

ACTIVITY REPORT



OCTOBER 15, 2024

NAADSN-FNI Canada Seminar Series (September 2024) Report

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The North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN) came together with the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI) for a series of meetings in Ottawa and Montreal in September 2024. It was noted that Canada and Norway host the two epistemic communities studying the Arctic. Of these communities, the FNI is the largest group studying the politics of the Arctic in Norway. It is an apolitical body not connected to the Norwegian state, nor it is a think tank.¹ Similarly, NAADSN is the largest group in Canada studying the politics of the Arctic and is also apolitical but is an original Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security (MINDS) Collaborative Network funded by the Department of National Defence (DND).² Both groups seek to deepen their Arctic contacts in each other's countries given their mutual importance in the Arctic. The various meetings were focused on opportunities for regular contact and knowledge exchange.

The Second Annual Norway-Canada Gauntlet Seminar held in Ottawa served to begin entrenching cooperation and served as a springboard to deepened epistemic ties, creating new involvement for Canadians in the European High North and Norwegians in the Canadian Arctic. A major theme throughout the meetings was the major tension between the drivers of climate change and geopolitics that animate the Arctic, and how they could be reconciled. Other themes included:

- Canadian Approaches to the Arctic centred on human security and sovereignty.
- Canada's Strategic Role in the European High North is limited due to stretched military and Baltic commitments.
- Norwegian Approaches to the Arctic are focused on Nordic cooperation rather than NATO.
- Norway perceives Canada's approach to Arctic security to be too broad; needs more of a defence focus.
- Norwegian intergovernmental affairs are marked by low trust between Northern and Southern communities.
- Russia is the main driver of Norwegian security calling for a strategy of deterrence (NATO) and reassurance (Arctic Council).
- Tensions between Canada and Norway were also identified.

FNI-NAADSN Meeting with ADM(Pol) Ottawa, Ontario

This closed meeting, organized by desk officers from ADM(Pol) working on Arctic issues, FNI, and NAADSN, was hosted at National Defence Headquarters on 18 September under Chatham House rules. The participants discussed areas of policy cooperation, divergence, and even conceptual challenges in Canadian and Norwegian Arctic defence. While the geopolitics of Russia's invasion of Ukraine was driving Norwegian Arctic defence, it was climate change that was largely animating Canadian approaches to the Arctic. The influence of these two drivers, along with each country's different geographies, made for an excellent discussion.

Both Canadians and Norwegians agreed that, from a geopolitical perspective, the Arctic was at risk from threats spilling into it from elsewhere (including Ukraine) that posed a danger to the High North. The Arctic was not a wellspring of geopolitics that could destabilize the larger international system.

The Norwegians noted a significant increase in Russian activity in the High North since 2016. Subsequently, the current threat environment is "all about Russia" for Norway, although Oslo insists that there is "no immediate threat." To check this Russian activity, Norway has pursued a twin policy of strategic deterrence alongside diplomatic reassurance designed to prevent strategic escalation.

Norwegian defence policies reflect a return to Cold War-style deterrence, with the risk of a land invasion of Norwegian territory being the primary focus. Norway also focuses on Russian strategic weapons, many of which are stationed adjacent the High North in the Kola Peninsula. This clear and proximate threat has thus shaped a focused defence policy. Central to this was policy alignment with its Nordic allies. Furthermore, Norway has pursued a policy that is dependant not so much upon NATO, but the larger countries within such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Germany (in that order) which bring capabilities to the High North that other members cannot. Indeed, some of the Norwegians professed that they do not currently consider Canada a key ally in the High North. They openly asked why Canada could not contribute further towards safeguarding the European High North?

The Norwegians acknowledge that a Cold War-style deterrence policy did risk escalation with Russia. Any NATO involvement in the High North triggers Russian threat perceptions, leading to greater Norwegian insecurity. However, the Norwegians pointed out that they still maintained some contact and cooperation with Russia on issues like border crossings, fisheries, and Svalbard. The Norwegians also pointed to the Arctic Council as an effective "reassurance strategy." They noted that creating a forum like the Arctic Council would be nearly impossible today, leading them to support an incremental and cautious approach to resuming activities and sustaining the Council below the political level (as is currently being done). Through this forum and other fora, the Norwegians stressed message coherence with other Nordic states being central to this reassurance strategy.

The Canadians noted their defence policy is much broader than Norway's. The 2019 strategy *Strong, Secure, Engaged*³ had fallen behind the realities of the world, leading to the defence policy update *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence* released in April 2024.⁴ Some participants also noted that there was an internal Canadian/DND push to refocus on the Arctic due to interests in securing Canada's borders, alongside pressure from the United States to take a stronger role in North American defence. Accordingly, Canada's latest defence policy focuses on the Canadian Arctic and Northern approaches to an unprecedented degree.⁵

While the Canadians emphasized that they share similar values with the Norwegians, their priorities diverge modestly with respect to Indigenous engagement, climate security, and human security within this broader national defence framework. Canada's Arctic defence policy is not just about a kinetic threat posed by Russia to its North. Climate change leads to unique commitments in Canadian Arctic. Canada's foremost commitment is to the people who live in the Arctic and thus is primarily focused on future infrastructure in the face of climate change. This is the major policy difference between the Canadian Arctic and the Norwegian High North due to Canada's requirement to provide services and engagement over a massive geographic space. This is followed by procuring modern equipment like the F-35s and addressing economic threats such as foreign direct investment (FDI) in mining.

