ACTIVITY REPORT

NAADSN
North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network

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The Second Annual Norway-Canada Gauntlet Seminar:

Building and Implementing Foreign and Defence Policy in an Era of Increased Attention to the Arctic and High North

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27 November 2024 saw NAADSN and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ottawa co-host the second Annual Norway-Canada Gauntlet Seminar at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, in partnership with the Fridtjof Nansen Institute. Canadian and Norwegian practitioners and academics shared their insights on how grey-zone activity, climate change, societal resiliency, and the role of local and Indigenous communities affect the implementation of foreign and defence policy in an uncertain world under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution. 75 people from across the Government of Canada, foreign embassies, experts, academia, and students were in attendance.

Canada's defence policy update *Our North, Strong and Free* asserts that the "most urgent and important task" the country has is to "assert sovereignty in the Arctic, where the changing physical and geopolitical landscapes have created new threats and vulnerabilities." Canada commited to increasing its military presence in the Arctic and to work cooperatively with like-minded partners like Norway. Norway shares this priority of partnering with allies to realize its Arctic policy goals centred on security, stability, and interest-based cooperation. What lessons can allies and partners learn and apply from diverse experiences in a time of intensifying great power rivalry? How does strategic competition and posturing affect the abilities for governments to implement policy in a quickly changing environment? How can allies and partners better coordinate their messaging to deter hybrid warfare and conflict escalation?

Norway and Canada are close allies, and as Arctic states share many of the same interests and perspectives on the future of Arctic governance and development. The Arctic has in many ways long been sheltered from geopolitical tensions elsewhere. However, Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine marked a turning point for the for the circumpolar Arctic. [1]This report provides a summary of topics discussed and lessons learned for subsequent Gauntlet Seminars and Norway-Canada policy alignment.

Background

The Second Annual Gauntlet Seminar began with opening remarks drawing on the historical research on *Operation GAUNTLET* by Ryan Dean and Whitney Lackenbauer. The seminar is named in honour of the Canadian, Norwegian, and British Operation *GAUNTLET* in 1941, the successful but little-known combined operation by a small task force in the Svalbard archipelago. The purpose was to deny Germany access to the coal, mining, shipping, and meterological infrastructure on Svalbard. It also was to prevent a possible humanitarian disaster by repatriating the Russian inhabitants of Svalbard back to the Soviet Union, and Norwegians to Britain . Gauntlet was a success: the Germans were deceived and did not learn of the expedition until after it was completed with the Allied forces suffering no casualties. Norwegian and Russian civilians were evacuated to Britain and Murmansk, coal dumps were set on fire and mining equipment rendered inoperative. Several ships were taken as prizes, and a German warship was sunk on the return journey. Even 200 French soldiers held in Soviet prison were evacuated from Murmansk and returned to Free French forces in Britain. While a modest non-combat mission, Operation *GAUNTLET* represented Canada's first expeditionary operation in the Arctic and a welcomed adventure away from the defence of Britain. The operation also ensured for the Norwegians that the Archipelago remained on the strategic and operational periphery for the remainder of the war, and that the Germans nor Soviets attempt to establish a foothold at Norway's expense.

Today's Arctic is facing the global drivers of geopolitics, climate change, advancement in weapons technology, and resurgent authoritarianism.[2] Canada's previous Chief of the Defence Staff, General Wayne Eyre, observed that:

> We are in a time of profound change, with the world more chaotic and dangerous than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Our adversaries are aggressively developing their military capabilities, including those that pose a threat to North America. These capabilities must be matched by the collective will of like-minded nations. Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine shows the extremes to which our adversaries are willing to go to achieve their aims. China's continued aggressive behaviour, both regionally and around the world, falls short of open warfare, but is no less menacing and routinely negatively impacts Canada and its allies.[3]

The spillover of global competition into the Arctic region was first clearly observed after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in 2014. This spillover became pronounced immediately following Russia's renewed invasion in February 2022. Given that the Arctic is "an important international crossroads where issues of climate change, international trade, and global security meet,"[4] this should come as no great surprise.

