

ACTIVITY REPORT



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Ottawa, Ontario

The Inaugural Norway-Canada Gauntlet Seminar Defence and Security in the Arctic and High North: Learning Lessons in an Era of Strategic Competition

Nicholas Glesby, Network Administrator

On Tuesday, 12 December 2023, NAADSN and the Royal Norwegian Embassy co-hosted the inaugural Gauntlet Seminar in the Barney Danson Theatre at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, in cooperation with the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Canadian, Norwegian, and American scholars and practitioners shared their insights on Canadian Arctic defence investments, differences in threat perception, a more Nordic-oriented NATO, shared vulnerabilities, and opportunities for enhanced policy alignment. Societal resilience and information sharing were themes routinely raised. A full house of ninety individuals from the Department of National Defence, embassies, foreign military and diplomatic attachés, academics and experts, practitioners from North America and Europe, think tanks, and students were in attendance.

Canada's defence policy describes the Arctic as an "important international crossroads where issues of climate change, international trade and global security meet."¹ Canada commits to increase its military presence in the region and to work cooperatively with partners. Norway places a similarly high priority on partnering with allies to realize its Arctic and High North policy goals centred on security, stability, and interest-based cooperation.² The inaugural Norway-Canada Gauntlet Seminar wrestled with such questions as: What lessons can allies and partners learn and apply from diverse experiences in a time of intensifying great power rivalry? How does strategic competition over resources and supply chains affect security requirements in the Arctic and High North? How is climate change shaping the strategic and operating environments? Does hybrid warfare heighten the risk of conflict escalation?

This NAADSN Activity Report provides a summary of topics discussed and lessons learned for future knowledge sharing in the Norway-Canada relationship and future Gauntlet Seminars.

Background

The Gauntlet Seminar consisted of opening and closing remarks by Norway's Ambassador to Canada, Her Excellency Trine Jøranli Eskedal, and NAADSN lead Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer. This was followed by three keynote presentations by Major General Elisabeth Michelsen, Mr. Jonathan Quinn, and Ms. Heather Conley, followed by a fireside chat moderated by Dr. Lackenbauer. Following this, Ms. Krstine Berzina moderated a *Norwegian and Canadian Perspectives* panel featuring Major General Odd Harald Hagen, Dr. Paal Sigurd Hilde, Dr. Andrea Charron, and Sergeant Jackie Jacobson. The seminar concluded with a brief synopsis and closing remarks by Dr. Lackenbauer. With respect to summaries of the panel discussions, the Chatham House rule of non-attribution has been applied with respect to the panel summaries to protect the views of experts who shared their knowledge.

This is the inaugural event of an exciting new annual Canada-Norway defence and security dialogue, where NAADSN, in partnership with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosts Norwegian partners in Canada to share lessons learned and best practices. The Gauntlet Seminar is named in honour of the Norwegian, Canadian, and British Operation GAUNTLET in 1941. Canadian Brigadier Arthur Potts led a successful but little-known combined operation by a small task force in the Spitsbergen (Svalbard) archipelago. After extensive planning and political conversations between Allied civil and military authorities, the operation was re-scaled so that a small, mixed task force would destroy mining and communications infrastructure on this remote cluster of islands, repatriate Russian miners and their families to Russia, and evacuate Norwegian residents to Britain. While a modest non-combat mission, Operation GAUNTLET represented Canada's first expeditionary operation in the Arctic.³

Representation and Sessions

Opening Remarks

Her Excellency Trine Jøranli Eskedal, Norwegian Ambassador to Canada

Panel 1: Keynote Addresses

Major General Elisabeth Michelsen

Advisor to the Norwegian Chief of Defence and former Chief of the Norwegian Home Guard

Mr. Jonathan Quinn

Director General, Continental Defence Policy, Department of National Defence

Ms. Heather A. Conley

President, German Marshall Fund of the United States

Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Moderator)

NAADSN Lead, Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) and Professor, Canadian Studies, Trent University

Panel 2: Norwegian and Canadian Perspectives

Major-General Odd Harald Hagen

Norwegian Defence Attaché to Canada and the United States

Dr. Paal Sigurd Hilde

Professor, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies

Dr. Andrea Charron

NAADSN Co-Lead, Professor, Political Studies, University of Manitoba
Director, Centre for Defence and Security Studies

Sergeant Jackie Jacobson

Speaker and Member of the Legislative Assembly, Nunakput, Northwest Territories (2007-2015, 2019-2023)
1 Canadian Rangers Patrol Group

Ms. Kristine Berzina (Moderator)

