the Bering and Native Chukotkan Seas, the Arctic Ocean and a portion of the North Pacific Ocean. This seemed to resolve the border issue that affected disputed territories between the two countries, but the agreement was never formally ratified by the Russian government. Nonetheless, the agreement seems to hold to this day, with both countries patrolling the area to ensure that there are no border violations.¹⁷

Four years later, in 1994, the *Convention on the Conservation and Management of the Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea* constituted another example of collaboration between the US and Russia in the BSR.¹⁸ In their 1990 agreement, the United States and Russia defined their ocean jurisdictions as extending 200 nautical miles from their coastlines. However, there was a part of the Central Bering Sea that remained outside the exclusive economic zones of either country, and was thus termed the 'Donut Hole' (which can be observed in the map above). Japan, South Korea, China, Poland, Russia and the United States all partook in extensive fishing of pollock in the region, which led to its depletion and endangered the ecosystems and marine mammals which depended on it, such as seals and sea lions. In 1994, all the states that had been actively fishing in the area came together, and signed a convention regarding the regulation of fishing within that area.¹⁹

In May 2011, the White House released the *Joint Statement of the President of the United States of America and the President of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Bering Strait Region*.²⁰ Within it, both administrations recognized the success of the Shared Beringian Heritage Program in providing a better understanding of the ties between Chukotkan and Alaskan Indigenous communities, noted the importance of the region for both countries, the necessity of protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples living in the BSR, as well a desire to deepen cooperation between the two countries in the BSR.²¹ As a high-level acknowledgement of the importance of the BSR, this statement served to reiterate the importance of the need for collaboration between the US and Russia in the Arctic. Although relations between the countries have changed since 2011, the necessity for joint management of the Arctic has only grown stronger with the changes in traffic and the environment.

4.a.ii Treaties and Agreements Affecting Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous rights and government structures that dictate federal interactions with Indigenous communities are inseparable from our research question. In order to have meaningful conversations with Indigenous Peoples and effectively integrate them in the policymaking process, factors such as their legal rights and the background which builds on the current consultation processes need to be understood. Below we attempt to give a brief overview of relevant policies in the context of our research question.

In 1971, President Nixon signed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), a pivotal piece of legislation for Alaska Natives. The goal was to resolve land disputes, stimulate economic development and preserve Native culture. Alaska Native Corporations were created under the federal law and were granted ownership of a portion of Indigenous lands that they had historically used, and they were compensated for the rest by the federal government. The funds from the compensation created Alaska Native corporations, at the regional and village levels, where most Alaska Natives are eligible to be shareholders. Today, the legislation is still hotly debated. Some believe that ANCSA was an innovative approach to an intractable issue, and that the integration of a capitalist model would better position Alaska Native communities to thrive. Others are more critical, arguing that the Indigenous Peoples were coerced into settling too much land for too little compensation. Although some Indigenous Peoples are dissatisfied with the act, the corporations are very entrenched in Alaskan society, making it difficult to reach a consensus amongst Alaska Natives regarding whether to condemn or embrace the act.

Several years later, in 1992, the US government amended the National Historic Preservation Act, first passed in 1966. This legislation is the basis for the tribal consultation provisions in the American Council on Historic Preservation's (ACHP) regulations. The 1992 amendment of Section 101(d)(6)(B) determined that Federal agencies were required, as part of the responsibilities defined under Section 106, to consult with any tribe 'that attaches religious and cultural significance to historic properties that may be affected by an undertaking'.²² Although tribal consultation has been increasingly recognized by the federal government since the initial passing of this law, problems often arise because the term consultation is loosely defined. To further complicate things, state agencies interpret consultation rights differently, and sometimes do not even recognize the right to consultation on a government-to-government basis. Different agencies therefore take consultation to mean different things, from meeting with Indigenous Peoples and tribes and seeking input, to merely seeing it as the need to inform them of a decision that has already been made. Muddled into this are personality politics, which play a large role in the interpretation of consultation rights. Unfortunately, the legal framework is so malleable that it often comes down to the specific person in charge of arranging consultation, and their own views on the matter, to decide how tribes are included in the decision-making process.

In the *Lower Brule Sioux Tribe v. Deer* case of 1995, the tribe sought to define meaningful consultation to be 'tribal consultation in advance with the decision maker or

with intermediaries with clear authority to present tribal views to the [...] decision maker'.²³ The consultation would take the form of a short meeting, where the federal agency would set forth their proposed actions, explaining the reasoning behind them, and the tribe would then have the ability to issue a motion of support for the decision, or to reject it.²⁴ However, this rarely seems to be the case. More often than not, our interviewees claimed that consultation rights simply translate into the right to be informed of decisions that have already been made.

Clinton strove to make progress by issuing an Executive Order in 2000 on Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments, but it did not seem to lead to any tangible results.²⁵ Consultation rights gained momentum once more under the Obama administration. In 2009, Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation.²⁶ Within it, he reinforced the need to include the voices of Indigenous Peoples in the policymaking process, especially when it affected their communities, and reiterated that it was a requirement for federal agencies to follow the procedures detailed in Clinton's Executive Order. Nevertheless, the way in which federal agencies interact with tribal governments is still not standardized, and the differences between agencies' attitudes persist to this day.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.²⁷ The Declaration constituted a significant step towards recognizing the responsibility of nations and states to consult with Indigenous Peoples before undertaking actions that impact their communities.²⁸ The problem with this Declaration, however, was that it was mostly symbolic in nature, and has no legally binding consequences for states who chose to disregard its suggestions.

4.b. Bering Strait History

4.b.i Chukotka

For much of history, invading powers found little success in the Chukotka region. Many Russian leaders attempted to subjugate the Indigenous Peoples, especially when the resource wealth of the Kamchatka peninsula was discovered. Nonetheless, the area was difficult to hold, and for the past three centuries, Russian control over Chukotka has ebbed and flowed. Due to its location and relative autonomy, Chukotka also had a great deal of contact with the West since around 1820. In fact, Chukotka is actually closer to Washington D.C. than it is to Moscow.²⁹

However, the advent of the Soviet Union and two World Wars led to Native resettlement processes and enormous mining operations. The value of Chukotka and its proximity to the United States meant that the Russian government guarded it jealously, and for forty years during the Cold War there was a so-called "ice curtain" separating Chukotka from its American neighbor.

