

ACTIVITY REPORT



January 5, 2024

Perspectives on the Arctic

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On 6 December 2023, the NAADSN Emerging Leaders Node (ELN) hosted the Emerging Ideas Series, entitled “Perspectives in the Arctic.” The event featured presentations from Network Coordinator Dr. Ryan Dean, ELN Lead Nicole Covey, Research Fellow Trym Eiterjord, and Research Fellow Kate E. Todd. Presentations focused on the Arctic policies of the United Kingdom, South Korea, China and the Netherlands. NAADSN Research Fellow Joanne Archibald served as moderator.

Dr. Ryan Dean’s presentation was based on his June 2023 policy brief, [The United Kingdom in the Arctic](#). Dr. Dean notes the review of past UK policy as one of their major strengths. He explained that the modern UK Arctic policy has shifted from being largely controlled by their foreign office and centered around human security to one that is increasingly being shaped by their Ministry of Defence.

Upon Dean’s examination of the [2013](#), [2018](#), and [2023](#) UK Arctic policy frameworks, he found that since all the policies referred to each other, it was easy to track the UK’s policy development over time. This referencing and showing of homework is a best practice that other states may look to adopt. Another strength of the UK is how often they write and revise their policies. Their ability to update policies shows their policy learning and gives them flexibility which was vital to their adaptation to Russia’s action in Ukraine. In the 2023 UK policy framework, it highlights their engagement with Canada as “learning from its expertise as an Arctic nation.” However, Canada can also learn from the UK in terms of clarity, confidence and increased writing of policy. The UK demonstrates that there is still space for policy entrepreneurship in the Arctic, and Dean illustrates several avenues going forward. Firstly, British strategies towards defending the High North and Canadian concerns about defending North America should be made clearer and more accessible to both populations. Additionally, he points out that a more cohesive explanation of how the defense of the high North benefits the defense of North America may strengthen Canadian policy.

Lastly, Dean points out that the UK interpretation of the Law of the Sea means they would not be open to the historic title argument, which Canada uses for the Northwest Passage. However, he does not view this as something to fixate on, as UK policies are oriented on Russia and China interfering with the Law of the Sea in the Arctic and elsewhere – rather than Canada’s claim. Dean closes with how Canada may learn from the UK in updating Canada’s story about how the Arctic

factors into the defense of Canada and the larger rules-based international order, a significant component of which is linking the North American Arctic to the European High North from the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Next, Nicole Covey presented her policy brief, [*The Republic of Korea in the Arctic*](#). Her presentation focused on the Republic of Korea's (RoK) position in the Arctic and their potential areas of cooperation and conflict with Canada. The RoK has been a predictable Arctic partner since achieving Observer status with the Arctic Council in 2013, actively engaging in the Arctic Council's Working Groups. Notably, the RoK's 2013 Arctic policy was one of the first national policies released by a non-Arctic state.

In 2018, the RoK published their [second Arctic policy and the 2050 Polar Vision](#), a summary of the state's goals for both polar regions. Covey points out that there are no immediate points of concern as the 2050 Polar Vision focuses on the importance of climate change, technological advancement and scientific research, aligning with the Government of Canada's priorities for the Arctic. The RoK is active in the Arctic because they are expecting to gain economic potential from the region. Their interest in polar shipping and a Northern Sea Route is why the RoK has historically targeted Russia as its primary Arctic partner.

Covey then explained that there are areas of opportunity between Canada and the RoK, since they share close relations and have established diplomatic ties in a variety of areas. The [Canada-Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#) was established in September 2022, and showcases the areas of opportunity that can be fostered between the two countries. Covey pointed out commitment to Arctic scientific research, as well as northern economic development, as two areas that would fulfill domestic policy goals for both nations. However, Covey raised two areas of potential concern for Canada regarding the RoK's activity in the Arctic. The first is that the primary articulated partner for the RoK is Russia. Russia is mentioned in all of the RoK's Arctic documents, while Canada remains unnamed. However, since the 2022 full invasion of Ukraine, the RoK has taken steps away from cooperating with Russia, becoming closer with NATO and the Western democracies. The second area of potential concern is the RoK's willingness to work outside of the Arctic Council. The RoK explains this is because of the limited role that non-Arctic States have in the Arctic Council. In fact, they are the most active member of the Asian Arctic Club. This is concerning as this forum may end up competing with the Arctic Council and have divergent interests for the region or ignore the rights of Northern Indigenous Peoples.

