



EMERGING ARCTIC SECURITY THREATS: NORDIC AND NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

Workshop Report

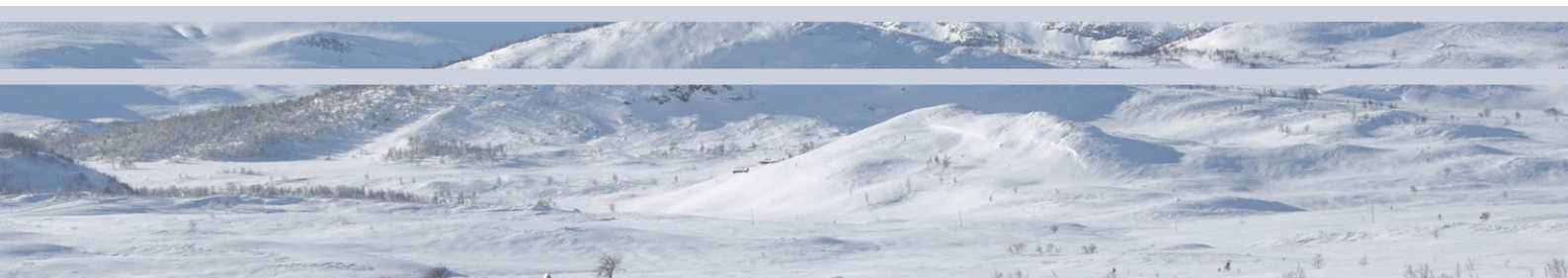
By P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Rory Jakubec

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Auditorium Nedre Lysthus
Centre for Peace Studies,
The University of Tromsø – The
Arctic University of Norway (UiT)

This student-led workshop on *Emerging Arctic Security Threats: Nordic and North American Perspectives* was held at Norway's Arctic University (UiT) in Tromsø on Monday, 29 January 2024. During the event, young scholars and policy practitioners had an opportunity to discuss emerging Arctic security issues with established North American and Nordic experts. Rich discussions and insights enhanced awareness amongst participants and facilitated discussion on how diverse stakeholders and rightsholders in the like-minded Arctic states can best promote cooperation and stability across the Circumpolar North.

The turnout was more modest than expected, owing to 75 mile/hour winds and a nasty storm that hit Tromsø that day. Owing to the conditions, Rory Jakubec, the lead organizer of the event with Dr. Lackenbauer, found her flight cancelled from Bodø (where she is studying for the winter 2024 term). This prevented her from participating in the workshop which she had played an instrumental hand in organizing.





Welcome Remarks

Dr. Marc Lanteigne (Associate Professor, UiT), Dr. Whitney Lackenbauer (Professor, Trent University, and Network Lead of the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network - NAADSN), and Dr. Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv (Professor, UiT) welcomed workshop participants. They explained that this was a jointly organized event by NAADSN and UiT, with funding secured by St. Francis Xavier University undergraduate student Rory Jakubec through the Canadian [Department of National Defence \(DND\) Mobilizing Insights in National Defence and Security \(MINDS\) Young MINDS Initiative](#).

In her remarks, Dr. Hoogensen Gjørsv introduced [the Grey Zone \(GZ\) research group](#) at UiT which focuses on challenges around understanding and addressing “grey zone” or hybrid threats and warfare. Researchers involved in the project explore how these concepts are defined, what and how different threats are perceived (from individual, society, to state and international levels), and ways of managing threats and crises through local preparedness and societal trust, national preparedness strategies, Total Defense, and Whole-of Government and Comprehensive Approaches.

Lunch Keynote: Jackie Jacobson

Our opening keynote speaker, Jackie Jacobson, joined us in person after a long trip from his home in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. Until recently, he represented the Nunakput constituency in the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, having been first elected in 2007 and re-elected in 2011, serving a term as elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and then being elected again from 2019-2023. He also has been an active member of the Tuktoyaktuk community, serving on the hamlet council as the mayor for two terms and as a hamlet councillor for three terms. He served as the secretary/treasurer of the Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation for eight years, as a community recreation board member for three years, and as the Chair of the Tuktoyaktuk Housing board for four years. In addition, Mr. Jacobson served for six years as both member of the board and as the Chair of the Inuvialuit Development Corporation, and Chair of the Human Resources Board with Norterra. His is also





a proud a 23-year member of the Canadian Rangers, now elected to the rank of Sergeant as his patrol commander, as well as serving as a member of the local search and rescue team and an active volunteer member of the Tuktoyaktuk Fire Department for the past 25 years.

Mr. Jacobson’s reflections began with an overview of his background as an Inuvialuit man with German and other European ancestry as well. He described himself as a “patriot of the country” who loves Canada but also has 528 family members across the western border in Alaska. Self-determining Indigenous Peoples worked collaboratively around the circumpolar world – and Jacobson had a vision of this extending to Arctic security. He spoke about the importance of Canada-US cooperation on search and rescue, as well as the need to establish safe harbours in the Western Arctic, including at Kotzebue, Nome, and Tuktoyaktuk. He expressed concerns about foreign marine scientific research vessels arriving without notification to local residents, increased ship traffic, the appearance of new fish species and animals, and coastal erosion, and permafrost cracking and degradation (including effects on the Inuvik-Tuk highway).