In response to Norwegian criticism of Canadian disinterest in the High North, participants acknowledged that Canada could engage with the Nordic countries more fulsomely (see Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly's Nordic Dialogue statement⁶) and could take a more active role in deterring Russia in the Nordic Arctic. However, a shrinking Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is limited in its capacity to send members to the Norwegian High North, driving the need to decide between the Arctic and Baltic regions, where Canada has increased its military presence from a battlegroup to a battalion.

In response to Canada's focus on Indigenous Northerners and human security, Canada's fixation on Indigenous relations does not always make sense to Norway because they are more siloed in their thinking about the High North. The Norwegians noted that there is a relatively low level of trust between Northern and Southern Norwegian communities due to ineffective communication strategies, with limited interest in resolving this tension from the Norwegian government's perspective. Norway does not have reserves or remote Indigenous communities like Canada. Historical land claims for both Sámi and non-Sámi people reach back over a thousand of years, but there are no land claim agreements or treaties akin to Canada's with its Indigenous Peoples. Interest in Indigenous rights of the Sámi people has increased in Norway, but this is an understudied area in Norway. However, with the rapid militarization in Norway, demonstrated by its commitment to reach 3% of GDP in defence spending, is changing how the government engages with these High North communities.

The Norwegians observed that Canada seemed complacent about defence and that Canadians, and their politicians lose interest quickly when a threat fades from the headlines. Sovereignty seemed to get more from politicians but that does not work well for Arctic defence. Canada's "holistic approach" to security and defence concerns in the Arctic does not always resonate with Norway when seeking support in international or bilateral contexts. Ultimately, the Norwegians argued that Canada's Arctic defence policy is poorly framed but politically

easy. Throughout the meeting, the Norwegians asked how Canada distinguishes between national defence and national security risks and threats. For example, despite economic threats like pernicious FDI being presented in the defence policy, these are not defence threats.⁷ The Norwegians returned to Canada not being a key ally for the strategic weapons emanating from Russia's Kola Peninsula. The "hottest topic" in Arctic defence is future Nordic cooperation, which the Norwegians suggested opened an opportunity for Canada to take a more public role in the Arctic given that circumpolar stability is global stability.

With the meeting running short, the Canadians explained they have not updated their national security strategy since 2004, and the government lacked a foreign policy in which to nest defence policy. Stitching a broader strategy together across defence and into the forthcoming Canadian Arctic foreign policy was difficult. Ottawa is not Washington D.C. and lacks the complex policy ecosystem that could tie everything together into a national security strategy that is politically palatable and actionable.

The meeting was marked by a frank exchange of ideas and criticisms. It was pointed out that there is a lack of mutual contact points between Norway and Canada on issues related to the Arctic. It was agreed that this should change, and that continued NAADSN-FNI cooperation was part of the answer.

Royal Norwegian Embassy and Public Library, Ottawa, Ontario

The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous Peoples and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. It was formally established in 1996. All Arctic Council decisions and statements require consensus of the eight Arctic States.

On 19 September, NAADSN and FNI convened two meetings in downtown Ottawa focused largely on the Arctic Council. Both meetings celebrated the 28th anniversary of the Ottawa Declaration creating the Arctic Council, and how that forum has survived the Russian invasions of Ukraine and rising geopolitical tensions. All participants extolled how Norwegian leadership was critical to the survival of the Arctic Council.

Both meetings also addressed climate change and how it was driver of Arctic politics and beyond. The Council's *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA)*, the first major report on climate change and the tremendous effect it was having on the region, is twenty years old. Arctic states and Permanent Participants had to seize this legacy to guide international entities like the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, as part of their global responsibility and efforts to address climate change.

For more on these Arctic Council events, see the NAADSN *Activity Report*, "[The Arctic Council and Regional Governance: Canadian and Norwegian Reflections](#)" by P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Justin Barnes.⁸

NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE) Montreal, Quebec

NATO's Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE) is hosted by Canada in Montreal. Based upon the programming pillars of awareness, adaptation, mitigation and outreach, CCASCOE serves as a hub to meet with academics, military officials, and civil servants about the relationship between military strategic, operations, tactics, and how they are influenced by climate. NAADSN and FNI, met with CCASCOE to discuss areas for future knowledge sharing and collaboration to support of the COE's mandate. This meeting was hosted under Chatham house rules at CCASCOE's temporary offices in Montreal on 20 September 2024.