Managing Director, German Marshall Fund North

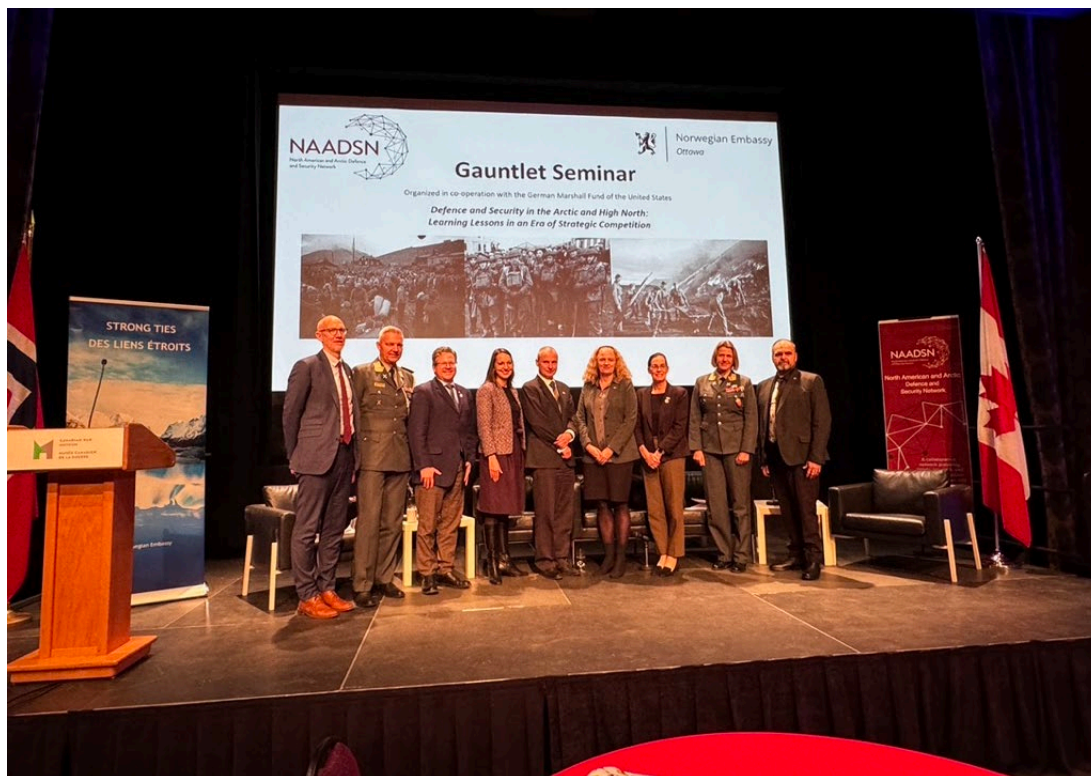


Figure 1: From left to right: Mr. Quinn; Maj. Gen. Hagen; Dr. Lackenbauer; Ms. Berzina; Dr. Hilde; H.E. Eskedal; Dr. Charron; Maj. Gen. Michelsen; and, Sgt. Jacobson

Opening Remarks

Diplomatic relations between Oslo and Ottawa were established during the deep crisis of the Second World War. The Government of Canada allowed the Norwegian government in-exile to operate, providing a space for Norwegian troops to train for conflict. This decision, which the Norwegian government still views as one of generosity, laid the groundwork for today's bilateral cooperation and the broader Canada-Norway relationship. In an evolving international security environment, with the Arctic and Nordic states as central foci, strong relations between Canada and Norway are as important now as in the Second World War. The two countries share a responsibility to keep the Arctic region stable and secure, which entails closer cooperation on defence, security, environmental, political, social, and economic endeavours. The inaugural Gauntlet Seminar provides military, civilian, and diplomatic experts to share their perspectives on issues important to both nations. The United States, represented in this event by the German Marshall Fund, is the closest ally for both Canada and Norway. In Canada, NAADSN represents a strong network of academic experts with close ties to Norway that produce valuable publications on Arctic security.

These discussions centred on contemporary developments in the Arctic and the High North. The name Gauntlet brings the history in the conversation, recalling the little-known operation led by Norwegian, Canadian, and British troops to deny the Soviet Union access to the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic Ocean in 1941. This successful, albeit modest, non-combat mission with no Allied casualties represented the Canadian military's first expeditionary mission in the Arctic.

Fast forwarding to today, the world is very different. The recent internal Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) document [Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in an Uncertain World](#) outlines a more chaotic global security environment than that to which Western states have



PA-180520 *Figure 2: Library and Archives Canada photo: Operation Gauntlet, 1941.*

been accustomed, with our adversaries actively building up capabilities to challenge us. Spillover of global competition into the Arctic has become a growing concern since Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russian aggression had an immediate impact on [Norway's military and security priorities](#), and the Arctic is an important international crossroads for many issue areas and shared priority areas across NATO and the like-minded group of seven Arctic states (Canada, Denmark via the Kingdom of Greenland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States).