During the fall of the Soviet Union, Chukotka gained nominal independence. Yet, the period of openness following *glasnost* and *perestroika* was cut short by the election of

Governor Aleksandr Nazarov in 1992, who closed off the region to outsiders—Russian or foreign. His policies crippled Indigenous Peoples' efforts to return to their traditional way of life and take care of one another. Nazarov has also been accused of embezzlement, and the Native tribes maintain that little federal money made it to the region.³⁰ The upheaval caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in conjunction with Nazarov's repressive regime was too disorienting for the Indigenous Peoples of Chukotka to establish their Native rights in the new Russian Federation.³¹

In more recent years, the region has gotten more help from the government. Roman Abramovich, a billionaire Russian oil magnate, assumed the post of governor following Nazarov. Many who study the region expressed suspicions about Abramovich's motives, since he is well-known as one of Russia's most powerful and controversial oligarchs.³² Siberian expert Fiona Hill noted in her book, *The Siberian Curse*, that Russian oligarchs have tendencies to "carve out fiefdoms for themselves in remote, resource-rich areas so that they can increase their influence at the center".³³ The governor owns a Chukotkan gold mine and his oil company was active in the region.³⁴ While life in Chukotka is difficult for the Natives, it offers an abundance of opportunities to Russian politicians and businessmen.³⁵

Still, Abramovich's governorship injected huge amounts of wealth into the regional economy through his charitable donations, business establishments and income taxes.³⁶ Abramovich effectively took over the role of the Russian state, supporting the population out of his own pocket: salaries rose five-fold during his term and helped the region claw its way out of a financial abyss.³⁷

Despite the generosity of their former governor, Chukotkans are by no means a liberated people. Democracy indicators consistently rank Chukotka near the bottom among the Russian regions.³⁸ When Abramovich stepped down as governor and passed the title to his protégé Roman Kopin, this rank fell even further, to the third least democratic state in the Federation.³⁹ Today, the region remains closed to outsiders and is tightly controlled and monitored by the Russian state.

4.b.ii Friendship Flight of 1988

June 13, 1988 saw a remarkable collection of passengers convene at the Nome International Airport. Alaska Natives, diplomats, academics and reporters all boarded a flight to the Russian city of Provideniya, a flight that would become an overture to the end of the Cold War.⁴⁰

This was a momentous and emotional occasion. Following War World II, the two Bering Strait countries halted any interactions across the border. Native families that had traveled freely back and forth for centuries were isolated on either side of the Bering Strait, and this vital community pathway was closed down by governments far away in Moscow and Washington D.C. During these forty years memories faded, as elders who remembered their relatives on the other side passed away.

The fall of the “ice curtain” also marked the beginning of a renaissance period for Siberian-Alaskan relations. Alaskan-Yupik, Alaskan-Inupiaq and Siberian-Yupik families who had been separated for decades reunited. Russian and Alaskan students attended each other's universities. A Russian ship brought fuel to Nome during the harsh winter of 2012 and Indigenous whalers and subsistence representatives from both countries set up coordination commissions.⁴¹

The initial friendship flight was remarkable not only for what it accomplished, but how it was accomplished. Private citizens, rather than federal entities, spearheaded the effort. This included people like Nome resident Jim Stimpfle, a real estate businessman from Nome, who found his calling in connecting these Alaskan and Chukotkan families. He was well-known for concocting outside-the-box ideas, such as sending weather balloons loaded with gifts across the strait in the hopes of communicating friendship to the other side. The 1988 friendship flight was the brainchild of Stimpfle and a handful of other dedicated activists, and they happened upon the right political moment.⁴²

During this period, Gorbachev was looking for high-profile examples of cooperation with the West. There were a number of events that were highly publicized in that time, apart from the friendship flight. In 1987, a swimmer from California named Lynne Cox swam between the Diomedede islands, which garnered media attention.⁴³ A woman from Juneau, Dixie Belcher, took a group of almost one-hundred musicians to Russia in the mid-80s as an effort to encourage more interaction across the Bering Strait, serving as an example of what the efforts of personal diplomacy could achieve. She had been fighting for more than three years to open up the borders, and had expressed her views that “[...] people need to reach out as people, and not leave it to the diplomats. The diplomats are not working.”⁴⁴

These were the honeymoon days. Alaska Airlines had regular passenger flights across the Bering Sea for about 10 years. In 1989, both governments established visa-free travel for Natives on either sides of the border, making the travel process quicker and cheaper. In 2012 the visa-free program was curtailed due to “administrative issues”, according to the U.S. State Department, and even Native residents had to apply for and buy visas. The Bering Strait Regional Commission reported in 2015 that the issue was resolved and that visa-free travel was taking place again.⁴⁵

Yet eventually the Alaska Airlines flights stopped, and contact across the strait declined. Bering Air, based in Nome, still makes the journey to Chukotka, but their website states: “Chukotka – the region where Bering Air flies – is still considered to be a “closed” region within the Russian Federation. U.S. citizens and other nationals must have a valid passport, Russian visa and an official entry permission document signed by appropriate Russian authorities. Visas are issued based upon an invitation from a person or corporation.”⁴⁶

This statement gives a taste of the barriers—both financial and bureaucratic—that locals face when trying to cross the border. The visa-free program is still operating, but the byzantine bureaucracy, difficult communication and high costs of chartering a plane

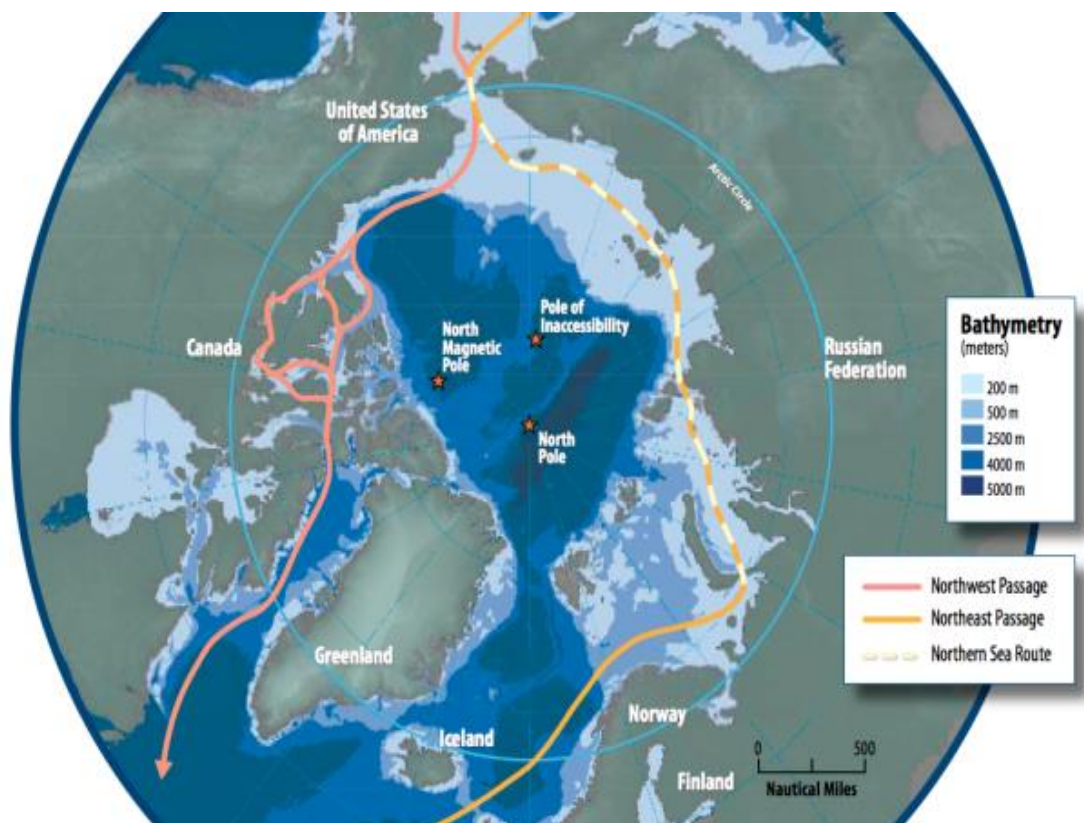
have dissuaded many from attempting to visit. Since the program's inception in 1993, the U.S State Department permitted visa-free travel for 4,800 visitors from Chukotka. However, in 2013, only about 30 Alaska Natives traveled visa-free.⁴⁷ As American and Russian geopolitical relations have declined, so have the cultural interactions.