CCASCOE is a multinational construct, with no direct affiliation to state governments or NATO Headquarters. There are 33 positions made up of civil servants from the 12-state membership committee which approves a yearly "program of work" activities.⁹ Practitioners apply a climate change lens to military doctrines, training cycles, new infrastructure, and capability requirements. Deliverables include reports, workshops, tabletop exercises, and a journal for trusted and credible impact. These activities are generated and requested by in-house experts and different elements of NATO (such as a joint force command, civilian division, or planning board on committee, for example). The NATO *Climate Change and Security Action Plan*¹⁰ guides this work, with the document's focus on how to adapt forces and their operations to the changing realities of climate change.

NATO thirty Centres of Excellence offer the alliance cost-effective research alignment, avoidance of duplicated efforts amongst member states, and increased partnerships to leverage knowledge. Fostering relationships and streamlining assets are done at no cost to NATO, with the host nations of these centres bearing the costs.¹ CCASCOE develops shared knowledge of the security impacts of climate change so that NATO members can acquire the capabilities that will be required in the future security environment and establish best practices to reduce the climate impact of military activities; its mandate is awareness, adaption, mitigation, and outreach.

CCASCOE staff made clear that they are in the business of risk management and is leading the efforts on mitigation within the climate change-defence nexus. Staff stated the responsibility to implement policies that reduce the instable risks of climate change on defence and security rests with national governments. Resilience and civil preparedness are responsibilities of NATO member states, explicitly outlined within Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty.¹¹ Given that ministries implement the policies national governments commit to, some meeting participants suggested that more forceful implementation of climate change mitigation efforts need to be undertaken by member states.

While CCASCOE SOE covers "four corners of the Alliance," and is not solely focused on the Arctic, the region is a natural first project. Participants were skeptical of increased security in Arctic due to climate change and were more concerned with geopolitics. For example, Canadian tactical and operational level thinking towards the North was focused on NORAD, SAR, fires, and floods, making it hard to be strategic here. It was suggested that

ACTIVITY REPORT



due to the lack of Arctic infrastructure, population, or possible migration stemming from climate change-induced effects, that kinetic action in the region is unlikely. It was further suggested that NATO states must be careful to not engage in discourse which promotes a US/NATO militarization of climate change and the Arctic. Such discourse plays directly into the hands of Kremlin information messaging campaigns, which seeks to discredit NATO as imperialist in nature. Finally, it was suggested that there is an increasing Nordic dynamic of sorts happening within NATO due to Finland and Sweden's accession and Norway's shared border with Russia. Climate change is a large driver of accessibility and instability concerns regionally, but as of now Norwegian defence thinking remains siloed yet fixated on Russia as its primary adversary.

For its part, NAADSN expressed a keen interest to support and partner with the CCASCOE on its important work. An initial product, which came directly out of conversations during the September meeting, is the [NAADSN Canadian Arctic Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment 2024](#), by P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Justin Barnes, which was released in November 2024.¹²



Participants from NAADSN, FNI, and CCASCOE, 20 September 2024.

References

¹ For more information, see Fridtjof Nansens Institute, “About the Fridtjof Nansen Institute,” at <https://www.fni.no/>.

² For more information, see NAADSN, “About us,” at <https://www.naadsn.ca/about-us/>.

³ National Defence, *Strong, Secured, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy* (2017) at <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/canada-defence-policy-report-2.pdf>.

⁴ National Defence, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada’s Defence* (2024) at <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/north-strong-free-2024.html>.

⁵ P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “‘The most urgent and important task we face’: Framing the Arctic focus in Canada’s April 2024 defence policy update,” *Arctic Yearbook 2024*, at <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2024/2024-briefing-notes/531-the-most-urgent-and-important-task-we-face-framing-the-arctic-focus-in-canada-s-april-2024-defence-policy-update>.

⁶ Government of Canada, “Joint statement following the Strategic Dialogue between Canada, Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden,” 29 September 2024, at <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/09/joint-statement-following-the-strategic-dialogue-between-canada-kingdom-of-denmark-finland-iceland-norway-and-sweden.html>.

⁷ For a recent framework to parse sectors of security and domains, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Arctic Pan-Domain Effects Workshop (APDEW24) Concepts and Context: A Report on Presentations in Ottawa on 10 June 2024,” *NAADSN Event Report*, July 2024, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/24jun-APDEW-PWL-summary.pdf>.

⁸ P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Justin Barnes, “The Arctic Council and Regional Governance: Canadian and Norwegian Reflections,” *NAADSN Event Report*, September 2024, at <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/24sep-AC-event-report-PWL-JB.pdf>.

⁹ NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence, “Our Story,” at <https://ccascoe.org/our-story/>.

¹⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO Climate Change and Security Action Plan: Compendium of Best Practice,” at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230710-climate-change-best-practices.pdf.

¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3,” at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm?#:~:text=The%20principle%20of%20resilience%20is,individual%20and%20collective%20capacity%20to.

¹² P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Justin Barnes, *NAADSN Canadian Arctic Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment 2024* (November 2024), <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Canadian-Arctic-Climate-Change-and-Security-Impact-Assessment.pdf>.