Jacobson spoke of Inuvialuit and Gwich’in from the Beaufort and Mackenzie Delta region as resilient and adaptable peoples. Not everyone can leave home to serve their country, and he explained how the Canadian Rangers allows Northern Canadians to serve from home. He told stories of training pilots in Arctic survival, of working with Norwegian diving teams, and of supporting NASA, National Geographic, and the calibration of the satellite station in Inuvik. Jacobson also highlighted the importance of energy security to Northerners, and the opportunities associated with the Inuvialuit Energy Security project, a plan to build a liquefied natural gas plant near the 3,000-metre deep TUK M-18 well approximately 17 km southwest of Tuktoyaktuk. This project envisages using LNG icebreakers to create shipping corridors out of the community, which would be transformed into a natural gas port.

Indigenous Perspectives: Self-Determination, Security, and Resilience

Moderator: Marc Lanteigne (UiT)

Jackie Jacobson (Canadian Rangers)

Sara Olsvig (Inuit Circumpolar Council)

Bridget Larocque (NAADSN)

This session began with Mr. Jacobson answering various questions inspired by his keynote. Themes included: the possibility of adapting the Canadian Ranger model in Norway or the other Nordic countries; the idea of Total Defence and whether it is perceived as militarizing society; the importance of two-way communications, both informing Northerners about threats and about Northerners communicating information to authorities; the value of the Junior





Canadian Rangers, a military-funded youth program enabled by the Rangers and local adult committees, that keep teenagers occupied, in school, and away from alcohol and drugs; and the role of Facebook now serving as “the new bush radio” in the Canadian North.

The next speaker, Sara Olsvig, is International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council. Olsvig served as member of the Parliament of Denmark (2011 - 2015) and the Parliament of Greenland (2013 - 2018). Olsvig has been leader of the political party Inuit Ataqatigiit and was Vice Premier and Minister of Social Affairs, Families, Gender Equality and Justice in the Government of Greenland from 2016 to 2018. She was also a member (2011 - 2014) and Chairperson of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (2013-2014). Ms. Olsvig was an appointed member of the Constitutional Commission of Greenland and is a member of the Human Rights Council of Greenland. She holds a Master of Science in Anthropology and is currently a Ph.D.-candidate at Ilisimatusarfik, the University of Greenland in Nuuk, Greenland.

Olsvig emphasized that, in Greenland, Arctic Peoples are inextricably linked to geopolitics and cannot be separated from either the “geo” or the politics. Accordingly, military, security, and foreign policy discussions must involve Indigenous Peoples both for moral reasons and to respect the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP). Greenlandic self-government is rooted in the inherent right of Indigenous Peoples to do so, not because states say that they can self-govern. Indigenous Peoples have a legal right to self-determine, even in areas claimed by nation states to fall within their competency (such as national defence and foreign policy). Accordingly, she highlighted that state-based geopolitical frameworks require critical re-evaluation to ensure that they include and reflect self-determined Indigenous perspectives. This will entail changes to how the Kingdom of Denmark makes decisions, Olsvig insisted, and difficulties in maintaining positive relations and trust also affects relations with the United States.

She explained how Greenland has clearly positioned itself, in both words and on paper, as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). She asked participants to consider what this means for Inuit across Inuit Nunaat (the Inuit transnational homeland), including in Chukotka in the Russian Federation. As the international chair of ICC, Olsvig explained how she strives to have ICC include Chukotkans in their delegations (such as online representation during the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials’ meeting held earlier that day in Tromsø). This is imperative to ensure that ICC can protect and assert human rights throughout Inuit Nunaat and globally.





Olsvig also explained that she is very interested in the Canadian Rangers as a potential inspiration for service in Greenland. There is no “one size fits all” solution in Greenland, she observed, and most Greenlanders do not speak the language of the military – so the military will need to learn Greenlandic! She also explained how the new Arctic Basic Education program, developed by the Danish Armed Forces in cooperation with the Greenlandic government to train young Greenlanders for preparedness and rescue tasks and which starts this spring in a newly renovated facility in Kangerlussuaq, focuses on civilian activities at the insistence of Greenlanders. She noted how it will strengthen Greenlandic preparedness and resilience at the community level, but without militarizing the country. She later explained that Greenland youth can join the Danish armed forces, but not in a separate Greenland force.

“56,000 people on an island of 2.2 million square kilometres cannot resist, by themselves, any military invasion,” Olsvig noted. This means that Greenlanders need alliances and allies. It also means that Greenlanders must be “firmly integrated into both geo and politics.” The question-and-answer period that followed grappled with various themes: Iceland as a model of an independent nation-state without a military; how the Greenlandic Government’s plans to align closely with NATO do not necessarily mean cutting all ties with Denmark; and how Greenland is moving towards more bilateral agreements with the United States. There was also a lengthy discussion about the US Space Force Base at Pituffik (formerly known as Air Force Base Thule) and the continuing consequences of the force relocation of Inughuit with terms of access to lands and rich resources in the area. Greenlanders appreciated the speeches at the [renaming ceremony in April 2023](#), which recognized the effects on Inughuit, and Olsvig emphasized that any act that does not respect Greenlanders’ self-determination will be perceived as a neo-colonial approach.