Norway's continues to provide unwavering support for Ukraine in repelling the Russian invasion. The geopolitical situation is viewed in Oslo as a call to action, with Norway raising its defence spending from 2% to 3%. New F-35 strike fighter and frigates strengthen NATO's unparalleled capabilities and reach. Canada and Norway have deepened cooperation through a memorandum of understanding signed last year and a Coast Guard partnership reinforces exercising for deeper Arctic security. Norway considers this a top priority with the reality of sharing a land border with Russia along its North. NATO's presence in the Arctic further strengthens

allied capabilities, with the recent accession of Sweden and Finalnd presenting new opportunities for regional security. Importantly, Indigenous peoples in Canada and Norway must be included in decision-making, ensuring that Arctic development and security policy is pursued in an inclusive and sustainable manner in line with the mantra "nothing about us, without us."[5]

Introductory remarks focused on the story of Howard Dransfield who served as a Sapper during Operation *GAUNTLET*. Born in 1913 in Sherbrooke, Quebec, he moved to Almonte, Ontario at the age of 20 where he worked at the local mill, met his wife, and started a family. In 1929, he enlisted in the Canadian Army and was placed in the Royal Canadian Engineers. During Operation *GAUNTLET* from August to September 1941, Dransfield, serving as the only corporal present, was tasked with burning coal fields and rendering mining equipment inoperable to prevent Germany from accessing over 450,000 tons of coal from Svalbard to fuel their war effort. The mission highlighted the cooperation of Canadian, British, and Norwegian forces. After the war, Dransfield returned to Almonte, ran the mill until its closure, and later worked at the Diefenbunker until retiring at age 65, leaving behind a legacy of service in wartime and to his community.

Royal Canadian Engineer sappers, including Don Dransfield, fire the coal pile at Barentsburg.[6]

Representation and Sessions

Opening Remarks

Mr. Tryge Bendiksby
Head of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Ottawa

Mr. Don Dransfield
Grandson of Sapper Howard Dransfield, Operation *GAUNTLET*

Mr. Nicholas Glesby
Administrator, NAADSN

Panel 1: Keynote Addresses

Rear Admiral Ole Morten Sandquist
Norwegian Defence Attaché Designate to Canada and the United States

Dr. Kerry-Lynn Nankivell
Director, NATO and Europe, ADM(Pol), Department of National Defence

Following a panel discussion moderated by:
Dr. Marc Lantegine
Professor, Political Science, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway; NAADSN Coordinator

Panel 2: Norwegian and Canadian Perspectives

Mr. Mathieu Bussiéres
Director, NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE)

Dr. Marc Lanteigne
Professor, Political Science, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway; NAADSN Coordinator

Mr. Andrew Smith
Intergovernmental Relations, Executive Council Office, Government of Yukon

Dr. Pål Wilter Skedsmo
Research Director, Marine and Polar Issues, Fridtjof Nansen Institue

Capt(N) Øystein Storebø
Program Director, Submarines, Norwegian Ministry of Defence

Following a panel discussion moderated by:
Ms. Melissa Jennings
Chief Operating Officer, Canadian Defence and Security Network

Figure 1: From left to right: **Ms. Jennings; Rear Admiral Sandquist; Dr. Lanteigne; Mr. Bussiéres; Mr. Dransfield; Mr. Bendiksby; Capt(N) Storebø; Mr. Smith; Dr. Nankivell; and, Dr. Skedsmo**.

Keynote Addresses

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally altered the security situation not just in Europe, but globally. Russia serves as the persistent and proximate threat to the European High North. Russia now relies on a strategy of nuclear deterrence due to the large number of conventional losses it has suffered in Ukraine. Much of Russia's nuclear capabilities are located in the Kola Peninsula and its Russia Bastion, signifying the increased relative importance of Moscow's Northern Fleet given the Baltic Fleet is occupied with the war in Ukraine.

Climate change continues to challenge the Arctic. The circumpolar Arctic is warming four times faster than the rest of the world, melting sea ice and raising concerns about accessibility. The like-minded Arctic allies should expect more tourism, a growing global desire for natural resources, and the use of transportation routes by

military and private actors from both Arctic and non-Arctic states. As a non-Arctic state, China is strengthening its relationship with Russia in the Arctic since 2022 showcasing the importance of the region globally.

