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## Framing Arctic Security NAADSN Members' Opening Comments to the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence

Wilfrid Greaves, Rob Huebert, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Suzanne Lalonde, Andreas Østhagen, and Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon

This *Quick Impact* shares the opening statements given by six members of the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN) to the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence on Monday, 28 March 2022. Please note that [official minutes of the sessions will be available on the Senate website](#).

Rob Huebert, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary

I have three points I'd like to start with. The first one is Canada is facing two existential threats to Arctic security. The first one, of course, is climate change. We're not here to talk about that. I'm here to talk about the existential threat that is now facing Canada because of geopolitical shifts that are occurring.

Canada — and I want to make this point as explicitly as I can — faces a threat and it is becoming a more dangerous threat as time goes. It's not about Russian invasion, land invasion; that's not a threat, though that's often used as a red herring.

Canada also is not protected by geography, though several of our colleagues are making this statement in the media quite a bit lately and this is, frankly, wrong.

And it's not about Arctic sovereignty. Arctic sovereignty is an important issue, but this is not what we're here to talk about. We're here to talk about Arctic security.

The threat is clear. The threat is a Putin regime that sees NATO as an existential threat. It has seen NATO as an existential threat — because of the Canadian clause in the creation of NATO in which you have to be committed to democratic principles — since at least 2008 when it declared war on Georgia to prevent Georgia from joining NATO. It then demonstrated in fact the degree to which it sees NATO as a threat by its beginning of the Ukrainian war in 2014.

Canada, therefore, given our commitment to collective security — and given our commitment to ensuring the protection of an orderly international system as a member of both NATO and NORAD — is directly threatened by this regime.

What we have seen also within this regime since 2008 is the development in which to engage us in war. Let me be very frank on this. There tends to be a tendency of seeing them as a competitor, seeing them as somebody who is doing domestic protection. In my view that is, frankly, wrong.

The first elements in which they are engaged upon war is, of course, in terms of hybrid warfare, weaponization of social media; we're seeing this in the American election, the separatist movement in Spain, the Brexit vote in the U.K. and I suspect we will find indications of influence in Canada.

But more importantly, and this is where the North is so directly threatened, is the development of Russian offensive systems in terms of the ability to engage in war since 2006, when they embarked upon this measure, basically placed the Arctic as the region in which the Russians would be directing any actions.

The Russians have changed their posture of nuclear deterrence to one of nuclear warfighting. They now have over 1,000 tactical nuclear weapons within their inventory. Those are to fight wars, not to deter wars. They have delivery systems that are increasingly deployed from the North that are increasingly confounding our ability to detect them through the NORAD systems. These include hypersonics, the undersea Poseidon system, cruise missiles and so forth.

They also have the development — and this is something that is often overlooked — of being able to completely disrupt our northern communications with a very distinct policy to having the ability of anti-satellite and anti-undersea cable capabilities.

They demonstrated this undersea cable capability with their attack on Norway just prior to relaunching their attack on Ukraine in February 2014.

They've demonstrated they can shoot down satellites by shooting down one of their own in February.

Ultimately, what we see clearly is a pattern of behaviour. Russia is not to be ignored. It is not to be belittled, but it to be recognized as the threat that it is. The threat that it has developed is, of course, focused on its capability.

Canada may wish that it had the ability to ignore or be ignored by Russia, but the reality is that this is not the case. Therefore, we need to be taking this threat as seriously as we are able to. We need to ensure that we are able to respond to it. I'm more than happy to elaborate on what I believe those steps necessary for Canadian security are in the question period. Make no mistake about it: Canada is at risk and the risk is growing.

[P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North and Professor, Trent University](#)

I live in Oxford County, on traditional Anishnabek and neutral territory that is covered by Treaty 3, the "Between the Lakes Purchase" of 1792. By taking the time to acknowledge the land that I stand on, I remind myself of the long history of silencing in this country and the need to speak truth on the journey towards reconciliation.

I am honoured to offer a few reflections on Arctic security through a Canadian lens. Russia's further invasion of Ukraine beginning in late February has confirmed that Arctic cooperation is not insulated from the events of the broader world. We have witnessed the spillover of the international tension into the sphere of circumpolar affairs, which raises fundamental questions about stability and cooperative governance in the region. That said, we need to be more careful than ever to base our decisions on well-grounded assessments of Arctic defence and security. I do not think that there is a greater likelihood of conflict arising over long-standing Arctic disputes, Arctic resources, boundaries, state sovereignty or shipping lanes. There's no greater likelihood of this now than there was a month or even a year ago.