Bridget Larocque is an Indigenous resident of the Northwest Territories who brings a distinct worldview from that region, and also shares a comprehensive knowledge of research methods and Indigenous and gender issues. In addition to serving as co-lead and Northern Advisory Board chair with the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN), she serves as a policy advisor and researcher with the Arctic Athabaskan Council (ACC) and was executive director of Gwich’in Council International (GCI) from 2007- 12, which indicates her tremendous expertise on the Arctic Council and Arctic governance issues.

Ms. Larocque began with background on her home community of Inuvik, Northwest Territories, which is a [government-made town created in 1953 with a military station there from 1961-1986](#). She emphasized that Métis are an Indigenous People who have been impacted by colonialism and have a long history of experiencing colonial violence and resisting it. She also highlighted the relationship between self-determination and security, including the importance





of trust relationships, allies, and partnerships that are inclusive of entire communities. She noted that self-determination is challenged by forest fires, flooding, dams, and pollutants flowing north to the Mackenzie Delta and Beaufort via the Mackenzie River (Deh Cho).

In terms of militarization, Larocque noted that many Canadian Rangers served in the Mackenzie Delta and are committed to the protection of their homeland. Despite the mixed legacies of Canadian Forces Station Inuvik (from sports and entertainment to sexual exploitation and children born out of wedlock to single mothers who did not receive ongoing support), Indigenous People in the region are resilient because they still have their land base, culture, and knowledge of who they are. She also spoke about unfulfilled promises made in treaties and land claim agreements between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown (Canadian government), as well as continued government monitoring, surveillance, and control. She ended with the question: who will determine the conditions for the militarization of our society?

The question-and-answer period included discussion about how we build government mechanisms to foster trust (given that distrust will lead to a breakdown in Western democracies); the importance of knowing communities and their vulnerabilities to understand what malign influencers might try to exploit and how they might seek to disrupt relationships and trust building; and ways of discerning what self-determined Indigenous economic and political futures look like.

Great Power Competition: What Does it Mean for Arctic Affairs?

Moderator: Rikke Ostergaard (JACO/Ilisimatusarfik)

Ben Gochman (NORAD/NORTHCOM)

Rasmus Gjedssø Bertlesen (Professor of Northern Studies, Barents Chair in Politics, UiT)

Iselin Stensdal (Fridtjof Nansen Institute)

Marc Lanteigne (UiT)

Dr. Benjamin P. Gochman has more than a quarter century of experience in the U.S. Government (Department of Defense, NORAD and USNORTHCOM), international business, and university education with a focus on Homeland Security, Homeland Defense, North American Defense and Security, Great Power Competition, the Arctic, Canada, Mexico, NAFTA, and transnational criminal organizations. Since 2011, Dr. Gochman has worked as Chief, Engagements for Arctic, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean in the NORAD and USNORTHCOM J3 Operations Directorate, and for the last fifteen years he has served as Adjunct Faculty, Josef Korbel School of International Studies and Lead Instructor, Homeland Security Certificate Program, at the University of Denver. He is also the editor of *The Watch*





magazine, which seeks to facilitate objective discussion – truthful, factual, and accurate – and to provide a platform for key influencers to give opinions and assessments that strengthen partnerships and inform homeland defence leaders.

Dr. Gochman's brief characterized the Arctic as the front line for the homeland defence of North America. The region is an arena for power and competition among Strategic Competitors, with climate change opening shipping lanes and opportunities for resource extraction that did not exist during the Cold War. Russia has always been and will always be an Arctic power. It views the Arctic as vital to both its national security and economic prosperity, and it has dedicated significant resources to heavily militarize the Arctic and increase its economic advantage. The Kremlin is also conducting influence operations in the Arctic to gain the comparative advantage and increase the perception of Russia's Arctic leadership legitimacy. For its part, the People's Republic of China (PRC) views the Arctic as vital to its future economic prosperity with transportation routes, raw materials, and fisheries stocks. China declared itself a "Near-Arctic" state in its January 2018 Arctic policy, and it is using a multifaceted strategy of cooperation and predatory behavior for unilateral advantage. Beijing is also conducting an overt influence campaign using a "multilateral cooperation" narrative to legitimize its Arctic presence. In response, the U.S, its allies, and trusted partners must collaborate and cooperate to coordinate, synchronize, and de-conflict their Arctic messaging in order to exploit opportunities to counter malign Russian and PRC influence campaigns. Strategies include combined counter-messaging operations, coordinated truth-in-information campaigns, and deterrence through consequence.