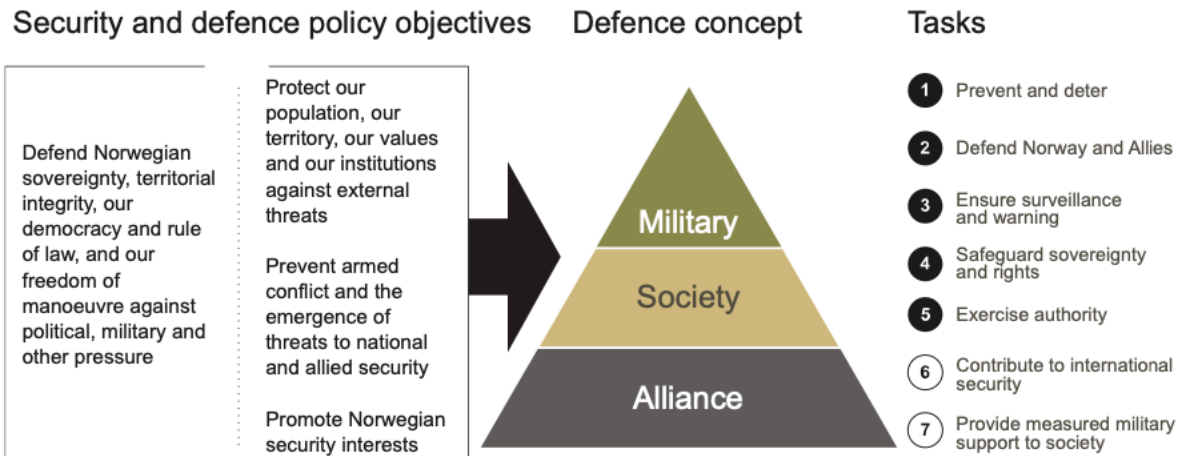


Figure 3: Policy Recommendations of the Norwegian Defence Commission of 2021.⁴

Canada continues to work with other actors in the region to face a resurgence of credible threats above and below the threshold of armed conflict. The like-minded group of seven Arctic states and partners need to rediscover what is a threat in the Arctic. There is a need to better articulate our Arctic actions and policies, which dialogues such as the Gauntlet Seminar emphasize our ability to do so. The notion of Arctic exceptionalism, which sheltered the region from geopolitical events and potential spillover, has been shattered.⁵ Exceptionalism has been replaced with susceptibility.

Keynote Addresses

Nordic Concerns and Vulnerabilities in the Arctic

The security challenges facing the world today are increasingly complex and changing. From a Norwegian perspective, the regional security of the Arctic is increasingly important. Although the passage of time changes the characteristics of war, great powers (in the Arctic context, the United States and Russia) still do what they please and small powers do what they can to survive. Norway values the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) collective defence alliance structure, which has been expanded to welcome Finnish and Swedish membership as a direct result of Russian aggression. Nordic cooperation will play a larger role in strategic planning for NATO in the Arctic. Russia's Kola Peninsula (which borders Finland) has seen an [increase in submarine and naval activity](#) near Norwegian waters. Russia has also revitalized their Cold War-era Arctic Bastion coastal missile systems, with investments in centralized military stockpiles with access and denial capabilities.

The High North plays an important role in its early-warning role in the air and maritime domains because of geography. Developments and enhancements to increase early-warning capabilities will assist in monitoring future escalatory threats. A state's ability to sustain a military expedition is not just based on the capabilities of its armed forces but requires support of civilian and private sectors and industry. Oslo views Canadian defence

investments, particularly the money allocated for [NORAD Modernization](#) and new over-the-horizon radar systems, as an important commitment to early-warning capabilities.

Norway is also increasingly aware and anxious of the relationship between Russia and China. Russia seeks to spur conflicts globally and China is increasing its presence on the international stage.⁶ The rules-based international order and geography provide Western allies with advantages, but Scandinavia, the rest of Europe, and North America must coordinate and collaborate more fully to promote closer civil-military relations and whole-of-government approaches. Failing to sustain Ukraine's fight against Russia will portray the West as weak and vulnerable, opening a divisive information space for our adversaries to exploit and feed with disinformation to their advantage. A key component of deterring further aggression is for the like-minded Arctic states and allies to share best practices and lessons learned, training exercises, and technological research and development (R&D). However, research and development cannot be led only by industry and the militaries, but needs to be guided by whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches with clear political direction. These efforts require close international collaboration to advance and maintain.