In Canada, we often talk about the Arctic as if it is a single space. Some issues and threats are truly circumpolar in orientation, but other aspects are best considered through a regional perspective. For Canada, this might include recognizing the distinct threats faced in the Canadian Arctic and those facing our allies in the European Arctic or in the Bering Strait.

While the world faces the globally increased risk associated with Russia's blatant disregard for international law and the rules-based order following its further brutal and unlawful invasion of Ukraine, the threats and risks faced in Eastern Europe compared to the Arctic parts of Canada are distinct.

I do not think direct Russian military action against Canadian Arctic territory is at all likely for reasons of Russia's national self-interest, which we can discuss later if that's the wish of the committee. However, I do think that the Canadian Arctic faces a distinct constellation of risks, and clearly understanding these risks will allow us to appropriately allocate resources and efforts to strengthen our short- and long-term defence and security.

The framework I find helpful to sort Arctic defence and security threats of one that looks in, to and through Arctic Canada.

The first category of threats includes those that pass through or over the Arctic to strike at targets outside the region. These include cruise missiles, hyperkinetic glide vehicles, bombers and ballistic missiles. It is important, as I see it, that these weapons and delivery systems are not primarily oriented at striking Arctic targets. They are strategic systems geared toward the global balance of power and deterrence. Similarly, hybrid threats to cybersecurity — including those embedded in Chinese telecommunications infrastructure if they are allowed in Canada as part of our solution to Arctic infrastructure gaps — will constitute a threat to Canada through the Arctic.

While it is best to situate these threats on the international level of analysis and not the regional security one, they do have an Arctic nexus, because we have Arctic capabilities that are important to detecting, deterring and defending against these global threats, and we should be investing in them more. To suggest that these are about defending the Arctic specifically, rather than about defending North America more generally, is a misrepresentation.

The second category of threats are those to the Arctic. Like climate change and pandemic threats, military and hybrid threats from outside the Arctic may portend, or threaten, particular locations and populations in the Arctic. Some are kinetic threats. We might think of Thule Air Base in Greenland as an obvious target in the case of a general world war given its strategic significance. However, I do not think most threats to the Canadian

Arctic are conventional military ones. Instead, we might look, as Dr. Huebert said, to misinformation campaigns designed to undermine the credibility of an Arctic actor or our democratic systems or to polarize debate on a sensitive issue. This category might include an attack below the threshold of armed conflict on a piece of critical infrastructure, such as a power plant, that would be designed to create panic and force Canada to direct its efforts and resources into dealing with that domestic problem.

The third category of threats are those in the Canadian Arctic. These include transport safety threats, like major air or maritime disasters; threats to populations from basic energy and water infrastructure failures; and the risk of political polarization. As the recent water crisis in Iqaluit demonstrated, Arctic citizens look to Canada's military capabilities for vital emergency response if and when essential systems and services fail.

Arctic Canada faces a crisis of equity, independently worthy of prioritization, that can also be exploited by adversaries through disinformation efforts intended to sow discord and destabilize domestic risk environments. I actually think Canada's 2017 Arctic defence policy does a good job at distinguishing between the international and regional levels of analysis. It references the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO's role vis-à-vis Russian force projection into the North Atlantic rather than concern about military conflict arising from Arctic disputes.

Thus, I want to emphasize that as Arctic defence and security become more explicit priorities for Canada, for the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, and for NATO, we need to carefully distinguish military threats to North American security that may pass through regions of the Arctic from those risks and threats arising in the Arctic because of local or regional vulnerabilities. Each risk axis requires solutions, but together, they form a matrix of Arctic resilience.

Most importantly, I hope that smart investments in Arctic defence and security are aligned with civilian priorities or provide dual-use, or military-and-civilian, benefits wherever possible. I look forward to discussing this further during question period.

[Andreas Østhagen, Senior Researcher, Fridtjof Nansen Institute & High North Center at Nord University and Global Fellow at Wilson Center](#)

First of all, thank you for having me. I wouldn't say I'm the foremost expert on the Canadian Arctic. However, I have been working on Arctic issues in the Norwegian Arctic and concerning the broader security environment, so it's important to bear in mind that many of my reflections come from the Norwegian security perspective on the Arctic. I'll keep it brief, as we've been asked to, and make three overarching points that we could elaborate on. In some ways, they reflect what has been said already by Dr. Lackenbauer and Dr. Huebert.