Themes during the question-and-answer period included NORAD's shooting down of high-altitude balloons in 2023 (the first time that the binational command shot down something); ways to coordinate strategies amongst allies with different views, and how to mitigate adversaries seeking to exacerbate divisions by building personal relationships and ensuring coherent approaches to counter malign information; and the EU's increasingly active role in the Arctic and how this relates to security. On the future of NATO in the region, one participant characterized the alliance's greater involvement is "inevitable," with Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere having removed the "pushback" that had existed within alliance and partner circles a few years ago. Questions remain about where NORAD fits with NATO, including how exercises integrate the capabilities of the North American and Nordic allies for air defence.

Dr. Rasmus Gjedssø Bertlesen is Professor of Northern Studies and the inaugural Barents Chair in Politics at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, as well as former Nansen Professor of Arctic Studies at the University of Akureyri (2022-2023). He was a H2020 InsSciDE workpackage leader on theory and strategy, and coordinates the Norwegian-Russian PhD-course "Society and Advanced Technology" in the Arctic (currently on pause) and the Norway-EU Science Diplomacy Network (with five members of this group joining him at the workshop).





Dr. Bertelsen discussed his work on the place of the Arctic in global environmental and political-economic globalisation processes, looking at the role of the Arctic in a transforming international order where Asia is reclaiming its historical economic and political weight. He observed that the Arctic usually reflects the world order at a given time: bipolarity during the Cold War, unipolarity in the post-Cold War era (which formed the basis for a liberal circumpolar order), and now multipolarity. He argued that the Arctic order rests on the relative distribution of power (which he sees moving towards a US/NATO+ and BRICS++ bipolar world) and legitimacy, with the West overestimating its perceived credibility and legitimacy (as evidenced by votes in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council). What is the credibility of the US and Western strategic communications, and do we overestimate our influence?

A changing world order, Bertelsen insists, inherently changes Arctic dynamics. He sees a clear division between the NATO Arctic, under US leadership, and the Russian Arctic (with Moscow reaching out to the BRICS to bolster its weight). Asian powers see themselves as stakeholders in regions around the world, given their concerns about climate change and their interests in energy security, access to raw materials, and shipping lanes to facilitate further economic growth. Will resorting to old Cold War strategic messaging help us to understand and navigate emerging dynamics?

During the question-and-answer period, participants debated Russia's opposition to US unipolarity and its aspirations for multipolarity; questions of how the US, China, and Russia should communicate with each other given the breakdown in official communications, and the appropriateness and role of academics in engaging across these divides; and the extent of compatibility between Russian and Chinese Arctic interests (given historical distrust between them as well as Russia's traditional orientation towards Europe). The topic of research collaboration invited a particularly spirited debate, with one participant explaining that Russian and Chinese researchers are censored in terms of the debates in which they are allowed to engage and can only support the official positions of their state governments, which means who "are not playing on the same fields, or the same game by the same rules!" There is also a danger that Western academics will put their colleagues from Russia and China in personal jeopardy if we engage them in our ideas. On the other hand, if Western openness and dynamism is our strategic advantage, and our competitors' obsession with domestic political stability places them at a disadvantage, how can we protect openness without it becoming a liability?

Iselin Stensdal is a research fellow at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Oslo, Norway, with more than a decade of experience working on Chinese environmental and climate policy, the social and political consequences of pollution/environmental degradation in China, Chinese energy security policy, and Asian interest in the Arctic. In her opening remarks, she suggested that the relative importance of the Arctic is actually dwindling in Chinese circles as it is seen as "just another place." Being less important, however, does not mean that it is unimportant.





Ms. Stensdal explained that the PRC's window of opportunity with the Western countries in the Arctic has closed, leaving only Russia – but that is highly revealing how cautious Beijing remains with respect to Russia. Both the Russian Federation and PRC are authoritarian regimes that want to revise the world order, but the alleged “relationship without limits” is not what President Xi and President Putin say that it is. Different global interests and a deep history of mistrust make the Sino-Russian relationship much more complicated. Although a joint Moscow-Beijing statement introduced the “Polar Silk Road” idea in 2017 (which may have been proposed by Russia), there has been remarkably little action on it since February 2022. The Chinese appear to be interested only in the Yamal and LNG-2 energy projects, and there have been no COSCO transits of the Northern Sea Route.

Beijing also appears to have largely moved away from its “near-Arctic state” self-designation. Stensdal noted that the annual China-Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium meetings hosted under the auspices of the China-Nordic Research Center (CNARC), until COVID restrictions interrupted them, had provided a helpful venue for Nordic experts to see how PRC Arctic policy developed. Established in Shanghai on 10 December 2013 by 10 Member Institutes (four Chinese and six Nordic), CNARC's purpose is to provide a platform for academic cooperation to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of the Arctic and its global impacts, as well as to promote cooperation for sustainable development of the Nordic Arctic and coherent development of China in a global context. The centre's research themes include: Arctic climate change and its impacts; Arctic resources, shipping and economic cooperation; and Arctic policy-making and legislation. Activities included joint research projects, developing Arctic research networks and facilitating opportunities for Chinese and Nordic scholarly collaboration through fellowships and scholarships, convening workshops, and facilitating information sharing and cultural exchange between China and Nordic Countries in an Arctic context. Through these mechanisms, Nordic researchers were able to dispel notions that the Arctic was “up for grabs.” Nevertheless, Stensdal disagreed that any real “marketplace of ideas” exists in China, and there is a danger in that, if something false is repeated often enough, it can be accepted as “real” (the illusionary truth effect).