Climate change is having a dramatic impact on the Arctic. Temperature increases are much higher than the global average and have a profound impact on the physical environment with the melting of icecaps, glaciers, and permafrost. The Northern Sea Route (NSR) does [not currently represent a global shipping alternative](#). It may become more attractive in the future with a longer shipping season due to the reduction of ice. Norway is aware of the increasing possibility of more shipping vessels through this route, bringing large amounts of commercial, military, and leisure traffic into the Norwegian Sea. More worryingly, the opening of the NSR will heighten Russian activity in the region, given the importance that Moscow assigns the economic and strategic importance of the Arctic as part of its ambition to solidify Russia's great power standing. Melting permafrost is and will render existing Arctic infrastructure inhabitable and unusable due to heaving and foundation degradation. Climate change does not yet pose a direct risk to Norway, but it is a threat multiplier. Some attendees raised a concern that Russia will not stop with pursuing the NSR and will make further maritime incursions to expand its influence and reach into what Moscow declares "uncharted" Arctic waters. Russia's development of its Northern Fleet has consequences for neighbouring states and risks unintended escalation and miscommunication. This is especially worrisome as Nordic states move assets into the region to support presence and protection of newly exposed economic resources; search and rescue (SAR) efforts to responded to incidents related to increased tourism; and new infrastructure (ports, runways, and bases) to support the deployment of personnel and capabilities. Participants suggested that a dedicated mechanism for Russia and Norway to deconflict in the maritime space is needed.

Defence Investments in the Canadian Arctic

The Canadian Arctic is a fundamental part of Canada's geography, sovereignty, and identity. The region is home to 200,000 inhabitants and encompasses 40% of Canada's land mass and 75% of its coastline. Dual-use capabilities, which serve both civilian and military purposes, are difficult to separate in the Arctic. For example, infrastructure development including all-season roads, railway lines, energy and electricity, and telecommunications systems could be integrated into a broader Canadian northern defence and security strategy and transform the ability to move civilian goods, services, and people. These investments are not simply

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about the projection of military forces and hard power, but rather about domain awareness to patrol and protect the region which is becoming increasingly accessible due to climate change and technological advancements (notably, some attendees view Canada's NORAD Modernization commitments as a test case for better domain awareness).⁷ The Canadian Rangers serve as the eyes and ears of the North, with Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) presence including Joint Task Force North (JTFN) in Yellowknife, Canadian Forces Station (CFS) Alert, and the Canadian Forces Arctic Training Centre (CAFATC) in Resolute Bay. Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) supporting the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) are based in Iqaluit, Yellowknife, Rankin Inlet, and Inuvik.⁸

Strategic cooperation and economic interests, paired with climate change, are coming together in a way that makes the region more vital strategic for global competition than ever before. Extreme weather is happening with a growing frequency and poses a material threat to Northerners' traditional and modern ways of life. Growing numbers of domestic emergency responses due to natural disasters (such as wildfires and floods) are contributing to a strain on the CAF, particularly on the already-overstretched Army and the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC). Runways at FOLs are built on permafrost which will heave with warmer weather, impacting the CAF's operational.

Changes to the physical environment are also having a profound impact on the strategic environment. Critical minerals are a source of economic importance to Northerners, Canada as a whole, and have attracted foreign investment interest. Fishing stocks are moving due to changes in atmospheric and oceanic conditions, affecting the national economy and Inuit traditional food sources. Protection of the rules-based international order is becoming even more important as Russia and China are increasingly making Canadian national interests more difficult to achieve. Russia has the [largest military infrastructure in the Arctic](#) and China has [stated its objective](#) to become a great power. Attendees posed the notion that China's Arctic playbook is twofold: First, targeted investment to access natural resources and create wedges and divides between local populations and governments; Second, increased in Arctic research activities for dual-purpose uses. The growing relationship between Moscow and Beijing in the Arctic is increasingly concerning, especially as Russia becomes more dependent on China with Western sanctions after its full invasion of Ukraine.

DND must strengthen its ability to respond to and defeat threats to Canada. Both Canada's 2017 defence white paper [Strong, Secure, Engaged](#) (SSE) and its 2019 [Arctic and Northern Policy Framework](#) (APNF) commit DND/CAF to improve mobility and reach in the Arctic. Recent acquisition announcements include: 6 [Harry DeWolf class Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships \(AOPS\)](#), with the last two to be delivered by 2025; [88 new F-35s](#), with the first delivered in 2026 and full fleet by 2032; and the procurement of [new space capabilities](#) underway.

Announced in July 2022, Canada is investing approximately \$40 billion over 20 years for [NORAD Modernization](#) in key pillars like surveillance, command and control (C²), and R&D. Fielding Over-the-Horizon (OTH) radars is key to NORAD Modernization efforts and Canada is contributing two key sites which will integrate into a single system combined with US sites. The Arctic OTH (A-OTH) will be based in Southern Ontario and will track from the Arctic Circle to the Canada-US border; the Polar OTH (P-OTH) will track from over the North Pole south to the Arctic Circle. While NORAD Modernization is primarily focused on the aerospace domain, Canada seeks to

ramp up ongoing commitments and discussions to defence investments wherever feasible, which are expected to be outlined in a long-awaited Defence Policy Update (DPU).