It is possible that such a diplomatic rapprochement was easier in this era because at the time, Gorbachev yielded a great deal of authority to the remote regions of Russia, and encouraged Chukotka to negotiate joint ventures with Alaska. Today's national leaders have expressed desire for improved relations, but the political circumstances are not analogous to 1988. President Putin has centralized control back in Moscow, and Chukotka residents are heavily discouraged from interacting with the West. However, when the grassroots movement to initiate the Alaska Airlines flight began, the political landscape also looked challenging.

4.c. Recent Events

4.c.iii.a Vessel Traffic

A map of Arctic shipping routes, including the Northern Sea Route over Russia. (Public Domain photo courtesy the Arctic Council)



The need for diplomatic cooperation today is also arguably greater than it was in 1988, given the swift changes taking place in the Arctic. The metamorphosis includes both changing natural conditions and human activity. No event demonstrated this more starkly than the voyage of the luxury cruise ship *Crystal Serenity* through the Northwest

Passage last August. Ordinarily, sea ice would have stopped such an undertaking, but the waters are becoming increasingly navigable. In fact, *The New York Times* quotes a passenger who remarked “The trip wasn’t quite what I had expected. [...] Because of global warming this year, the ice has melted so much that actually we had to look for ice rather than try to avoid it.”⁴⁸ This startling statement illustrates the changing conditions in the Arctic which local and Indigenous communities are facing.

Additionally, the massive vessel, which carried over 1,000 passengers, sparked both hopes and fears from those in the towns visited by the *Serenity*. The possibility of an accident loomed large, since few of these areas had the capacity of infrastructure to respond.⁴⁹ At the time, Nome had only 18 hospital beds available.⁵⁰ Many were also concerned about threats to the environment, yet few on the Alaskan side knew if the Russians shared their concerns, let alone how they would coordinate should something happen in the middle of the Bering Strait.⁵¹

The U.S. National Park Service has recently created a projection for what to expect of Bering Strait vessel traffic in 2025. The simulation estimates that two to eight percent of ships that currently use the Suez and Panama canals will begin using the Northwest Passage instead.⁵² According to KNOM, a local radio station in Nome, the National Park Service is working with local and Indigenous organizations to try to predict locations that are especially vulnerable to oil spills and marine animal disruptions.⁵³ There are many calls to involve Russia in this planning process, since these challenges cross the international dateline.

One bright spot in the middle of political tensions between the US and Russia has been the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, an international organization of the Arctic countries’ coast guards. The Forum is dedicated to enhancing inter-service relationships in order to deliver immediate benefits to Arctic stakeholders.⁵⁴ While almost all military contact between Russia and the U.S. has terminated, both countries’ coast guards have managed to continue operational cooperation. The Arctic Institute’s Andreas Østhagen has argued that these organizations are capable of holding two opposing views simultaneously: “both Norway and the United States have recognized that cooperation on low-level coast guard issues can be kept separate from a strong symbolic response in reaction to Russian actions in Ukraine.”⁵⁵ The United States Coast Guard has recognized the importance of working with Russia on ocean governance, and has prioritized cooperation in the region. Separating high and low level political partnerships offers a blueprint for Bering Strait operations in the future, and suggests that policymakers should be optimistic when it comes to Russian participation.

4.c.ii. Recent Events Impacting Indigenous Peoples

Executive Order 13689

Recent events relating to consultation and representation rights have greatly affected Indigenous Peoples. In December 2016, Obama signed Executive Order (EO)13689

which established the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. Within it, he established a mechanism to receive input directly from Alaska Native communities in the policymaking processes, stating that “these communities possess a unique understanding of the Arctic ecosystem and their traditional knowledge should serve as an important resource to inform Federal decision-making.”⁵⁶ The EO also emphasized the importance of traditional knowledge in coordinating federal efforts in the Arctic. It created the Bering Task Force, which is required to perform regular consultation with a Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council, to be formed within six months of the EO. This Tribal Advisory Council was to be composed of eleven elected officials representing Alaska Native tribal governments in the Northern Bering Sea area, and was charged with providing recommendations on activities, regulations or policy that may affect actions or conditions in the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area.

The order gave special attention to climate resilience; the rights, needs and knowledge of Alaska Native tribes; the delicate and unique ecosystem; and the protection of marine mammals and other wildlife.⁵⁷ Although this Tribal Advisory Council would be something that could potentially change the policymaking process for the Bering Sea area, formally including tribes, it faces two challenges. Firstly, there was no specific funding allocated to the formation of the Council, and with four out of the six months established by the EO having passed, some have started to doubt that this Council will ever see the light of day. Secondly, if the region does overcome the obstacles to the formation of this Advisory Council, it risks being unoriginal and suffering from the same endemic issues that plague tribes’ consultation rights, depending on the Bering Task Force’s interpretation of consultation. Nevertheless, it was an encouraging step taken by the Obama administration on its way out to further recognize the need in the region to include traditional knowledge and Indigenous Peoples in the decision-making process.

Improving Tribal Consultation and Tribal Involvement in Federal Infrastructure Decisions

In early January of 2017, the Department of Interior, Department of Defense and Department of Justice published a report entitled ‘Improving Tribal Consultation and Tribal Involvement in Federal Infrastructure Decisions’.⁵⁸ The report provided non-binding recommendations for federal agencies, but these did not have any legal consequences.⁵⁹ This built on the Obama administration’s efforts to improve the government-to-government relationship between the federal government and Indigenous tribes, in part to address concerns that tribal consultation policies are often poorly implemented.

The report states “Tribes have expressed frustration with inconsistent authorities, implementation, policies, and practices across the Federal Government and across the country with regard to consultation.”⁶⁰ This is consistent with the findings from our interviews. The report also collected feedback on the best practices for consultation with tribes and asked the tribes to provide information on two broad categories, “promoting meaningful government-to-government engagement within the existing framework” and “identifying any necessary change to the existing framework.”⁶¹

Although this report was conducted at the national level, the findings are representative of the sentiment we encountered in Alaska. The Indigenous leaders we interviewed told us, without any reference to this report, that consultation is only fruitful when there is a possibility for sincere partnerships and willingness on the part of federal agencies to reach a consensus. During our interviews, we encountered views expressed in this report that, at times, federal infrastructure projects were imposed on Indigenous communities that did not need or wish for said projects. These projects were carried out without any consultation with Indigenous leaders, or the population at large, who were then left to pay for the projects.

In the Obama administration's report, tribes also referenced the fact that they often have to educate federal agents on Indigenous issues, which was also voiced by many of our interviewees, leading to our recommendations to appoint tribal liaisons and to extend terms of Alaska District Commander. Although the report called for the consistency of federal agencies when dealing with tribes, we argue that more action is required on this topic.

Requests for Tribal Recognition at the United Nations

On February 7th 2017, the Navajo Council Delegate asked for tribal representation at the United Nations in an effort to advocate for the Navajo Nation to become an official member of the United Nations.⁶² This action is symbolic of the struggles of many Indigenous tribes to be fully recognized as sovereign bodies when trying to obtain government-to-government consultations. Delegate Brown presented before the UN and asked that Navajo Nation no longer be considered a non-governmental organization.