The question-and-answer period included discussions about the idea of China using the Arctic as a “trojan dragon” or convincing competitors to divert resources to the Arctic rather than theatres elsewhere (such as the South China Sea); why nuclear deterrence makes the Arctic relevant to China; and the role of US secondary sanctions in dissuading China from more fully investing in Russian energy resources and infrastructure.

Dr. Marc Lanteigne is an Associate Professor of Political Science at UiT specialising in Chinese and East Asian politics and international relations, as well as Asia-Pacific security and





cooperation. He also specialises in the politics and security of the polar regions, including Chinese and East Asian diplomacy in the Arctic and via the Antarctic Treaty System, and the politics of non-Arctic states (including Estonia, Japan, Singapore and Switzerland) within the Arctic policy sphere. He is also chief editor of the Arctic news blog *Over the Circle*, which has been cited and quoted in international news services as well as government publications, and a network coordinator with NAADSN.

In the context of great power competition is spilling over into the far north, Dr. Lanteigne questioned the idea of a probable, and perhaps even “inevitable,” Arctic pact between China and Russia, one based on mutual northern interests and shared mistrust of the West (as Admiral Rob Bauer of NATO suggested at the Arctic Circle Assembly in 2022). At first glance, there is much evidence to support this view, especially with Beijing declining to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and instead adopting a nebulous policy of neutrality toward the conflict. Both countries are pushing back against what they allege is NATO militarism and expansionism in the Arctic, and the Polar Silk Road, centering on the Northern Sea Route connecting Asia and Europe, was envisaged to enhance Sino-Russian cooperation.

Lanteigne asked: what if Russia and the PRC see each other as competitors in the Arctic? Below superficial rhetoric, trust between the two actors is lacking, and they hold different views on what the future of the Arctic should look like. Russia has a long history and has invested heavily in the Arctic, while the PRC is not an Arctic state – and is beholden to Russia for access to the region. China wants to transition from being a regional to a global power, and the Arctic is a “strategic frontier” important to this aspiration. Over the last two years, the trajectories of the two countries have diverged, with China’s relative power continuing to rise and Russia’s in decline. Both are well aware of this, which affects cooperation.

Despite lofty declarations of mutual interests in the Arctic, Lanteigne observes that there have been significant cracks in the Sino-Russian regional relationship. These include ongoing concerns about demographic stresses between Russia’s increasingly depopulated Arctic territories (despite Putin’s best efforts to encourage Russian people to live there) and Chinese immigration into the Russian Far East and Siberia from adjacent Chinese provinces. Another telling sign of trouble was the release of an official standard Chinese map in August last year, which designated Bolshoi Ussuriysky (Heixiazi Island in Chinese), an island shared by the two powers, as wholly belonging to China. The Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources previously decreed in February 2023 that its own maps of the Russian Far East be changed to use traditional Chinese names of Russian cities like Vladivostok. Long-term, a key question is whether Russia be able to stand up to PRC pressure?





A closer look at the pattern of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic over the past decade reveals deep ambivalence, especially on Beijing's part, and both governments are concerned about each other's future intentions in the region. Far from pursuing an "unlimited" partnership, Beijing is worried about becoming "shackled to a horse" and being dragged down by Russia. Accordingly, it has instead selectively engaged Russia in the Arctic, in areas that reflect China's own interests (such as increased science diplomacy), and has agreed to purchase Russian oil and gas (albeit at discounted rates). In terms of shipping, Chinese firms have been reluctant to use the Northern Sea Route since 2022 out of worry that this would precipitate Western sanctions for providing economic assistance to Russia. China's stance on oil and gas development in the Russian Arctic has also been sporadic, with Beijing remaining tepid on Russian interests in co-developing the Power of Siberia 2 natural gas pipeline. Much discussion of closer Sino-Russian Arctic ties ignores the fact that Moscow is seeking to further diversify its Arctic partners beyond China, by including India and countries in the Gulf Region. Moreover, China originally perceived the Polar Silk Road as eventually linking Chinese interests with the whole of the Arctic, with plans ranging from mining in Canada and Greenland, to rail links in the Nordic region, to natural gas development in Alaska. Now Beijing must deal with Russia as its only viable economic outlet to the Far North, a situation the Chinese government did not anticipate when the Polar Silk Road was first announced.

The underlying question is whether there is a threshold degree of trust between China and Russia to allow for a deepening of Arctic cooperation. Both countries have engaged in joint military operations in and near the Arctic, such as off the coast of Alaska in August 2023, but it remains unclear as to whether these displays have served any purpose beyond a show of unity against the West. The signing of an April 2023 bilateral coast guard agreement in Murmansk, near the Finnish border, was symbolic, but there has been little sign that Russia will significantly yield its coveted Arctic maritime space to Chinese vessels. Would Russia sit passively if China set submarines or surface naval ships into the Arctic? Again, Chinese access depends on Russian goodwill. Thus, while analysts must continue to carefully analyze the far-northern strategies of Beijing and Moscow, presumptions that the two states are in lockstep with their regional policies creates a distorted strategic picture. When we are discussing great power competition in the Arctic, we also need to acknowledge competition between Russia and the PRC – and must be mindful that China does not want a fragmented Arctic but a single Arctic with which to engage.