In conclusion, Covey recommended that Canada seize the opportunity to collaborate with the RoK. This is because they have both demonstrated they are two like-minded states with similar values, and their pre-existing economic and diplomatic ties can be carried forward into the Arctic.

Trym Eiterjord presented on Chinese perspectives of the Arctic, along with a review of their Arctic policy. He started his presentation by building off what Dr. Dean and Covey said in terms of policy learning. China's only Arctic policy document is their [2018 white paper](#), which sets out the four pillars of China's interests: scientific research, environmental protection, utilization of Arctic resources, and active participation in Arctic governance. China declares themselves as a "near Arctic State," due to their borders being close to the Arctic. Eiterjord points at push back to this

notion from Arctic states, especially the United States. On a security level, states became concerned about China's ambitions in the Arctic and how they tie into both China's research programs and investments in infrastructure. Eiterjord views the usage of the term "near-Arctic state" as a strategic misstep. This is the result of a lack of understanding of Arctic politics, since framing themselves as an Arctic stakeholder would have not raised the same kind of alarm.

Since China has only released one Arctic policy document, Eiterjord emphasized that this means there is little-to-no insight into how the policies were formed or if there has been a learning process afterwards. It is also difficult to understand how China is refocusing or developing its Arctic policies. Eiterjord argues that three events have drastically changed how China views its involvement in the Arctic: the release of the 2018 Arctic Policy, COVID-19, and Russia's full invasion of Ukraine. He points at the domestic push within China in 2018 for the Polar Silk Road and the backlash that followed the release of the policy as something that impacted the way China thinks about the Arctic. China views itself as a great power, despite lacking political capital in the Arctic. In the future, Eiterjord sees China as being more keen to come back to thinking of the Arctic multilaterally, and perhaps rolling back their own position in the Arctic and taking a smaller role.

Next, Kate E. Todd's discussed her policy brief [The Netherlands in the Arctic](#). Her presentation highlighted areas where Canada and the Netherlands have similar policies, where their interests diverge, and recommendations for how Canada and the Netherlands can work together. The Netherlands has been an active observer state in the Arctic Council since 1998. According to their most recent [Polar Strategy](#), the Netherlands have three main interests in the Arctic: protecting natural habitats in the environment, strengthening international cooperation, and ensuring sustainable economic activity.

In her presentation, Todd answered three main questions: 1) What are the Netherlands key defence and security interests in the Arctic? 2) What are the areas of opportunity and common interests that Canada has with the Netherlands? and, 3) What are areas of divergence and concern? The Netherlands have released four polar strategies since 2009, using iterative policies to develop more strategic insights on their Arctic goals. Todd recommends this as something that Canada could start practising, instead of only publishing once a decade. The Netherlands' four polar strategies have been guiding frameworks for their actions and investment in the Arctic. The most recent strategy titled *The Netherlands Polar Strategy 2021 to 2025* was published in March 2021 and details the importance of the polar regions for the Netherlands, highlighting climate change, safety and security, and sustainable economic activity as areas of concern. In the Netherlands' [Defence Vision 2035 Policy and Security Strategy](#), Amsterdam highlights the potential for conflict in the Arctic over access to and control of shipping routes. They also stress the importance of their membership in NATO in addressing potential threats in the Arctic.

After Todd compared the Netherlands' and Canada's interests in the Arctic, the main takeaway was that many of the two countries' interests overlap. This is because both countries are affected by climate change, and the areas of environmental research and protection are vital to both countries meeting their environmental commitments and economic goals. Additionally, both countries have signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and are trying to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG).

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Todd highlighted two areas of divergence: Canada is interested in its own national sovereignty in the Arctic, while the Netherlands benefits from and is supportive of development in the Northern Sea Route (as shipping is a major pillar of the Dutch economy). Despite this, their common goals are a way to create opportunities for the Netherlands and Canada to work together to continue investing in environmental research, to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to support the rules-based international order, and to effectively respond to emergencies in the Arctic through search and rescue.

The Emerging Ideas Series provided deeper insight into four non-Arctic states' policies and highlighted shared areas of cooperation for Canada. All presenters clearly laid out the policies for each of the non-Arctic states, provided recommendations, with the audience able to come away with a greater understanding of the Arctic policies of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Korea, China, and the Netherlands.

Reviewed by: Nicholas Glesby, 5 January 2024