Norway's has intensified its lines of effort to ensure regional and collective security. Oslo is strengthening its national defence according to Article 3 of NATO, which commits each member country "to be resilient in order to withstand a major shock such as a natural disaster, failure of critical infrastructure, or a hybrid or armed attack." [7] Norway's 12 year long-term defence plan, *The Norwegian Defence Pledge*, includes historic investments and was unanimously approved by parliament in June 2024, symbolizing a consensus understanding of the threat environment. By increasing defence spending by $60 billion USD over 12 years, Norway will meet its 2% of GDP target in 2024 and 3% by 2034. Priorities include surveillance and space-based situational awareness, new drones, satellite systems, and a national spaceport capable of launching satelites. This will enable broader allied situational awareness in the High North.[8]

Given that Norway's sea areas are seven times the size of the Norwegian mainland, the Navy and Coast Guard will be given high priority in the long-term plan. Norway will development and procure up to 28 new surface vessels for the two services, based on civilian standards. 18 of these vesels will be coastal, with the other 10 ocean-going and helicopter-capable. A minimum of five new frigates for anti-submarine warfare will be procured, and the Norway-Germany submarine-building agreement will see 12 ships built by 2035 (6 for Norway and for Germany).[9] Canada is actively looking for 12 new vessels to replace the Victoria-class fleet.

With Russia's intense grey-zone activity of jamming GPS in northern Norway, air defence is an area of needed and sustained investment. Norway has purchased and received all five of its Boeing P-8 Poisedon maritime surveillance aircraft for anti-submarine (ASW) and anti-surface (ASUW) warfare, and its role for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). As of the Second Gauntlet Seminar, 42 of the 52 ordered F-35 fighter jets have been delivered. New ground-based, surface-to-air, anti-tactical ballistic missile defence systems are being developed by Kongsberg Defence & Aersopace. Two new batteries and simulators of the Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAM) have been ordered.

The Norwegian Army will also expand. Two new brigades will be added. The army will recieve modernized kit for cold-weather operations, along with investments in fixed-wing and rotor aircraft for the special forces and precision weapons. The Home Guard will also be strengthened to ensure domestic resiliency and capacity-building.

Oslo's plans align with NATO capability targets, positioning itself as a key allied reinforcement hub for Sweden and Finland. Robust support for Ukraine continues through a $7 billion USD five-year program to expand training, naval development (with the United Kingdom), and F-16 loans to Kyiv. Ultimately, a key tenant of Norway's long-term horizon defence plan focuses on the need to safeguard collective defence by working with allies to build resilient capabilities across all domains.

The circumpolar Arctic is integrated geographically, and represents both an opportunity and a challenge. *Our North, Strong and Free* (*ONSAF*), Canada's April 2024 defence policy update, highlights the defence of Canada

and North America as top priorities. The defence of the Arctic, in particular, is critical to globally effective and integrated deterrence. Building on 2017's *Strong, Secure, and Engaged* (*SSE*), Canada's long-term approach emphasizes Canada's need to be strong at home (consistent with NATO's Article 3), secure in North America, and engaged in the world. These missions have not changed under *ONSAF*, with Canada's long-term approach to defence having been and always being based on these fundamentals.

Climate change, technological development, and intensifying strategic competition by Russia and China are challenging global security. The Arctic, Euro-Atlantic, and Indo-Pacific are all theatres of contestation. China is looking to reshape the international system, with adversaries showing interest in the North. Beijing wants to play a larger role in the Arctic and Russia continues to invest in their regional military capabilities.

Advanced technology is changing the characteristics of warfare and below-the-treshold actitivity. Artifical intelligence and quantum technology will change military operations and challenge cyber security. To counter this, Canada is looking to invest in space capabilities given new missile technology exposing the vulnerability of North American early-warning security. Grey zone attacks blur jurisdictional boundaries and forces rethinking about how to implement policy to safeguard public interests like critical infrastructure.

ONSAF is Canada's plan to make sure the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is ready to respond to uncertainty. Significant investments articulates Canada's commitment to assert its sovereignty in the Arctic, prioritize continental defence through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), and contributions to collective defence through NATO. Given that Canada is NATO northern and western flank, Ottawa and our allies cannot ignore the geostrategic importance of the circumpolar Arctic. The North Pole represents the fastest avenue of approach between adversaries and North America, with our existing surveillance system vulnerable to exploitation because of advancing technology and climate change. Russia's military buildup in its Arctic and China's growing ambitions highlight the Arctic's vulnerability, especially as global warming and new technologies make the region more accessible.