The first one is that we, as researchers looking at Arctic security and conflict — and perhaps also as politicians — tend to define Arctic security in terms of static results, or we tend to find the answers to the question of conflict in the Arctic or the scramble for the North, without taking into account that things change quickly. That's a given in international politics at large, but perhaps even more so in the Arctic because of what the others already mentioned and what we could discuss, the various climatic, economic, political changes in the North.

It is important to recognize that although we tended to say, in the past, that the chance of a conflict emerging or erupting in the Arctic was rather low, these things are also open for reinterpretation.

This leads to what overlaps with Professor Lackenbauer's point about the different ways of interpreting threats in the Arctic. I take a different approach. I call it the different levels of Arctic security dynamics or different interactions in the Arctic. The point is still the same as the one Dr. Lackenbauer is making, though. It's the need to differentiate between what happens at a circumpolar level for instance, with what happens at a global level with an Arctic impact

Russia still, even today, maintains a strong interest in keeping Arctic relations peaceful. Russia maintains an interest in the primacy and the safeguarding of the Law of the Sea in the Arctic and separating the circumpolar dynamics from those dynamics that, say, have something to do with conflictual issues elsewhere.

The most obvious example, of course, is relations between NATO and Russia that might be dragged into the Arctic. We are seeing that happen now, maybe the most we have ever seen in the modern history of the Arctic, due to the invasion of Ukraine. China and the focus on China in the Arctic can in many ways be said to follow the same logic. It only to some extent has to do with Chinese actions in the Arctic. Rather, it has a lot to do with the systemic rivalry between the West, or the U.S., and China, dragging that into the Arctic. We have to separate between these things.

Adding a third layer to it are those specific points in the Arctic where conflict might erupt. I am particularly talking about the European part of the Arctic. This is also my third point, the need to differentiate between the North American parts of the Arctic and the European parts of the Arctic, at least when we're talking about immediate threat and conflict spillover

Professor Rob Huebert highlighted that there is no threat of a direct invasion in the Arctic, but for the Norwegian Arctic, there definitely is. Norway shares a land border and a long maritime boundary with Russia, and those security relations are now more fraught than ever.

There are security issues in the Arctic. Not the scramble for the Arctic - the resource race that people were talking about a decade ago - but there are specific issues, whether it is fisheries around Svalbard or other issues on the archipelago, or the legal status of the various passages, or whether it's the continental shelf extensions. There are issues in the Arctic that might not lead to outright war or hostility among states but that still might be a dispute that might erupt into something more, especially now given the security situation with Russia. There again, the European Arctic is in a much more vulnerable situation than the North American Arctic.

[Wilfrid Greaves, Assistant Professor of International Relations, University of Victoria](#)

I'm privileged to be speaking with you today from the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on southern Vancouver Island, where I am fortunate to live and work.

I'm particularly honoured to be here in the company of my distinguished and expert colleagues. As they and others have noted, it's an important and uncertain time in global politics, with significant ramifications for

Canada at every turn. We all know the crisis into which Russia's aggression against Ukraine has plunged the international community. We all know the current and likely future challenges to the liberal international order posed by a powerful and authoritarian China. We all know the urgent need to make the investments necessary to support long-term human development and well-being, and we all know too well the present and looming menace which the climate crisis poses for our world.

Each of these challenges runs directly through the Arctic, and we must acknowledge that they are substantial. However, Canada does not face these challenges alone, nor does their urgency mean there are no opportunities for international cooperation, mutual benefit or human and economic development.

In my remaining time, I wish to offer the following thoughts on the implications of the current moment for the future of Arctic politics.

First, for more than 30 years, the Arctic has been characterized by cooperation among states, Indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations and, increasingly, non-Arctic states. This model of pan-Arctic cooperation has made considerable achievements, including facilitating international agreements governing Arctic search and rescue, oil pollution preparedness, scientific cooperation and High Arctic fishing.

The Russian Federation, which accounts for around half the land, water, coastline and the people in the entire global Arctic, was a vital partner in these negotiated political achievements. Effective pan-Arctic cooperation will always require Russian participation. However, Russia's aggressive and destructive international behaviour makes the prospect of continued cooperation at this time extremely problematic. Canada and the other members of the Arctic Council have paused their participation in the institution's work pending assessment of how best to proceed under the current circumstances.