Officially, Navajo Nation has sovereign status because its representatives are democratically elected to represent and act on behalf of the Navajo people. Brown argued for the creation of a new category within the UN to ensure that Indigenous tribes with sovereign status would be allowed to 'participate in all meetings to the fullest extent regarding issues that may affect the Navajo people, their land, territories and resources'.⁶³ This recent event relates to movements that there have been across the Arctic with Indigenous Peoples fighting for their voices to be amplified and to be able to have a seat at the table.

Indigenous communities greatly desire the opportunity to influence decisions and policies that will directly impact their way of life and their communities' well-being. Building on opportunities such as the 'permanent participant' category at the Arctic Council, which allows Indigenous Peoples to have a seat at the table and grants them full consultation rights, the Navajo Nation will add force to a movement that is already gaining traction in international law. Delegate Brown's actions could thus set a precedent for the formal recognition and inclusion of Indigenous tribes as governments in their own right at an international level.

5. DATA AND METHODS

The following is an explanation of the data and research methods that informed this report’s recommendations. In addition to consulting the latest and most pertinent literature on the subject, we conducted numerous interviews with a cross-section of stakeholders. The objective was to identify common threads of opinion that could be translated into policy action.

5.a. Interviews

The foundation of this report is interviews with 30 different people, conducted over the course of three months (January 2017 - March 2017) in Anchorage, Nome, Washington D.C. and remotely. Table (1) provides a qualitative description of the interviewees, classed by position held.

	United States of America	
Interview Category	Frequency	Percent of total interviews
Federal/Local Government Official (Former or Current)	5	16.67%
Elected Official or Staff	5	16.67%
Coast Guard	1	3.33%
Military Officers	1	3.33%
Academics	2	6.67%
NGO Leaders	12	40%
For-Profit Organizations	2	6.67%
Activists	2	6.67%
Total	30	100%

From these interviews, eleven people were from Indigenous organizations (corporations, tribes, non-profits), representing 36.67% of the people with whom we spoke.

To acquire contacts, we followed an exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling method to get as wide a variety of viewpoints as possible in an attempt to avoid bias. Although we are aware of the possibility of bias that snowball sampling entails, we strongly believe that we interviewed a variety of stakeholders with different political, economic, social and developmental outlooks and backgrounds, who gave us very different responses and had contrasting opinions, making us confident that we were not simply interviewing a small subset of the affected population. We were careful not to oversample a particular network of interviewees, and to reach out to everyone who was recommended to us without discrimination, which leads us to believe that our selection of interviews is largely representative of the wider affected population.

The majority of interviews were conducted in person, in Anchorage, Nome and Washington D.C. A small number of interviews were conducted over teleconference or Skype. Interviewees were provided with the same introductory document upon first contact, and always before the interview, which outlined the project and gave them a list of sample questions to prepare for the interview. This allowed for the comparison of responses across interviewees. Interview data was stored securely online and not shared with anyone outside of the research team.

5.b. Literature Review

This report was also supported by an extensive literature review, which included periodicals, journals, government strategies and publications, international agreements, and news articles. See Bibliography for a complete list of sources.

5.b.i Articles, Journals and Periodicals

The information collected through interviews is supported by findings and opinions published in journals and periodicals. Although there were diverging opinions on some topics across our interviews and journals, some common themes emerged, which are highlighted in the *Findings* section. This report nonetheless seeks to represent all the points of view which were encountered during the interview and literature review processes.

5.b.ii International Agreements

This report also referred to international agreements, particularly bilateral agreements between the US and Russia. Agreements that were considered for the report include:

- The 1982 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*

- The 1990 *Agreement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Maritime Boundary*
- The 1994 *Convention on the Conservation and Management of the Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea*
- The 2011 *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic*
- The 2013 *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness and Response in the Arctic*

5.b.iii Government Publications

Government publications were key for the background and recommendations section of this report, as the recommendations seek to enhance existing government regulations and agreements for improved regional governance and bilateral collaboration.

Government publications include Executive Orders, Arctic Strategy reports, memos and other official publications produced by the government.

5.b.iv Indigenous Publications

Finally, this report referred to publications by Indigenous groups and NGOs, such as the ICC's Strategic Plan 2014-2018, or reports published by Kawerak on Indigenous issues in the Bering Strait Region.⁶⁴ This provided a background to assess the current state of affairs in the region from the perspective of local and Indigenous communities.

6. FINDINGS

The issues addressed by this report span multiple layers of government and the two contrasting political systems of Russia and the United States. Therefore, we have divided our findings into sections that analyze the different relationships among the key governing bodies and stakeholders.

6.a. Russia-Chukotka

The great degree of power centralization in Moscow has reduced the autonomy and increased the isolation of Chukotka. Over the course of our research we found it difficult to speak with individuals who had been to Chukotka, let alone who were from there. Many of those we spoke with who had connections to Chukotka told us that the residents are leery of speaking with Americans, as they fear retaliation from the Russian government.

Its remote geography means that Chukotka is already profoundly isolated from the outside world. According to anthropologist and Russia expert Patty Gray, most believe that the region is still under the same Soviet rules that were repealed in the early 1990s.⁶⁵ While conducting her research, she sometimes heard the rules defended by

Natives and non-Natives alike. Officials have justified keeping Chukotka closed by arguing that, “the large influx of diverse adventure seekers to Chukotka has the adverse effect of creating a criminal atmosphere”.⁶⁶ Chukotkan residents believe that the tight controls protect them from undesirable individuals who might want to enter.⁶⁷

Many of our interviewees also spoke about Russian intolerance for foreign NGOs. The Russian state is distrustful of international nongovernmental organizations, seeing them as thinly-veiled mechanisms for foreign subversion. After the anti-government protests of 2012, the Kremlin introduced new legislation that requires all groups that accept foreign funding or engage in political activism to register as “foreign agents”. This has affected Chukotkan and American interactions, particularly as Indigenous organizations were pressured to declare themselves “foreign agents” after collaborating with Americans on cultural preservation.⁶⁸

It is possible that Roman Abramovich’s posting as governor was an easy means for President Putin to re-establish governmental legitimacy in Chukotka, while still maintaining tight control over the region. Allowing Abramovich to retire was seen by some scholars as Putin’s next step in the increased centralization of power by nationalizing the country’s elite, mandating that all public office holders must divest of any foreign property.⁶⁹ Bringing elites to heel and cracking down on nongovernmental organizations means greater authoritarian rule and fewer aid for Chukotka residents.⁷⁰

This refusal to allow foreign NGOs access to the region is a problem, because Chukotka is also suffering from economic and cultural decay. The region lost 66 percent of its population between 1989 and 2002.⁷¹ Chukotka’s 78,600 residents have the highest cost of living in the Russian Federation, and must spend 75 percent of their income on food alone.⁷² While the cost of living in Alaska is also high, it is still comparable to the cost of living in America’s largest cities. In Anadyr, food is more expensive than anywhere else in the Russian Federation.⁷³ Housing is also precious, and many rely heavily on the Russian government to subsidize the costs. This has resulted in large extended families often sharing small apartments, which constitutes a decrease in the quality of life of the region.⁷⁴

These findings are meaningful because they illustrate the uphill battle facing the local and Indigenous communities when it comes to civic participation and cultural preservation. The state of governance and quality of life in Chukotka are serious barriers to advocating for more Indigenous rights. Chukotkans rely on the Russian government for basic necessities and protection. For Chukotkans to contribute to the policymaking process in the Bering Strait and renew relationships with their relatives in Alaska, they would need to obtain explicit blessing from the Russian federal government.