Canada also recently announced the procurement of [Poseidon](#) maritime surveillance aircraft, which will allow the CAF to respond to surface and sub-surface threats. The first delivery is expected in 2026 with full delivery by 2033. Canada also remains committed to its Arctic states and partners, including to NATO. Notably, Canada is increasing its commitments to Arctic exercises, including [Operation NANOOK](#) deployments. Canada and Norway have worked together on exercises such as NATO's [COLD RESPONSE 2022](#) and participating in [NATO's STEADFAST DEFENDER 2024](#). In June 2023, Canada and Norway signed the [Bilateral Defence Co-Operation Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) pledging to enhance cooperation on strategic surveillance and situational awareness in the Arctic.

DND/CAF is deepening its multilateral cooperation with seven like-minded Arctic states, best exemplified by the success of the [Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff \(ACHODs\) Forum](#). Canada seeks to deepen collaboration going forward and to strengthen its relationship with Norway through practical steps such as information sharing. DND is working at a policy level to strengthen collaboration on bilateral and multilateral fronts with partners and allies to maximize the opportunities to exercise together and to collaborate on strategic messaging and research and development. Awareness and understanding of each other's concerns and priorities are key to collaboration.

Arctic Threat Perception

Arctic states view their greatest threats differently. For Norway, by virtue of a shared border and a long history of aggression, Russia presents itself as Oslo's primary adversary. However, for Canada and the United States, China represents a more direct threat. There have been a series of incidents in Canada, such as Chinese firms seeking to and buying resource mines in the North, or the alleged interference in numerous recent electoral processes, which may contribute to the public's perception of Beijing as an adversary. The 2022 US National Security Strategy speaks to this delineation by characterizing Russian remilitarization and aggressive behaviour as a representation of a military threat, while a Chinese Arctic presence is tied to longer term economic and hybrid security concerns.⁹ When the like-minded Arctic states and Western allies fixate on different states and threats relative to domestic considerations, strategic focus can be easily lost. Some attendees suggested that the best way to understand Russia, home to the largest amount of Arctic territory, can be best situated by taking Russian policy statements at face value and representative of inner thinking in the Kremlin.

How Russia views the Arctic

Russia is at war, but Canada, Norway, and the US are not. The survival of the Putin regime is based on continuous confrontation with the West, and so it is unlikely the Russian aggression in its near-abroad will stop in the short-term. The West and like-minded Arctic states must understand this and act proactively to defend its domestic and regional interests. The Arctic is a strategic space that is economically profitable for Russia and of which they want to protect. Russia has lost ground forces in its full invasion of Ukraine, but its naval and aerospace presence in the Arctic remains strong. Commentators, such as NAADSN Fellow Dr. Sergey Sukhankin, have posited that there are four geo-economic factors that showcases the strategic importance of the Arctic region to Moscow:

large source of foreign direct investment (FDI) and transfer of new technologies; approximately 12 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) before the full invasion of Ukraine; vast abundance of natural resources, such as liquified natural gas (LNG) and rare-earth minerals; and, the region is home to transportation routes on both land (Northern Corridor) and maritime domains (Northern Sea Route). Russian policy views the Arctic as “a locomotive of Russian economic development.”¹⁰ Additionally, Russia has committed capability upgrades to its military forces in the Arctic, such as two Resonance-N radar complexes in the Kola Peninsula, deployment of Tupolev Tu-160’s, ground transportation and infantry fighting vehicles, and the Kh-47M2 Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM).¹¹ In late March 2024, the Russian Ministry of Defense shuffled its Northern Fleet, the Naval forces responsible for the North Atlantic and Barents Sea, was demoted and integrated into the re-established Leningrad District, consolidating its domestic Arctic forces under singular command.¹²