Sovereignty, Security, and Safety: From Circumpolar to Community Scales

Moderator: Serafima Andreeva (FNI)
Dr. Charles Morrison (East West Center)
Randy “Church” Kee (TSC)
Dr. Gunhild Hoogensen Gjrv (UiT)
Andr Moreau (Government of Nunavut)
Dr. Jennifer Spence (Belfer Center Arctic Initiative)

Dr. Charles Morrison was president of the Honolulu- and Washington-based East-West Center from 1998-2016. In this capacity, he had extensive involvement in the conceptualization, organization and funding of multilateral, policy-oriented education, research and dialogue projects. A strong advocate of the concept of Asia Pacific community, he served on the Standing Committee of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (and was the organization’s international chair and co-chair from 2005-2012), is a past chair of the U.S. National Consortium of APEC Study Centers, and has been a research adviser to two high-level bi-national Japan-U.S. commissions. He also coordinates a project on Asia-North American understandings of the Arctic.

Dr. Morrison began by noting that Asians typically see the Arctic in terms of shipping routes, resources, and infrastructure, while North Americans see it in terms of territorial integrity (or “sovereignty” in Canadian language). Accordingly, Asians less commonly harbour a sense of responsibility, sustainability, or focus on Indigenous Peoples and their rights. Geopolitics is not their major consideration. Instead, they see Arctic security primarily in terms of climate change, cognizant that the challenges associated with greenhouse gas emissions start in the mid-latitudes and then are amplified as they interact with global systems.

Geopolitical tension and conflict also starts in the mid-latitudes and can spill over into the Arctic, but Morrison characterized the Arctic as a “low-conflict area” because there are no acute land or territorial conflicts (and maritime disputes are unlikely to lead to military conflict). He also highlighted the very high cost of building and maintaining military infrastructure in the region, with the Kola Peninsula and northern Nordic countries the only areas where this is significant. Accordingly, he anticipated that tensions elsewhere in the world are likely to divert military resources from the Arctic. He also noted that the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO makes the “red lines” more clear.”

Morrison added various “caveats” to his net assessment of a “low-conflict” region. Accidents have the potential to escalate. The Sino-Russian relationship is also a significant variable,





although he agreed with Lanteigne's position that the PRC is suspicious of Russia, and Russia uncomfortably dependent on the PRC. He also noted the salience of mis/disinformation and proxy conflict, not akin to the kinetic War in Ukraine but in the form of deniable, non-kinetic actions. He ended with the importance of communication and mechanisms for dialogue to lower the risk of miscalculation or accident sparking a conflict in the region.

MGen (retired) Randy "Church" Kee is Director of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, the US Department of Defense's sixth and newest regional center, located in Anchorage, Alaska. In 2020, the President of the U.S. appointed Kee as a Commissioner to the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, and from 4 January 2016 to 22 August 2021 he served as the Executive Director of the Arctic Domain Awareness Center, a U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center of Excellence in Maritime Research, hosted by the University of Alaska. During his 30-year military career, Kee led at the squadron, group, wing, and Air Operations Center levels. General Kee's staff assignments include U.S. Transportation Command, Headquarters USAF, and the U.S. Joint Staff in both Operations plus Strategic Plans and Policy Directorates. While in uniform he contributed to U.S. Arctic Strategy, supported domain awareness technology development, and Defense Support to Arctic crisis response. He culminated his military service as Director of Strategy, Policy, Planning and Capabilities for U.S. European Command (ECJ5/8) in Stuttgart, Germany.

Mr. Kee's comments suggested that the Arctic security equation consists of five core concepts: sovereignty, security, safety, circumpolarity, and community. He emphasized that Indigenous sovereignty is critical to how we envisage the Arctic space, and that the Arctic states are responsible for protecting their Arctic citizens. NATO and NORAD are proven mechanisms for defence for threats emanating from and through the Arctic region, enabling Canada, the US and their allies in Europe to deter and dissuade military aggression in the Arctic. When called to respond, NATO and NORAD can provide the forces capability with suitable command and control to counter air, land, sea and cyber threats, but each mechanism must be fully suited to cope with a more diversified threat picture that could characterise the Arctic in the coming years and beyond. Creating and resourcing mechanisms for multi-national security forces' collaboration and cooperation complementary to defence mechanisms can help to reduce threats and risk from malign activities. Meanwhile, advancing mechanisms and opportunities for Arctic residents to contribute more substantively in regional governance is critical and necessary to address historic mistakes. Not only do Indigenous voices need to be heard, but also the volume of their message needs to be amplified.

