

STANDING ON GUARD?

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In this day and age, with human migration on the rise, with skyrocketing deaths from illicit opioid use, and with the continuing threat of terrorism, smuggling and trafficking, the issue of border protection is becoming more and more of a concern for many countries targeted by drug traffickers and migrants seeking illegal entry. Many Canadians don't give our border security too much thought and assume that everything is under control. However, there is one particular practice that should be of serious concern to most Canadians since it carelessly and needlessly places the security of our borders in jeopardy.

The activity in question is the lackadaisical management of our marine anchorages which are primarily used by foreign owned and operated freighters making use of free parking for weeks and sometimes months while waiting for their scheduled pick up in Canadian ports. In Canada the anchorages are managed by the Canada Port Authorities which are "federally incorporated, autonomous, non-share corporations that operate at arms length from the federal government. They operate on a commercial basis with a view to being financially self-sufficient."

Many anchorages under the Vancouver Fraser and Nanaimo Port Authorities are situated in remote areas scattered throughout the pristine waters of the Southern Gulf Islands. In addition to polluting pristine maritime air and waters, destroying marine habitats, disrupting endangered wildlife and violating the right to quiet enjoyment of nearby residents, these foreign ships also pose an unchallenged threat to our border security.

While at anchor within swimming distance of Canadian shorelines, the foreign ships are parked a significant distance from their ultimate destinations and far from any authority responsible for their conduct. There is little, if any, monitoring for air pollution or spillage into water and no onshore video surveillance of the ships, allowing the crews of these foreign ships the freedom to do as they please. So our border security has essentially been left in the hands of foreigners.

As a resident in close proximity to some of these remote anchorages, I have noted that the conduct of operation varies significantly from one ship to another. Some ships readily comply with operational rules, and others, with lack of monitoring, have no qualms to break the rules. As a result of the frequent violations the management of the anchorages has set up a web page for reporting non-compliant activities. Therefore the onus of monitoring anchorages for noncompliance has fallen on those citizens whose rights are being violated.

I have also witnessed on many occasions activities that, to me, are inappropriate and likely in violation of regulations regarding anchorage protocols. I have seen many domestic pleasure boats make unchallenged approach to within meters of the freighters. Boats are also dispatched from the freighters to carry out "abandon ship" drills wander up to hundreds of meters away from the ships. The fact that crew members from the ships enter Canadian waters where they can interact with domestic boats presents ample opportunity for undetected ship-to-shore transfer of illicit cargo or personnel.

So some of these foreign ships are operated without adhering to local rules. Illegal activity is not uncommon in the shipping industry and there have been incidents of criminalization of seafarers who are afraid to expose criminal activities. Also there are plenty of spaces on these huge ships to hide illicit cargo or personnel that can be easily transferred to shore undetected. This scenario clearly

demonstrates the vulnerability of our border security. The Vancouver Port Authority and Transport Canada do not view this situation as a threat claiming that there has never been an incident in the past. This response is somewhat naive since it is not known for certain whether undetected incidents have or have not happened in the past. Also just because there have been no past incidents does not negate the possibility that there could be incidents in the future.

How does our anchorage management system compare with the American system in the state of Washington? Clearly there is a difference since there are never any freighters anchored in the pristine waters of the San Juan Islands as seen on [Marine Traffic website](#).

When it comes to anchorage usage, the United States takes the issue of border protection extremely seriously. Management of the anchorages in the state of Washington falls under the responsibility of the [Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee](#) (PSHSC) which has developed and regularly updates the [Puget Sound Harbor Safety Plan](#) (the Plan).

As outlined in the Plan, the PSHSC is comprised of more than a dozen voting members (stakeholder groups) which include commercial fishing, environmental groups, local governments, Native Americans, petroleum shippers, public at large, recreational boaters, state ferry systems, steamship lines and others. In addition there are 7 non-voting governmental advisors: US Coast Guard, US Army Corps of Engineers, NOAA, US Navy, US Maritime Administration, Pacific States/BC Task Force and WA Dept of Ecology. Therefore many affected parties have input to and a democratic vote for the anchorage management and all levels of governments are involved.

As stated in the Plan, “The Coast Guard is the primary advisor, an active participant and major contributor to the Harbor Safety Committee and this Plan.” The US Coast Guard is a branch of the US Armed forces and operates under the US Department of Homeland Security. Clearly the question of border security is of high importance.

To summarize, anchorage management in Washington State is run by a **democratically oriented “Committee”** that places high priority on harbor safety, guarding the coast, securing the homeland, and protecting the ecology of Puget Sound with a forceful voice from many stakeholders. Whereas, in stark contrast, anchorage management in Canada is run by a **commercially oriented “Authority”** that places priority on shipping cargo and making money with little or no input from provincial or local governments as well as the general public. The time is long overdue for the government of Canada to revamp anchorage management and operations to bring them to parity with those in the US and to remove unmanageable anchorages from remote locations where they pose a threat to our border security.