Essential cooperation may continue, but at this time we should recognize that one of the costs of standing against Russian aggression in Eastern Europe is Russia's full participation in the governance of the Arctic region. The bodies of the Arctic Council will remain limited in their work until the war against Ukraine is resolved, and the manner of that war's resolution will impact the future of Arctic politics and cooperation.

With that in mind, I believe that Canada would be well served to seek opportunities for cooperation with its other Arctic neighbours, four of whom are also NATO allies. The recent announcement regarding renewal of NORAD's North Warning System is an example of necessary defence cooperation in the region. However, other issues persist, be they Arctic boundary disputes or ongoing disagreement over the legal status of the Northwest Passage. Addressing such issues among friendly allied nations in the Arctic will only strengthen their unity and effectiveness in the face of external challenges. If done well, they may even achieve important domestic priorities related to economic and social development and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Although no institution will replace the Arctic Council, the other seven Arctic states are free, democratic societies aligned in their values and many of their interests, and we should pursue all opportunities to deepen their collaboration on Arctic issues until such time as real pan-Arctic cooperation is again possible.

My final point, however, is that nothing about the current crisis in Ukraine or its implications for cooperation in the Arctic affects the ecological, economic and human realities of climate change. Although in the near term

there is continued need for the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels, this historic moment in global politics should affirm the trend in the North American Arctic away from fossil fuel development.

The 2016 United States-Canada Joint Arctic Leaders' Statement between Prime Minister Trudeau and former president Barack Obama was an important milestone in this process designating virtually all Canadian and American Arctic waters off limits to future offshore Arctic oil and gas licensing. In 2021, the newly elected Government of Greenland instituted its own ban on oil and gas drilling within its waters.

We have seen in recent weeks how the immediacy of war can distract us from the longer term imperative to make our economies and societies more sustainable, but the future of healthy communities and economies in Canada's North and across the Arctic cannot be based on the energy systems of the past, particularly when they are the very root of the problem that is driving both chronic and acute challenges across the region and globally. In defending ourselves against aggressors, we cannot fail to also secure ourselves against the climate threats of our own collective making.

[Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, Professor Emerita, University of Western Ontario, and Senior Fellow at the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History, University of Toronto](#)

At present, the biggest military threat in our Arctic is the potential for spillover from Russia's war in Ukraine. This is a threat that's been discussed by previous presenters, both this week and last.

Therefore, in my four minutes, I want to focus on a different issue, one that is often mentioned in the media, although the coverage tends to be superficial and often misleading: namely, the allegation that Russia is aggressively claiming Canada's Arctic seabed resources up to 200 nautical miles, which is 370 kilometres, from our shore.

Contrary to this allegation, Russia is, in this case, abiding by international law and, frankly, it is only doing what Denmark/Greenland have already done and what Canada is likely to do in the near future.

Last spring, Russia filed an addendum with the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, revising its 2015 submission pertaining to the Arctic Ocean. On the map that I sent you, you can see Russia's delineation depicted in yellow. Russia's proposed extended continental shelf now stretches from its exclusive economic zone all the way across the Arctic Ocean to the exclusive economic zones of Canada and Greenland.

Last spring, when Russia filed this expansive delineation, Western media accused Russia of aggression. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, those criticisms have resumed. However, Russia's expansive delineation does not violate international law, nor is Russia's behaviour very different from that of its Arctic neighbours.

I hope you will give me the opportunity to explain why this is the case during the question period.

As you can see from the map, there are large overlaps between the extended continental shelves delineated by Canada, Denmark/Greenland and Russia. The light blue lines north of Alaska indicate the area likely to be included in the U.S. submission, although we won't know the exact details until the U.S. actually files its submission with the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. The green and yellow stripes indicate

overlaps between the delineations of Canada and Russia, and the pink and yellow stripes indicate overlaps between the delineations of Denmark/Greenland and Russia. The area outlined in blue, which includes the North Pole, indicates overlap in the extended continental shelves of Russia, Canada and Greenland.

