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## Norwegian Arctic Perspectives

Eivind Vad Petersson

State Secretary to the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs

*The North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN) and the Canadian Defence and Security Network (CDSN) were pleased to partner with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ottawa to welcome Secretary Petersson to Ottawa to speak with Canadian university students on Norway's place in the Arctic. "Norway, Canada, and Arctic Security: A Conversation with State Secretary Eivind Vad Petersson," was held at Carleton University on 8 November 2022. The following are the remarks offered by the Secretary at this event:*

Distinguished guests, ladies, gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to Carleton University and to this event to share some Norwegian perspectives on the Arctic. I am very happy to be here and to discuss issues which are at the core of Norwegian foreign policy.

Norway and Canada are close allies, and as Arctic states we share many of the same interests and perspectives on the future of Arctic governance and development. The Arctic has in many ways long been spared geopolitical tensions. Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine marked a turning point – for European security and for multilateral cooperation in general – and of course also for the Arctic.

For Norway, sharing a border with Russia, such a devastating attack has had profound and immediate impact on our foreign and security policy. The key elements of Norway's Arctic policy remain the same: International cooperation, sustainable development, military and allied presence in the North, combating climate change and accelerating the Green Transition. I will return to these points later.

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It is hard to comprehend the suffering that Russia's brutal war of aggression has inflicted on the Ukrainian people. The credible and numerous reports of war crimes are shocking. Norway will continue to provide substantial military, economic and humanitarian support for Ukraine for as long as necessary. Norwegian support for Ukraine so far amounts to approximately NOK 14 billion, about 1,8 billion CAD. The consequences of this war reach far beyond Ukraine. Europe is currently facing the most serious security crisis since WWII. And with global food and energy prices rising, we see once again that it is the most vulnerable among us who will bear the cost.

The war has ushered in a new period of instability. Russia's complete disregard for international law, human rights, and democratic principles undermines multilateral cooperation in general. This also affects cooperation and stability in the Arctic. It is now we must ask ourselves: what kind of Arctic do we want to have? For Norway, the answer is simple: we want a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Arctic. The path forward is bit more complicated, but I will mention the key components here today.

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Over the last years, Russia has modernized and developed its military. Russia conducts regular exercises in the waters off the Norwegian coast. Substantial parts of the Russian nuclear arsenal are located just across the Norwegian land border to Russia.

We do not observe any major changes in the Russian force posture in the High North. Except for considerable depletion of their land forces due to the war in Ukraine. It remains to be seen if there will be any substantial Russian adjustments in our region with new Nordic members in NATO. So far, we note that Russian reactions to the Swedish and Finnish NATO-applications have been limited.

Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership will strengthen NATO and make the Nordic region more secure. We are supporting our neighbors in their accession in any way we can. Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession also paves the way for increased Nordic collaboration on defence and security policy, as well as in other areas.

Russia's war on Ukraine emphasizes the importance, from a security perspective, of a strong and robust Northern Norway. We are now strengthening our defence and facilitating allied presence and training in our Northern regions. We are also increasing military presence around offshore installations and other critical infrastructure in Norway. We take very seriously Norway's role as a credible supplier of gas to Europe. And we are strengthening security at the border with Russia.

Norway and Canada cooperate closely on Arctic related issues in NATO.

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Our Arctic policy has been and continues to be defined by our relationship with Russia. Norwegian governments have facilitated cooperation and exchanges across the border for decades. A well-functioning cooperation with Russia in the North has been in our national interest. We cannot cooperate normally with the current political regime in Russia.

After 24 February we have downscaled our bilateral cooperation to a bare minimum. Unity among allies and partners remains crucial for standing up against Russia's military aggression. We have (with minor exceptions) aligned with all consecutive rounds of EU sanctions. The fundamental and necessary change of policy has had big implications for many Norwegian communities, businesses and research institutions in the North that have worked closely with Russian counterparts for decades.

Norway cannot change its geography. We share a border with Russia on land and at sea. It is necessary to maintain some contacts in order to minimize risks of misunderstandings and unintended escalation. We aim to be a predictable and responsible neighbor.

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9% of Norway's population resides above the Arctic Circle. Investing in the people living and working in the North is a crucial investment in Norway's security. We want to make sure our Northern regions are attractive places to live, work, study, raise families, and continue the traditions and way of life of the Sámi people. Sustainable economic growth, job creation, education and research, and opportunities for the young generation is therefore necessary. We see a population decline in certain parts of the Norwegian Arctic, and this is a concern. The Government is working actively to reverse this trend.

Indigenous issues are a priority in Norway's Arctic policy. Sámi culture is a valuable part of our national historical heritage. Indigenous peoples have a right to be consulted in matters that could affect them directly. The Sámi therefore have their own parliament, the Sámediggi. Indigenous groups also participate actively in the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and the Barents Regional Council.

While Canada and Norway's Arctic regions are quite different, I think we nonetheless share many of the same concerns. As Arctic states we have a responsibility towards the people living in the Arctic. Going forward, we must find the right balance between protection and development.

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Climate change is affecting communities across the Arctic at an alarming pace. Most of the pollution and greenhouse gas emissions are happening mainly elsewhere in the world. This constitutes a threat not only to the Arctic climate, environment, and biological diversity, but also the traditional way of life of the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. To understand how the Arctic is affected by climate change, and to mitigate the consequences, it will require stable, long-term, and ambitious investments in science and research.

We are seeing the development of world-leading research environments and technology hubs in the Arctic – and we encourage this. We must utilize the Green Shift and further strengthen infrastructure and services in the North. Our hope is that this will not only contribute to combatting climate change, but also to serve as the foundation for creating sustainable livelihoods in the North.

This requires a bottoms-up approach. All stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples, must take part in the process. I believe that the answers to the challenges the Arctic faces – will come from the Arctic as well.

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Common challenges continue to require common approaches.

The Arctic is a well-regulated region. There is a comprehensive legal framework in place and the Arctic States have established effective fora for discussing Arctic issues. Being here in Ottawa, it is of course only natural to

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say a few words about the Arctic Council. Since the signing of the Ottawa-declaration in 1996, the Council has been the leading forum and mechanism to address issues of common concern across Arctic States.

Following Russia's invasion, all work in the Council was put on pause in March. It was simply not possible to continue normal work under a Russian Chairmanship. However, the cross-border challenges in the Arctic, such as climate change, will not disappear, and must be dealt with.

Norway continues to plan for our upcoming Chair of the Arctic Council, which we will hold from 2023 – 2025. We are encouraged by the fact that Arctic Council projects not involving Russia have now been able to resume. Moving forward, our priority will be to continue the important work of the Arctic Council that so successfully has contributed to global scientific knowledge, sustainable resource management and the wellbeing of the people living in the Arctic. As an Arctic state, Russia has a natural place in the Arctic Council. But with the current Russian regime, business as usual is no longer possible. We will continue to seek out a way forward for Arctic cooperation, naturally in close coordination with our friends and allies in Canada, the U.S., and the Nordic countries.

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International interest for the Arctic has been increasing for many years. And there has not been less interest after 24 February. Climate change, the region's natural resources, research cooperation, developments in green technologies and sustainable development, and the Arctic's strategic location are key drivers. In uncertain times like now, it is more important than ever that partners and allies work closely together to find constructive solutions. Norway looks forward to continuing and strengthening the close Arctic relations with Canada.

I look forward to the discussions today.

Thank you.