Dr. Gunhild Hoogensen Gjorv's research has interrogated the interactions and tensions between perceptions of state and human security in a variety of contexts, with a particular focus





on civil-military interaction and Arctic perceptions of security. She is concerned with representations and performances of civilian agency, drawing upon intersectional approaches to better understand agency, “everyday” security, and possibilities for peace. She currently leads the project Resilient Civilians examining civilian agency in population-centric and hybrid warfare scenarios (partially funded by the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme).

Dr. Hoogensen Gjørsv agreed with the assessment that we are unlikely to see overt kinetic military conflict in the Arctic region. Instead, we are seeing below-the-threshold provocations (hybrid or “grey zone” threats that fall within the competitive continuum between peace and war and below the threshold of armed conflict) in the region. Her research reveals a recent increase in hybrid threat activities in the Norwegian High North, most of which are either attributed to Russia or suspected to originate from Russia. These threats take various forms, and intend to destabilize society without engaging in direct military confrontation. While Russia is unlikely to seek or engage in direct military confrontation in the European High North, she warned that the use of “below the threshold” activities could serve to increase doubt and mistrust, thereby destabilizing the target country. Over time, such activities could exacerbate insecurity in Norway and influence geopolitical power dynamics in the European Arctic more generally.

Recognizing that “psychological operations” do not look the same today as they did historically, Hoogensen Gjørsv called for vigilant monitoring and policy development to counter hybrid threats, with a particular focus on the local level (where most hybrid activities are taking place). In Northern Norway, intelligence and information gathering includes Russian trawlers mapping the seabed (including critical infrastructure thereon which could be sabotaged), drones gathering information, and the deployment of spies from embassies and universities. She emphasized that academics are “not neutral actors,” and reiterated that Western researchers are allowed to share ideas freely, while colleagues from other countries find themselves under threat for doing so. Our adversaries are seeking to divide our pluralistic, democratic societies. By providing marginalized people in our countries with a space to be heard we can start to deal with their sense of disenfranchisement. Supporting pluralism is the key to our stability, and this will not be accomplished through military solutions. Instead, Hoogensen Gjørsv urged participants to learn from local experiences and discern ways to defend local values to bolster resilience.

André Moreau is Director of Intergovernmental Relations at the Government of Nunavut in Iqaluit and an Action Canada public policy fellow. In his previous role as the Circumpolar Affairs Advisor in the Government of Nunavut’s department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, André advocated for the interests of Nunavummiut at both the





domestic and international levels and advised the territorial government on a wide range of matters involving the circumpolar region. Before that, he was the first-ever Indigenous Liaison Officer at the University of Waterloo, where he pioneered significant changes in recruitment and admission policies to better serve Indigenous students and communities. He also actively contributes to his community of Iqaluit as a volunteer with the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association (CASARA), where he assists in search and rescue operations in Nunavut, and as a board member and volunteer at the Niqinik Nuatsivik Nunavut Food Bank.

Mr. Moreau explained liaison activities with international partners and the importance of translating ideas so that they make sense at both territorial government and community levels. Challenges facing the Government of Nunavut (distances, multiple time zones, no road connectivity between communities) make it difficult to ensure that messages get across the entire territory. A team approach is necessary, including hunters and trappers organizations (HTOs), Inuit Guardians, Canadian Rangers, and other groups that comprise a network who identify changes and enable action. Nevertheless, it is also difficult to maintain trust with diverse rightsholders and stakeholders when there is a high turnover of government employees.

Moreau held up the Canadian Rangers as a strong example of how communities can effectively liaise with larger organizations. The vast majority of Rangers serving in Nunavut are Inuit and serve as the “eyes, ears, and voice” of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) throughout the territory. They are not intended to act as combat forces and receive no tactical military training. Instead, their regular tasks include surveillance and presence patrols, collecting local data for the military, reporting unusual sightings, participating in community events, and assisting with domestic military operations. To facilitate these operations, Rangers share their knowledge and skills with other members of the military, teaching them how to survive and function effectively in Arctic environments. They are also heavily involved in leading and mentoring youth in their communities through the Junior Canadian Ranger (JCR) program, which promotes traditional cultures and lifestyles and other developmental activities. Furthermore, Rangers are often called upon to respond to local emergencies and disasters, conduct search and rescue operations, support humanitarian operations, and perform other public safety missions. The Rangers are organized into patrols by community, which are led by a patrol commander (sergeant) and second-in-command (a master corporal) who are elected into these positions by patrol members.

In terms of “militarization” of the Canadian Arctic more generally, Moreau noted that Canadians generally see the CAF as a positive force in emergency response, given their increasingly active domestic role in support of civilian authorities in the Canadian Arctic. This includes responses to forest fires, flooding, and a water crisis in Iqaluit. In October 2021, Iqaluit’s city council declared a local state of emergency when petroleum entered the water





system and made the local supply unsafe to consume even after filtration or boiling. When the colder temperatures complicated the city's pumping of water from the Sylvia Grinnell River and presented hazards to the water truck pumps and equipment, the Government of Nunavut requested aid from the CAF. Under Operation LENTUS, through which the military responds to emergencies and natural disasters, the CAF was dispatched to support the efforts to provide potable water to residents of Iqaluit. They did so for six weeks, producing 307,650 litres of purified water for the city. This case exemplifies how the military can make a positive contribution to community resilience.