The overlaps are huge, and they're going to be even bigger when the United States files its submissions, which raises the question: What are the prospects for maritime boundary delimitation? In other words, what are the prospects for resolving the overlaps? Sadly, the highly cooperative relations that Canada had with its Arctic neighbours, including Russia, in the delineation of their respective Arctic continental shelves have ground to a halt in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In closing, I chose to focus on the extended continental shelf, not to minimize the threats of Russian aggression emanating from other parts of the world but because misconceptions about this issue are prevalent and because, in formulating effective policy, we need to be clear about what is and what is not a threat to Canada's national security.

[Suzanne Lalonde, professeure, Faculté de droit, Université de Montréal](#)

C'est à titre de spécialiste du droit de la mer que j'aimerais partager quelques réflexions préliminaires.

Dans le contexte actuel, il est difficile d'insister sur l'apport du droit, sur sa force mais à son niveau le plus élémentaire, le principe de la primauté du droit (la « *rule of law* ») assure aux États un environnement stable, prévisible et ordonné pour mener leurs activités, un rempart contre l'arbitraire.

Les 5 États riverains de l'océan Arctique ont reconnu cette vérité lorsqu'ils ont adopté la Déclaration d'Ilulissat en 2008. Par cet instrument, les cinq États se sont engagés à respecter le cadre juridique du droit de la mer, à régler de manière pacifique leurs différends dans la région et à renforcer la coopération. Par exemple, le moratoire sur la pêche commerciale en haute mer adopté en 2017 (10 États parties) est né d'une première entente entre les cinq États riverains.

C'est aussi en 2017 que l'Accord sur le renforcement de la coopération scientifique internationale dans l'Arctique a été adoptée. Ainsi, en dépit de tensions résultant de l'annexion de la Crimée ou d'accusations d'ingérence et de piratage informatique, les États de la région sont demeurés convaincus qu'il était dans leur meilleur intérêt national de respecter les règles juridiques et miser sur la coopération.

Avec l'agression en Ukraine, j'ignore quand ou s'il sera même possible de revenir à un tel terrain d'entente.

However, at this point, I would like to emphasize that even this commitment to the legal regime formalized in 2008, while critical, could only take us so far in regard to some highly sensitive issues.

When it comes to the extended continental shelf, it has been repeatedly emphasized that the A5, including Russia, have been playing by the rules of the game. Indeed, all of the Arctic coastal States, save the U.S., have now filed their final submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.



The maps published by the different governments reveal clear areas of overlapping claims, including, as Professor Riddell-Dixon has just told us, between Russia, Canada and Denmark/Greenland. Yet the rules of the game, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, provides no answer in terms of resolving these competing claims. Article 76 unambiguously declares that the Commission process does not and cannot settle the issue of overlapping outer limits of the Arctic continental shelves. The legal regime has always provided that it is up to the States concerned themselves, through diplomatic channels and political dialogue, to determine their mutual boundaries.

The severance of relations between Russia and the West, therefore, does not bode well for the resolution of this sensitive issue. Vigilance will be needed.

Perhaps the long delays that afflict the Commission process will actually be beneficial. Perhaps sufficient time will elapse to allow for a return to the collaborative approach that, thus far, has characterized the process unfolding in the Arctic. The Commission is actually estopped, according to its own rules of procedure, from considering a submission if it includes an area in dispute, if there are overlaps, unless it has the prior consent of all the parties to the dispute. Canada, Denmark and Russia have each given their explicit consent and have allowed the Commission to proceed and evaluate their neighbours' submissions. This is in stark contrast to other areas of the globe, like the South China Sea.

Adherence to the legal regime and dialogue are both necessary if Canada is to finally resolve the limits of its outer continental shelf in the Arctic. For this reason, I feel it will be essential to re-establish, at some point, lines of communication with Russia.

Finally, I have prepared and submitted briefing notes on the Northwest Passage in case they may be of interest to the Committee members. As is well known, there is a stark difference of legal opinion between Ottawa and Washington on the legal status of the Northwest Passage. Yet Canada and the U.S. have a long history of respectful collaboration in the Arctic. This pragmatic approach - of agreeing to disagree and then getting on with the business of resolving issues of mutual interest and concern - I would argue, is more important than ever as the Arctic region bears the brunt of climate change and foreign interest in the Northwest Passage increases.

As for Russia, on this issue, we have been unacknowledged allies. The Russian Federation's legal claim regarding the Northern Sea Route is almost the perfect mirror of the Canadian legal position. If Russia were to contest the Canada's position, it would be torpedoing its own claim. A rational analysis of its own national self-interest should therefore ensure the absence of any Russian challenge on this question.