6.b. US-Alaska

The United States federal government has a complicated relationship with Alaska. Geopolitics mean that the state is very far removed from the rest of the country, and its particular location means that the governance issues Alaskans encounter are not readily understood by policy-makers from the lower 48. To further convolute things, tribes in Alaska are constituted differently from those in the rest of the country, and their systems of interaction with state and federal agencies is thus more complex.

One of our main findings was the frustration on the part of tribal governments, Native corporations and Indigenous-led NGOs with regard to the fact that federal-tribal consultation processes are not standardized across state and federal agencies. While the State of Alaska does not recognize tribes as sovereign bodies, the federal government does. Nonetheless, the degree to which federal agencies actually consult with tribes differs depending on the agency. This means that oftentimes, because there is no one legal framework that clearly states how consultation should take place (despite the many attempts outlined in the legal contextualization section), it comes down to personality politics. Alaskan tribes suffer from the political swings that take place every two years as a new Coast Guard District Commander is chosen, or as the state government turns over, and they effectively have to re-educate these officials on tribal policies and consultation procedures. The quality of consultations with tribes often depends heavily on these officials, and on whether they consider consultation to be a worthy use of their time. Further complicating the process is the fact that not all agencies have tribal liaisons, which means that the way in which agencies are able to interact with tribal leaders and stakeholders is subject to increased volatility.

Another source of frustration between Alaskan citizens and the federal government stems from the fact that frequently, the first respondents to a distressed vessel are other local boats, not the Coast Guard. However, these communities do not have the training, infrastructure or the equipment needed to do so safely, meaning that more lives are put in danger. Many villages would like more SAR and oil spill-response training and equipment, to achieve a higher grade of self-sufficiency until the Coast Guard can establish a closer base or expand their operations. This does not mean that locals do not appreciate the Coast Guard, which is generally held in very high esteem by BSR communities because of its dedicated outreach, including a tribal liaison. Instead, they feel that the USCG is underfunded and stretched too thin, doing the best it can with its severe constraints and limited resources.

There is also widespread dissatisfaction among Native leaders regarding the current role and place (or lack thereof) of Indigenous knowledge in the policymaking process. The federal government and the Arctic Council have not yet found a good way of integrating Indigenous knowledge and placing it at the same level as Western knowledge, even though there seems to be a consensus that traditional knowledge should be included. Some specific areas where Indigenous knowledge is seen as particularly useful is when it comes to mapping currents and noting dangerous areas for ships, or deciding which parts should be avoided due to marine mammal activity. However, some interviewees

also noted that because every aspect of Arctic life is changing so drastically due to climate variations, traditional knowledge might no longer be as practical as it previously was in helping note what specific aspects of the environment currently differ from the norm, since the change is ubiquitous. Nonetheless, Indigenous knowledge is a valuable tool which should not be discounted, and steps should be taken to better integrate it in the decision-making processes.

Particularly concerning was the fact that none of our interview subjects expressed certainty with regard to the new administration's stance on the Arctic, with many of them stating that they believed Alaska and the Arctic were not even on their radar, with the exception of climate-related concerns. As many of the issues plaguing Alaska are time-sensitive, this lack of recognition of the importance of the Arctic is troubling, and the Arctic community should work to remedy this.

6.c. Indigenous Cross-Strait Relations

Russian and Alaskan tribes across the strait share a common heritage. For thousands of years they, as the mammals which they hunt to maintain their subsistence way of life, knew no boundaries, moving freely across the waters on both sides of the strait. As the marine ecosystem is one, disregarding any man-made border, the tribes had established relationships that resulted in shared dances, language and foods flowing freely from Chukotka to Alaska.

Relations between Russia and the United States, however, seem to have impacted, perhaps irreparably, the possibility of reaching that state of union once more. Alaska and Chukotka's remoteness mean that they are often misunderstood by their own governments. They are closer to each other in their connections and outlooks than they are to D.C. and Moscow. However, as a result of their great resource wealth and strategic position to the Arctic, parts of the regions, particularly on the Russian side, are closed off. Even for the average Russian citizen it is not easy to access cities such as Provideniya or Anadyr, as the region is a designated 'closed zone'. Inevitably, this has had profound effects on the possibility for Indigenous Peoples on both sides of the strait to continue to pursue the relations they once had.

There have been renaissance periods for cultural and familial ties in the region, most recently the post-Cold War events surrounding the friendship flight. This sparked an increase in contact between the two sides of the strait at a time when it seemed unlikely that the US would encourage relations with Russia. However, it appears that the ice curtain that then thawed has begun to grow once more. Despite the difficulties that these tribes face, from the US sanctions on Russia to the Russian condemnation of interactions with the West, there are some programs in effect that are working to maintain relations between the tribes.

In many cases, it seems that the struggle to foster increased relations between Indigenous Peoples in the BSR is a fight against time. As elders die on both sides of the strait, memories of the familial relationships they had on the other side, a strong

incentive for the 're-unification' of the tribes, die with them. Furthermore, as is happening around the globe, the shared languages between the tribes are, if not completely dead, almost extinct. Although renewed interactions would perhaps revitalize these languages, the current situation makes this difficult. Few tribal members except the elders speak the languages fluently, with many members speaking only a few words, and with the impending extinction of their shared languages, another strong incentive for revitalizing relations is being erased.

Communication is thus one of the most important factors influencing cross-strait relations. Now that most people do not speak their Native languages fluently, there is an important language barrier between native Russian and native English speakers, a key but sad change. Often residents of the region, despite their proximity to each other, only speak one or the other. Thus, cultural language revitalization could be an important tie for both countries in renewing relations.

One of the more successful attempts to bridge the language gap was the Bering Strait Messenger Network, funded as part of the National Park Service Shared Beringian Heritage Program. As part of this program, the Bering Strait Messenger Network was funded for two years, and run by the Institute of the North. It was a chance once a month for people to talk to their counterparts across the strait. They hired a translator, provided by the program, to facilitate communication. The calls would be centered around a specific topic each month, and there would be experts on each side dialling in and giving their opinion on the topics discussed.

The program kept communications and connections alive, but it was a slow process, and each call took a long time because translation was needed. Although the people on both sides of the strait have shared concerns regarding the environment and economic development, this project showed how difficult communication really is. Now that the Messenger Network has run out of funding, it is even more complicated. Rules imposed by the Russian government are standing in the way of increased communication, as Chukotkans are discouraged from talking to people on the Alaskan side. Even US scientists have difficulty getting information from the Russian side, further complicated by the sanctions, which eliminated the possibility of most meaningful dialogue across the strait.