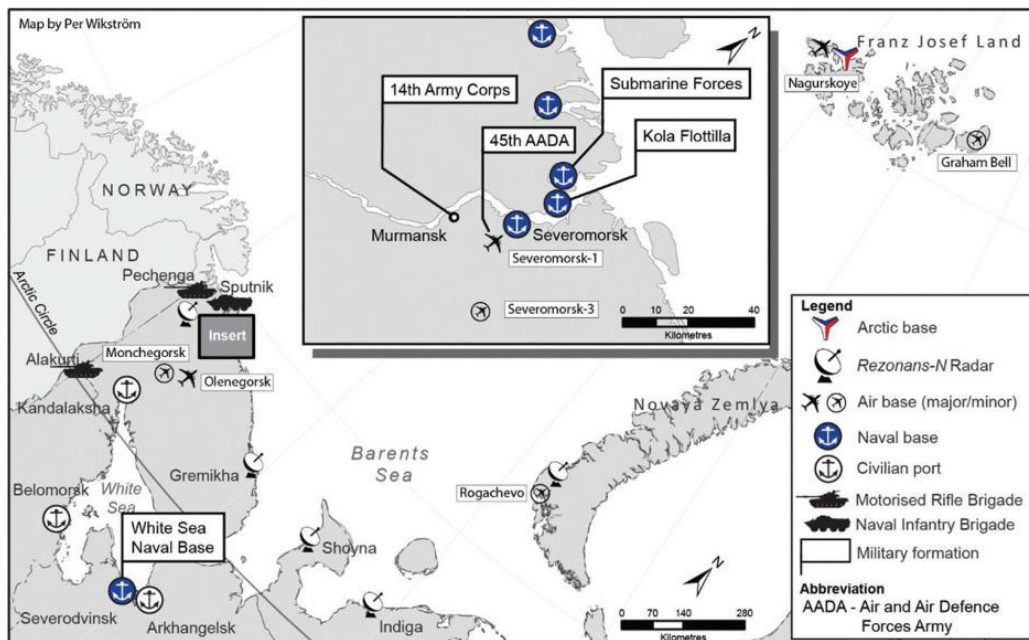


Figure 4: The Russian Northern Fleet’s bases, installations, capacities, and civil ports in Northwest Russia.¹³

Hybrid Threats

[NATO](#) and the [European Union](#) (EU) are increasingly aware of the strategic significance of the Arctic to broader European security. Hybrid warfare below the threshold of armed conflict blurs the line between war and peace.¹⁴ It is in Russia’s best interest to remain below the threshold of nuclear exchange or escalation, given the united Western response of providing arms, aid, and sanctions to their invasion of Ukraine. Hybrid warfare, sometimes referred to as “grey-zone warfare,” can be addressed by bolstering and strengthening societal resilience at home through whole-of-government approaches. This includes support from civilian agencies and constabulary forces, in addition to the militaries, to fuse knowledge, intelligence, and operational practices. The maritime domain, in particular, is a complex and challenging hybrid environment, with numerous state, non-

state, commercial actors (in the shipping and leisure business) and many possible crisis situations. Some attendees noted that stopping escalation and unintended spillover in the Arctic will be particularly challenging in the future without proper information sharing arrangements to combat hybrid threats. Norway is particularly interested in learning on how to respond to in real time to hybrid threats in the Arctic and is looking to allies and partners such as Canada to contribute to a shared understanding.

A possible hybrid attack on the [Balticconnector](#), a bi-directional underwater natural gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia, and data information cables occurred on 8 October 2023. Finnish authorities assessed the cause of the damage was from the dragging anchor of Chinese container ship *NewNew Polar Bear*. Maritime surveillance actors watched the ship transit the Gulf of Finland and Baltic Sea, which are increasingly becoming hybrid theatres. Both Russia and China denied knowledge of the incident and Finnish investigations and repairs to the pipeline are ongoing. Our adversaries seek to incapacitate our response to their actions, highlighting the urgent need to act proactively and protect critical day-to-day infrastructure.

In terms of threats and escalation tactics, hybrid threats are expected to be deployed more often by our adversaries, pushing upwards towards a threshold where a significant response is expected in return. Our adversaries' goals are to debilitate our civil societies and cause disruption domestic to achieve their broader global objectives and interests. The mobile and agile [Norwegian Home Guard](#), formed in response to the Soviet occupation of Northern Norway from 1944-1946, is an example of readiness, projection, and deterrence to foster societal knowledge through trust and knowledge of the communities and people they serve and protect. Soldiers are trained within their community and have knowledge of the terrain, representing a vital civil-military connection. Today, the Home Guard is 40,000 soldiers and conscripts strong. Its mandate is to safeguard territorial integrity, increase military presence, and protect community infrastructure, which are vital to protect against divisive below-the-threshold threats.

Adversarial Alignment

Understanding alliances as a cost to protect national interests and defence and security priorities is preferable to the thinking of militarily, economically, or financially supporting "free riders" who do not provide help in exchange for these investments. This is often how alliances are explained in political terms. Alliances are essential to collective prosperity, particularly in a region with as many unique challenges and considerations as the Arctic has. With the release of the [US National Strategy for the Arctic Region](#) in October 2022, Washington now understands that it is an Arctic nation, with a greater presence and heightened tempo of exercises needed. The Arctic is not just a luxury theatre that can be managed externally, but a strategic theatre across domains requiring sustained presence, knowledge and expertise to manage below-the-threshold activities, tactics, and internal considerations.