Dr. Jennifer Spence is the Project Director of the Arctic Initiative at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, with expertise related to sustainable development, international governance, institutional effectiveness, and public policy. She is also an Adjunct Professor with Carleton University's Northern Studies Graduate Program and was the Executive Secretary of the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group until 2023. Previously, she worked for 18 years with the Government of Canada in senior positions related to resource management, conflict and change management, strategic planning, and leadership development.

Dr. Spence acknowledged tensions between ideas around sovereignty (state, Indigenous, individual), security, and safety, and returned to the fundamental question of what type of sovereignty or security we are talking about. This inherently connects to questions of scale, recognizing that state action (for example, to deal with Russian geopolitical threats) can cause insecurity at local levels. It is imperative to ensure that the right decisions are taken at the appropriate scale, and that the right people are engaged when making them. She observed that hybrid threats are evolving, as are our concepts of sovereignty and security, and we must be attentive to non-state actors, as well as sub-state tensions, that make this a complex space.

In the question-and-answer period, the first discussion focused on how accidents are not just military and, by extension, what potential scenarios we should anticipate and prepare for. The Ted Stevens Center provided an overview of a recent activity on North Atlantic-Arctic region crisis response scenarios, which include tourism, forest fires, industrial development, shipping, search and rescue, aging infrastructure (such as power plants and airports), and cyber. A subsequent discussion dove more deeply into the question of how we can make communities more resilient to hybrid threats at the grassroots level. One participant suggested that we should get communities to define the models and tell us what information is useful to them, which will be highly context specific. Another participant emphasized the value of storytelling, rooted in positions of trust (such as elders and community leaders), as well as schools as vital nodes of communication and public education.





Final Comments

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Whitney Lackenbauer, and Marc Lanteigne offered final reflections, thanked the teams at NAADSN and UiT for organizing the event, and thanked the participants for braving the treacherous weather conditions to engage in such a rich and substantive discussion.

Future Work

- Correcting persistent “myths” about Arctic sovereignty and security, and more carefully articulating the geopolitical and security implications of climate change in the region
- Clarifying how the Canadian Rangers could serve as a potential model or inspiration for Northern service in armed forces in other like-minded Arctic countries
- Comparative historical studies on the effects of Arctic militarization on Indigenous Peoples
- Comparative work on how national governments can contribute to Indigenous and sub-national jurisdictional priorities in the North, including improvements to infrastructure
- Comparative work on how militaries in the seven like-minded Arctic states engage with Indigenous rightsholders
- Discerning ways of raising political and public awareness about “hybrid threats” in and to the Arctic, including the information environment
- Clarifying the role of academic networks in the information and influence environments, including mapping networks of collaboration between researchers from various countries and their relationships with Russian and Chinese researchers
- Identifying further opportunities for practical operational and strategic collaboration with like-minded Arctic allies, particularly in light of Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO
- Clarifying DND/CAF’s roles in advancing whole-of-government priorities in the Canadian Arctic and North, and how these align with our allies’ whole-of-government or comprehensive security frameworks and structures (including comparative work on the military roles in humanitarian assistance and disaster response)
- Convening a student-led workshop on Arctic security through a North American lens, ideally in the Canadian Arctic





Key Takeaways

- The Canadian Rangers, who serve as the “eyes, ears, and voice” in the North, are an example of military service that other countries are interested in learning about.
- Military, security and foreign policy discussions must involve Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous voices should be amplified to ensure that Arctic residents have a say in policies that impact them.
- Government mechanisms to foster trust amongst their populations with respect to Arctic security should be reinforced.
- While the immediate conventional military threat remains low, Russia and China are competitors who pose distinct threats in and to the region, and the status of their relationship/partnership should be closely monitored.
- Competition between Russia and China means that their partnership may not be as strong as they seek to project outwardly.
- The local level is most vulnerable to hybrid threats, requiring better monitoring and investments in appropriately scaled and resourced whole-of-government and whole-of-society solutions.
- The like-minded Arctic states should share best practices of how multi-use infrastructure can meet military requirements and benefit local communities.
- Myriad actors make the Arctic a complex space and complicate decision-making, requiring close attentiveness to authorities and mandates as well as distinctions between rightsholders and stakeholders.
- In a changing geo-political and environmental landscape, strategic and operational partnerships and ties between like-minded Arctic States are increasingly important. Identifying and addressing emerging pan-domain threats to the Arctic requires improved cooperation between North American and Nordic allies, including through joint exercises that help to clarify the relationships between NORAD and NATO.
- Dialogue and communication between countries (including competitors) are important to lower the chance of mis/disinformation sparking a conflict in the Arctic, but engagement must be carefully calibrated to ensure that our competitors and adversaries cannot use it to undermine our defence and deterrence efforts or weaponize it to suggest that we can return to a *status quo ante bellum*.