A further impediment to a renewal of relations is the expense related to cross-strait travel. While some travel is still taking place, and there have been some facilitating factors, such as a visa-free program, the prices are often prohibitive. Since Alaska Airlines withdrew its regular flights to Chukotka, one of the few options to get to the other side, especially in the winter, is through charter flights, which are not accessible to the average citizen in the region. Bering Air has some flights during the summer months, and there is some boat movement when the ice withdraws, but by and large getting to Chukotka is no mean feat. During our interviews we encountered suggestions from private citizens to introduce a ferry to the region, passing through several cities in the summer months, which would allegedly bring economic prosperity to the ports through an increase in travel and tourism. The problem, however, is related not only to

the fact that due to the harsh climate, the ferry would only be realistic during a few months of the year, but also, more importantly, to the almost certain lack of profitability of such an endeavour, which would act as a strong deterrent for any private investors.

Another example of an attempt to revitalize relations is the Shared Beringian Heritage Program, funded by the National Park Service. The program was created after an agreement between George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev in an effort to foster US-Russian collaboration in the fields of environmental protection and global change. In 1991 funding was allocated for this project, which receives around \$650,000 per year.⁷⁵ The program seeks to “foster a climate of mutual understanding and cooperation among the United States, Russia and the Indigenous People of Beringia [...]; support subsistence opportunities [...] and recognize the unique and traditional activities of Indigenous People of the region; promote the study, interpretation, and enjoyment of the natural and cultural resources of international significance; support cultural exchange between the Indigenous People on both sides of the Bering Strait.”⁷⁶

By doing this, the program seeks to develop and strengthen connections across the border, facilitating partnerships and collaboration. From a project on ‘Savoonga’s Bond and Connection to the Great Land (Chukotka)’ to ‘Traditional Knowledge of the Native People of Chukotka About Pacific Walrus and Dialogue Across the Bering Strait on Walrus-Related Concerns’ to ‘Translation of Chukchi Warfare: Mid-17th-Beginning of the 20th Century by Alexander K. Nefëdkin into English’, the Shared Beringian Heritage Program supports a wide range of endeavours to revive interactions across the strait.⁷⁷ However, although this project presents a great opportunity for cultural revitalization, it is currently understaffed, which complicates the successful running of the program.

6.d. United States-Russia Arctic Relationship

Relations between the United States and Russia are in a state of flux. The future seems to balance on the edge of a knife. Based on our interviews, many believe that the Arctic is the best arena for the two countries to foster cooperation.

Our interview subjects voiced frustration regarding Russia-US communication on the ground. Due to the government prohibitions of contact with the West, hunters and fishermen are not forthcoming about the environmental situations on their side of the strait. One marine mammal scientist recalled an oil spill incident where she and her colleagues were unable to pinpoint the source because it was probably on the Russian side, and no one would speak with them. This is indicative of the different levels of transparency and response when dealing with environmental crises at the US and Russian levels, which highlights the need for bilateral agreements.

Journalists who have traveled to Chukotka describe petty harassment from Russian border officials. Low-level communication among civilians is essential in the Arctic, because oftentimes the Coast Guards are too far to respond in a timely manner. The taboo against Western contact is impeding Arctic communities' abilities to react to emergencies.

On higher governance levels, the story is very different. The Arctic Council has proved to be a productive and cordial platform for U.S.-Russia relations, in spite of the challenges. American media narratives of Russian Arctic activity paint an alarming picture of militarization and aggressive resource exploitation.⁷⁸ According to one of our interviewees, the Russian response is that they are expanding their Arctic infrastructure because they have the most land above the Arctic Circle; they are merely capitalizing on an innate advantage. Our interview sources agreed that the real situation is a bit of both. Though there are certain military advantages to dominating the Arctic, Russia's main concerns are commercial. According to our interviewees, these commercial interests have aided in the two countries' dedication to the pooling of scientific knowledge. Sharing information has also provided a foundation for trust and confidence in mutual benefits. One interview subject characterized it as "the best kept secret in U.S.-Russian relations".

This comparison between relations on the ground and in the Arctic Council shows how difficult it is to make grassroots connections across the Bering Strait. The governing styles of the two countries are not compatible: Alaska is not analogous to Chukotka in terms of individual autonomy or governing structure. This leads us to the conclusion that a private citizen-driven campaign to restore Alaska-Chukotka connections would be less feasible today than it was in 1988, although it might help create momentum. The most promising avenue for success is through negotiations on the national scale, either through the structure of the Arctic Council, or through an independent bilateral agreement.

7. BEST PRACTICES

Throughout our research, we encountered several examples of best practices that could be fruitfully applied in the Alaskan context.

7.a. Best Practices in Canada

Canada was mentioned as an example to follow in terms of inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, having achieved a higher degree of integration than the United States. In fact, after their Arctic Council Chairmanship, Canada stated that one of its achievements was "setting a course to more consistently use traditional and local knowledge of Arctic communities in the work of the Council".⁷⁹

A particular piece of Canadian legislature that might be of interest to the US government is the "Considering Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge in Environmental Assessments

Conducted under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act”, passed in 2012.⁸⁰ This act enables relevant authorities to consult traditional knowledge in environmental assessments. It recognizes the fact that Indigenous Peoples possess knowledge about the land which can help with several tasks, such as helping identify potential environmental effects, strengthening mitigation measures, making better decisions and improving project designs, among other uses.⁸¹

Another step that the Canadian government has taken which can serve to illustrate US policymaker’s decisions regarding the integration of traditional knowledge is the creation of the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee under Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. By creating this subcommittee, Canada is recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge in wildlife regulations and policies. A similar action is desperately needed in Alaska, particularly taking into account the potentially detrimental effects of future environmental changes on subsistence ways of life.

Furthermore, the Canadian International Development Agency has expressed interest in the inclusion of traditional knowledge in their strategies, with a former president of the agency declaring that “just as the world needs genetic diversity of species, it needs diversity of knowledge systems”.⁸² The author of “CIDA: Traditional Knowledge”, Peter Croal, further cements this statement, by emphasizing the range of policies, conventions, laws and agreements, at the national and international level, requiring the application and implementation of traditional knowledge in development planning.⁸³ This provides an interesting example of the uses of Indigenous knowledge which could be applied in US agencies, from USAID to domestic agencies such as NOAA or NPS, to better integrate IK in the policymaking process.

7.b. Best Practices in the US

There are also significant examples of best practices within the US itself which could be applied to Alaska. Appendix 6 from “Improving Tribal Consultation and Tribal Involvement in Federal Infrastructure Decisions” sets out some of these procedures. Particularly relevant to our report are the successes in the Albuquerque District with respect to the relationship between the tribes and a full-time tribal liaison. The tribes have found that the tribal liaison “enhances cross-cultural communication by ensuring that Tribal perspectives and values are considered early and often”.⁸⁴ Also pertinent, relative to our recommendation of extended terms for District Commanders, is the fact that Albuquerque tribes praised the fact that new Commanders visit the reservations in the early stages of their tenure and establish regular visits to cement a good relationship with the tribes, with the Commander’s staff following suit to ensure the successful functioning of daily activities in partnership with tribes.⁸⁵