Norwegian and Canadian Perspectives

Canada is a vital ally to Norway, although Oslo emphasizes that Washington is its most important relationship. Ottawa and Oslo need to avoid competing for American attention. Norway is at the precipice of the biggest concentration of military power in Europe by virtue of geography and new and emerging technologies. China is

also in the minds of many decision makers in Arctic states, as [Russian and Chinese Coast Guards have agreed to cooperate](#) in the region. Communications across the North Atlantic are increasingly important, and Canada's NATO contributions to the [Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group](#) in Latvia enforces the need for protected sea lines of communications (SLOCs). Exercise NORDIC RESPONSE 2024 was designed to bring Finland and Sweden fully in to training exercises and to enhance NATO interoperability, given that the accession of these Nordic countries into the alliance has significantly expanded the size and length of the NATO-Russia border.

The Arctic is changing both physically and politically. Physical changes are climate-change induced. Political changes include the end of the notion of Arctic exceptionalism, best highlighted by former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 2019 [speech](#) in Rovaniemi, Finland, which insisted that Russia and China respect American Arctic interests (and also shamed allies including Canada). Global politics have fully entered the Arctic, with the prime example being the pause of the seven like-minded Arctic states' participation in Arctic Council activities after Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Arctic is geographically large and cannot be treated as a singular entity. It is a region of regions, with the European Arctic withstanding many of the current strategic considerations due to Russian actions. Predicting what the Arctic will look like in the future is difficult to do without taking stock of current considerations: the Arctic is a comparatively stable region; human activity might increase in the Arctic, but this is still uncertain; and China is a challenge regionally in Southeast Asia, but the Chinese-Russian relationship is the key factor to consider in policymaking. Russia is China's door to the Arctic and will determine Beijing's level of regional involvement, but this access is likely to be viewed as conditional based on the [degree of trust](#) in the broader Sino-Russian relationship.

A Nordic-oriented NATO

With Sweden and Finland's new NATO membership, the balance of power and focus of the alliance has shifted from the Baltics to the Nordics, even amidst Russia's full invasion of Ukraine. This opens strategic gaps and seams for our adversaries to exploit and raises questions over future NATO sub-regional commands and regional defence plans, which would have operational and tactical implications. The like-minded seven Arctic and rest of NATO need to work together on problem to break down information and knowledge silos and stovepipes to attain cross-alliance situational awareness. A common operating and intelligence picture of the persistent present and near-term threats is needed to ensure the alliance's thinking is on the same page and future strategy is applied with foresight. Furthermore, NATO's Command Structure (NCS), which represents the strategic, operational, and component command levels and was last reformed at the 2010 Lisbon Summit, contains the Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformation.¹⁵ Reviewing how NATO Command and Control is structured and how the alliance organizes would support integration efforts, if politically palatable. Some commentators have [begun calling for a unified NATO Arctic Command](#) under ACO.

Additionally, there are geographic gaps and seams which may be exploited by our adversaries. Examples of these openings include the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap or the Bear gap between Svalbard and continental Norway. The GIUK gap represents a crucial sea line of communications (SLOC) connecting Europe to the North

Atlantic and westward to North America. Likewise, the Bear gap is a SLOC between the Barents and Norwegian Sea, which our adversaries may seek to disrupt the flow of forces, vessels, or goods through. Managing these

NATO needs to reconsider the important geographical location of smaller members such as Iceland, or of non-members such as Ireland, whose Irish Sea is home to vital telecommunications and data connectivity cables which feed into the rest of Europe. These SLOCs and small and non-member states are increasingly important considerations in a changing strategic operating environment, in which factors such as climate change could lead to adversary-supported disruptive hybrid tactics such as piracy – which was suggested by some attendees and panelists.

All of the like-minded Arctic countries are now members of the alliance. Canada’s choices of where to send CAF assets is going to be an important future conversations, as Ottawa has historically favoured commitments to NATO in the Baltics. If a NATO Arctic region is stood up, combined with the foundation of [Joint Forces Command \(JFC\) Norfolk](#) in 2018 (which is twinned with United States Second Fleet), Canada may find itself in a dilemma over where to contribute personnel and resources to the alliance given ongoing internal personnel and capability shortages.