The eleven Great Lakes Tribes and the Forest Service at the Department of Agriculture also developed an effective system of interaction, embodied in an MOU, to facilitate coordinated decisions. The MOU originated in the 1990s after both the Forest Service

and the eleven Lake Superior Ojibwe Tribes which are members of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) expressed concerns about the jurisdiction of treaty rights in lands that were managed by the Forest Service.⁸⁶ GLIFWC and three entities of the Forest Service ratified the MOU in 1999, which “codifies a true government-to-government relationship and establishes a framework for collaboration based on consistent and timely communication and tribal participation in national forest decision-making.”⁸⁷ In doing so, both sides avoided legal procedures and successfully negotiated an agreement regulating their collaboration. The MOU served to highlight shared goals and to establish a “consensus-based consultation process”, becoming instrumental in facilitating the interaction between all relevant entities in the capacity of co-managers with the objective of resolving disputes and reaching agreements on co-ordinated endeavors.⁸⁸

Collaboration between the North Dakota State Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) can also be seen as an example of best practices.⁸⁹ Tribal elders in the state worked with Department of Transportation archaeologists in order to determine sites to be avoided for future highway projects. Between 2004 and 2006 a Tribal Consultation Committee was created, which now includes nineteen tribes. Additionally, the North Dakota DOT employed members from the tribes to work with the archaeologists on the field to ensure that sensitive sites were avoided. Although the current situation with the North Dakota pipeline makes it clear that not everything is working well in the state, these actions by the DOT set a good example for the rest of the US to follow.

7.c. Best Practices Elsewhere

Lastly, an international example of best practices, with regard to working with the Russian Federation on maritime issues, can be found in the Turkish Straits.⁹⁰ The Vessel Traffic Information System that was set in place in the Turkish Straits in 2004 provides a working model for the US and Russia on the separation of geopolitical issues from maritime concerns, especially when it comes to increased traffic safety. In the Turkish Straits, Russia was able to collaborate with other countries in increasing the safety of the region, which is particularly relevant for the BSR. As one of our interviewees remarked, this system works in the Turkish Straits because the body that conducts it is independent of any of the relations between the countries, which means that it is not affected by any of the ongoing political issues. Something in the BSR would have to be done similarly, due to the current political situation between the US and Russia.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.a. Use Existing Framework to Standardize Federal-Tribal Consultation Process

We recommend that the federal government standardize the way in which agencies deal with tribal consultations, by setting out guidelines by which all agencies must abide. Standardization will help to better streamline the decision-making process and homogenize the ways in which tribes are included in it, and to ensure that they are in fact included appropriately. Said action would build on both President Obama's and President Clinton's executive orders, which sought to better integrate Indigenous Peoples in the decision-making processes.

To standardize the process, an explicit definition of consultations is needed, which could be based on the Sioux tribe's definition of consultation in the case described previously in this report. A suggestion that was brought up by our interviewees again and again was that the Indigenous community member who is consulted should be a proper representative of the community, and well-versed in the issue at hand, as they should be able to effectively relay any decisions that are made.

8.b. Appoint Tribal Liaisons for the Federal Entities Working in the BSR

The standardization process should also include the appointment of a tribal liaison for all federal agencies working with Indigenous issues, which would help unify the way in which tribes can interact with federal agencies and the consultation process itself. The tribal liaison does not necessarily have to be of Indigenous origin, but should have training pertinent to the interactions of the federal government with Indigenous communities and to Indigenous issues, to avoid the time-consuming process whereby Indigenous leaders have to re-educate new tribal liaisons.

8.c. Extend the Terms of the Alaskan District Commander

To eliminate the effects of personality politics and the volatility that this induces in the policymaking process, the term of the Alaska CG District Commander should be extended from two years to a period of four years. Together with the previous recommendation, this will help with the stabilization of the Alaskan political arena, particularly when it comes to Indigenous issues, as a major complaint that we encountered was the fact that these quick turnovers meant that Indigenous communities had to re-educate the District Commander every two years on Indigenous issues.

Prolonging the term to four years will put the District Commander on the same footing as the Lieutenant Governor and the Governor. This will allow the District Commander

to participate more fully in Alaskan politics and will exponentially increase the opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to participate in the decision-making process.

8.d. Create processes whereby traditional knowledge is included in research and policymaking for the BSR region

Establish a framework under which traditional knowledge is formally included in the decision-making process for agencies dealing with Indigenous issues. Ideally this should take place in the country as a whole, as well as at higher international-level institutions such as the Arctic Council. Traditional knowledge is a very valuable tool which is often underused by agencies and organizations working in the BSR, as Indigenous Peoples have a wealth of knowledge about the environment and cross-strait relationships which could be utilized to help identify changes, as well as help strategize effectively about the future.

The Arctic Council presents a very powerful opportunity for the inclusion of traditional knowledge, and, if it could be done effectively in that institution, it would serve as an example to be followed for other intergovernmental and federal organizations. In fact, the Sustainable Development Working Group within the Arctic Council has already made specific recommendations for the inclusion of traditional knowledge.⁹¹ Canada has been able to successfully integrate traditional knowledge in their policymaking process, so it could also be regarded as a model to follow to structure the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge from Alaskan tribes in the Arctic Council.

8.e Set the Groundwork for a Bilateral Agreement between Russia and the US on Indigenous Cultural Exchange and Preservation

8.e.i Grassroots movement recommendations

Encourage private citizens to get involved in the policymaking process and take steps to demonstrate a desire for closeness between the communities across the strait.

In 1998, the activities of private citizens were pivotal in bringing about the rapprochement between Russia and the US. Although the current situation might be even more complex than that after the Cold War, it is still possible for individuals to express their willingness for renewed relations between Russian and US communities across the BSR. Activists and journalists in the region have succeeded in managing the visa-free program, suggesting the possibility of new means of transport across the strait, and making it clear that greater connection is desired by both parties.

Many of our interviewees implied that federal attention only focuses on the Arctic in the case of emergencies or other unexpected events, so high-profile citizen-led initiatives such as the ones that took place in the late 1980s would bring the desired attention to the region.

As Ms. Belcher stated in the mid-80s, "I think people need to reach out as people, and not leave it to the diplomats. The diplomats are not working."⁹² We therefore encourage citizens, particularly those residing in the Arctic, to continue to advocate and pursue private initiatives to bring both sides closer.

8.e.ii.1 Revitalize commitments and funding to cross-strait programs

The National Park Services and similar organizations which promote Indigenous cultural preservation and revitalization across the strait should be backed by an increase in funding from both the US and Russian governments to establish a renewed partnership.

On the US side, the National Park Service has been a very active agent when it comes to trying to breathe new life into the relations between Indigenous Peoples across the strait. If Indigenous Peoples' ties across the BSR are to be a basis for improved relations between Russia and the US, programs which encourage and facilitate interactions across the strait, such as the Bering Strait Messenger Network and the Shared Beringian Heritage Program in general, should become a priority, and should be backed by an increase in funding from both governments.

One particular point where there is also huge potential for improvement is lowering the cost of travel across the strait, which would surely result in an increase in communication between the BSR communities on both sides of the strait, and would thus solidify the ties that unite Russian and Alaskan Indigenous Peoples.

Scientific research also provides an opportunity for US-Russian agreements, and there are current programs, such as RUSALCA, which could be further developed to create a more lasting scientific partnership.

Expanding and enhancing the visa-free program, so it is accessible to a larger part of the population and removes some of the current bureaucratic restrictions (particularly on the Russian side) would also help facilitate more frequent communication and movement between Chukotka and Alaska.