Figure 5: Map of Russian Bastion Defence in relation to Norway and the Bear and GIUK gaps¹⁶

Reserve components such as the [Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups](#) and the Norwegian Home Guard build community resilience and can facilitate international and sub-national collaboration. The diversity of peoples in the Canadian Ranger organization reinforce kinship ties across the Arctic, including family ties that transcend state or territorial boundaries. The Rangers are a source of national and local pride, especially for Canadians who are unable to leave their home communities due to familial or cultural commitments but still want to serve and assist the country. The Canadian Rangers within the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as their cooperation with international allies, form a sort of “fraternity of the uniform.”¹⁷

Climate change is already underway in the Canadian Arctic, with unheard of December temperatures of -15° Celsius in places such as Tuktoyuktuk, Northwest Territories. Our adversaries are talking more about the Canadian Arctic and our policy and decision makers need to be more proactive, rather than reactive, when it

comes to utilizing the Canadian Rangers, working with allies such as the like-minded group of seven Arctic states, and dual-use investment. The Canadian Arctic has plentiful amounts of natural resources such as oil and gas, and local inhabitants see the threats coming now to their economic prosperity. China has been economically [aggressive](#) in wanting to buy key mines and ports in the region, prompting the urgency in calls for a federal government approach to protect the interests of its Northern citizens – for example, in strategic areas such as the Beaufort Sea. Given Indigenous peoples have called the Arctic home since time immemorial and are heavily dependent on the land for their traditional lifestyles, the presence of foreign or commercial entities extracting vital resources for profit is great concern.

Some attendees also raised the bifurcation of civilian agencies and military organizations in Canada as a detrimental information silo. A shared common operating picture that can be easily and readily shared would be of use in crises where whole-of-government approaches (such as Search and Rescue) are needed and time is essential. The model for information integration can be found in Marine Security Operations Centres (MSOCs), which combine Canadian Border Services Agency, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canadian Coast Guard, DND, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Transport Canada in an East, West, and Great Lakes Regional offices. By using a whole-of-government approach to analyze and form a real time maritime situational awareness picture, responding to threats can be delineated by their respective mandate (such as constabulary law enforcement or regulatory and safety agencies).¹⁸ Sharing information across partners and agencies increases societal resilience and the ability to respond to issues and events in a timely manner.

Two high-level dialogues serve as examples of successful Arctic military cooperation. First, the US and Norwegian-hosted [Arctic Security Forces Roundtable](#) (ASFR) serves as a high-level dialogue for 2-star flag and general officers to work cooperatively on a wide range of Arctic issues and coordinate training exercises. As the Arctic Council expressly does not discuss or deal with military concerns, these meetings are important for sharing knowledge and establishing relationships and dialogue. “Established in 2010 by Norway and the U.S., the ASFR promotes Arctic cooperation among military forces that operate in and around the region, while also supporting nations that promote peaceful development of the Arctic region and adhere to rules-based international order.”¹⁹ The like-minded seven Arctic states participate, alongside France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany; Russia has not participated since 2014 after its invasion of Crimea.

Second, the Arctic Chiefs of Defense (ACHODs) Forum was restarted in 2022 after its initial conception in 2012. Like the ASFR, discussions were paused after Russia’s 2014 invasion of Crimea.²⁰ This dialogue originally “allowed participants to increase their mutual understanding on Arctic issues, share knowledge about regional operational challenges, and discuss ways in which militaries can support civilian authorities in the North.”²¹ Canada hosted the 2022 reboot with representatives from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and the US to “share lessons learned from ongoing Arctic operations and to coordinate enhanced cooperation.”²² These forums represent an important dialogue in a geopolitical threat environment where unintended consequences and spillover effects from miscommunication is a present concern. With greater focus on the European Arctic and Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO, having regional NATO commands and the like-minded Arctic states regularly communicate and meet is crucial to enhance cooperation, training, and share best practices.

Conclusion

In a rapidly changing geostrategic environment with a multiplicity of considerations and factors, Canada, Norway, and other like-minded Arctic states and partners need to “start drawing lines in the snow” and collaborate proactively against a growing number of pan-domain, below-the-threshold tactics and threats that our adversaries employ. During the inaugural Gauntlet Seminar, Canadian, Norwegian, and American practitioners, officials, and academics shared knowledge and expertise, lessons learned, and offered suggestions to bolster societal resilience, broader strategic implications of a shift towards the Nordic region for NATO, a common view among allies of the threat perception, regional vulnerabilities, and upcoming defence investments. Further sharing of information and bolstering societal resilience were overarching themes amongst all speakers and panelists. Dialogues such as this are increasingly important in an era of increased geopolitical attention towards the Arctic and in a tense global strategic environment to bolster alliances and partnerships; this was evidenced by a senior discussion with a European Air Force general officer who highlighted the importance of the Gauntlet Seminar in a Chatham House event to a Canadian university audience in February 2024. The Gauntlet Seminar provides a foundation for relationship building and exchange of ideas to move conversations forward, contributing to a better understanding of the mutual challenges and opportunities facing Canada and Norway.

Notes

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¹ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2017), 50, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/strong-secure-engaged/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

² The Government of Norway, *The Norwegian Government's Arctic Policy*, (Oslo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021), https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/arctic_policy/id2830120/.

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