8.e.ii.2 Attempt to engage with the Russian government to lower bureaucratic barriers to cross-strait travel

The US and Russia must come to a renewed agreement to better facilitate travel across the region.

At the moment, the visa-free program is not enough. On the Russian side, there are still many bureaucratic hoops through which Indigenous Peoples must jump to get the paperwork to cross to Alaska, despite the visa-free agreement. These procedures take time away from their families and jobs, and money, so many cannot afford such a luxury.

On the Alaskan side, people wishing to travel to Russia are sometimes dissuaded by the widespread harassment by Russian authorities of Westerners in the region. Therefore, a more far-reaching agreement is needed between both governments in order to truly facilitate the travel that is so fervently desired by their citizens across the BSR. This goal could be achieved through bilateral discussions held between the relevant authorities, including DHS and Border Guards.

CONCLUSION

Within our report we explored the possibilities for greater local and Indigenous engagement in the Bering Strait policymaking process, as well as the potential for these groups to leverage their ties with their family and neighbors on the other side of the strait to encourage US and Russian collaboration in the region. We found a great desire from these communities for these changes to be made, in order to be both more connected with the decision-making in Washington and more active within the diplomatic strategies taking place between the US and Russia.

The future of the Bering Strait Region is uncertain, but all stakeholders are bracing for sweeping changes in coming years. In order to navigate these changes, it is important that American policymakers empower local and Indigenous communities to contribute to the policies that will shape their adaptation. The stability of the region will also depend on the fruitful cooperation of the US and Russia.

Although these rapid changes might seem daunting, we see them as a powerful opportunity for both countries to take the initiative and work on preventing and mitigating the harmful effects of the changing environment. The Bering Strait Region presents a space in which the US and Russia can set aside their differences and work together to improve the lives of their citizens, and secure a region which will become key in coming years. Involving local and Indigenous communities, who have lived in the region for centuries and know it best, will help these two countries to act, and not react, to the coming transformations.

We strongly believe that policymakers have an opportunity to get ahead of major issues in the Bering Strait Region, but it will require changing gears. By adopting our recommendations, policymakers will be able to make better informed, more sustainable decisions in the Bering Strait, as well as increase the possibilities of a fruitful working relation with Russia in the Arctic. The time for the US to act is now, and we hope to see the current administration take advantage of this opportunity.

Brown University Bering Strait Policy Team

Project Description:

Brown University's Bering Strait Policy Team is composed of two graduate students from the Public Affairs program, working in collaboration with the USCG Academy's Center for Arctic Study and Policy. They are researching how local and Indigenous Bering Strait Region communities and organizations can contribute to improved regional governance through utilizing and enhancing cross-strait community, cultural and family relationships. Decreasing ice coverage and increased activity in the Bering Strait will have profound effects on the Indigenous Peoples in the region. This increased activity is largely the result of the massive natural resource wealth contained in the Arctic, which will become recoverable as ice continues to melt. In addition, the Bering Strait presents an opportunity for the United States and Russia to cooperate and work with Indigenous Peoples to lay a foundation for enhancing domain awareness and improving governance. The team will conduct thorough literature reviews and field research to provide recommendations to the Coast Guard and others on enhancing cross-strait relations for improved governance in the region. Finally, the team will carry out in-person analyses and discussions in both Alaska and Washington DC and will be prepared to present recommendations by the end of March of 2017.

Research Trips:

- Anchorage, Alaska- February 6-11th, 2017. Will attend Alaska Forum on the Environment.
- Nome, Alaska - February 11th-13th, 2017.
- Washington DC - February 16th-21st, 2017.

Agenda for Meeting:

1. Can you tell us a little about your current position? What are your top goals during your tenure?
2. What are the key issues that you see in the Arctic, the Bering, and particularly the Bering Strait?
3. What do you see as the biggest threat to regional governance in the BSR? Why?
4. How can we improve regional governance in the BSR?

5. What are your thoughts on current cross-strait relations (in general, but also, for example, community, cultural and family relationships, relationships between state and local governments, and relationships between the US and Russia)?
6. Are successful cross-strait relations important for the BSR? Why or why not?
7. What is the biggest threat to cross-strait relations in the BSR? Why?
8. Do you believe enhancing cross-strait relations will improve regional governance in the BSR?
9. How can we improve cross-strait relations?
10. What role should the Coast Guard and other government agencies play in this?
11. Are there points of agreement that we could approach the Russian government on to move towards an agreement in the Bering? Environment? Citizen participation?
12. Are we working enough with the Russians in the region now? Do you feel that there is a potential to form an agreement in the Bering region despite the impasses in other parts of the world?
13. Are we working enough with the Indigenous Peoples in the region now? Do you feel that they are sufficiently included in the decision-making?
14. Are we working enough with local organizations in the region now? Do you feel that they are sufficiently included in the decision-making?
15. What role do Indigenous Peoples play in the BSR? Is there anything that you think should change in regard to their role?
16. What role do local organizations play in the BSR? Is there anything that you think should change in regard to their role?
17. Is a shared vision and guiding objectives between US and Russia important for the region? Why?
18. How might these cross-strait relationships or networks serve as a foundation for the creation of a shared vision and guiding objectives by US and Russian responsible agencies? How might this be improved upon?
19. What role can cross-strait coordination/cooperation play in supporting the identification of protected areas and areas to be avoided, informing joint US-Russia maritime management of the broader BSR region and enhancing environmental protection in the regional perspective?
20. Do you have any contacts we should talk to? Can you introduce us to those contacts or provide us contact information for them?
21. Are you interested in seeing our report and recommendations as we move forward?

Appendix 2: Meet the Authors

Sonia Cuesta:

Sonia Cuesta is currently attending Brown University as a Master of Public Affairs candidate with an expected graduation in May of 2017. She is concentrating in environmental studies and data.

Prior to attending Brown University, Sonia attended Oxford University from 2012 to 2016. She majored in French and Italian, and spent a semester abroad in both Montpellier and Florence. While attending Oxford she interned for Oxford Development Abroad for two years, a non-profit organization that works with Indigenous communities in Nepal, Uganda and Bolivia to create sustainable development projects that fit the guidelines of what the locals actually need, working closely with in-country agencies to ensure the success of their projects. As part of her work with ODA, Sonia spent six weeks in Bolivia building water cisterns, and helped coordinate the project the following year, which centered around biosand filters.

Sonia currently lives in Providence, Rhode Island. She hopes to pursue a job in the public policy field after graduating in May.

Robyn Sundlee:

Robyn Sundlee is currently attending Brown University as a Master of Public Affairs candidate with an expected graduation in May of 2017. She is concentrating in international policy and diplomacy.

Robyn also attended Brown University from 2012 to 2016. She majored in International Relations and specialized in Persian-speaking regions. As an undergraduate she studied for a semester at University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Robyn has spent her summers in Washington DC, interning as a researcher for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and the Office of the United States Trade Representative. While at USTR, she conducted research, edited opinion pieces and drafted speeches to support the Trans Pacific Partnership. As a native of the Pacific Northwest, she has developed a great interest in Arctic issues and hopes to use her educational background to contribute to future Bering Strait policy.

Robyn studies in Providence, Rhode Island where she also works as a teaching assistant for the Department of Public Policy. Following graduation in May, she will pursue a career in international diplomacy.

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