Investments in *ONSAF* cover a wide arrange of capabiltiies and plan to increase defence spending: radar lines, northern basing stuctures, maritime surveillance, and space-based surveillance. Canada has committed to reach 2% of GDP on defence spending by 2032, totalling $73 billion over 20 years. Ottawa is modernizing procurement, developing a defence industrial strategy, and strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties, notably with like-minded Norway and Germany, to reinforce NATO's traditional northern flank.

With tangible contributions like OP Reassurance in Latvia and OP Unifier in Ukraine, Canada is supporting allies with sustained commitments. Canada seeks to increasing bilateral and multilateral relationships. This includes relationships with a longstanding history of close collaboration such as Norway, and is a continued priority for Ottawa in a global threat environment.

The panelists expanded on how Canada and Norway are dealing with hybrid warfare and how it impacts the implementation of security policy. Norway's total defence concept, incorporated in the 1950s, is for civil communities to support the military if a large-scale incident happens. Originally developed to reinforce

overwhelmed police or medical systems in need of assistance with military support, the idea integrates military and civilian actors such as police, harbour authorities, customs, and medical personnel. This binds together military and civilian stakholders. For example, four civilian actors sit permanently in the Joint Warfare Centre, supported by about 100 military liaisons. This ensures secure communications and rapid information sharing during emergencies and exercises. This balanced civil-military cooperation contributes to national readiness and has proven effective in countering hybrid and grey-zone threats, which demand collaboration across the civilian-military nexus.

Canada, by contrast, lacks a strong tradition of civil defence but is beginning to learn from allies. Hybrid and grey zone tactics can only be countered with lots of communication and cooperation with a wide variety of partners to develop a shared understanding of the threat environment. Recent steps include updating the Investment Canada Act to encourage more communiation between the departments who work on foreign investment. The federal government is also in the process of drafting a National Security Strategy to bring together disparate departments into a whole-of-government approach to security.

Panelists were also asked about lessons learned for increasing defence investment. Norway's defence modernization plan is historic, focused both on upgrading existing equipment, personnel, and infrastructure, and acknowledges deep need for investing in new capabilities. This is because of Russia's aggression in Ukraine and role as a land and sea neighbour in Norway's north.

Panelists focused on how populations in both countries are more supportive of increases in defence spending. Support for NATO and national defence remains strong in Norway, with high public trust in government and institituions. Canadians are showing growing support for defence spending, particularly in the Arctic, where investments strengthen ties between Ottawa and communities. NATO, meanwhile, has advocated for more specific capability targets. NATO Supreme Allied Command Europe (SACEUR) has taken the lead in doing so. Exercises like Nordic Defender demonstrating the alliance's ability to generate and employ forces for a high state of readiness.

The Arctic, long stable under international law, is now a region of increasing strategic importance, especially with Sweden and Finland joining the alliance. Both Canada and Norway recognize that geography and security challenges in the Arctic require cooperation, interoperability, and evolving strategies. Norway's total defence model offering valuable lessons for Canada as it adapts to new threats.

Expert Perspectives

The panel following the keynote addresses began by discussing the drivers of Arctic affairs. Discussion noted that despite decades of warnings, the world continues to ignore Arctic climate science. This denial has led to receding ice, melting permafrost, and the release of harmful pathogens. Moscow views receding ice as advantageous and China, the largest global carbon producer, has failed to heed scientific advice. At the same time, Norway and Canada are making significant investments in the Arctic that are centered on scientific and strategic advice. Canada faces a procurement challenge, particularly in adapting to fast-evolving drone and

counter-drone technologies, which can have compounding effects in the Arctic. Canada's present procurement capacities and challenges highlight the difficulty of keeping pace with technological developments. Compounding these issues is the slowing and stopping of the Atlantic Maritime Ocean Current. Increasing commercial activity in the Arctic is creating additional safety and security risks, has adverse social and economic impact on communities, and highlights the need for more monitoring and awareness of what is happening in the region.

Strategic competition remains a defining feature of the circumpolar Arctic's security landscape. Russia continues to assert its presence with the revitalization of its military infrastructure. China is actively expanding its role through information gathering and increased activities, recognizing that expertise and experience in the Arctic cannot simply be purchased through property.

Framing itself as a "near-Arctic state," China views Arctic engagement as essential to its ambitions as a global power. This stance has been reinforced since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as Beijing has doubled down on scientific research and outreach to Arctic states. Concerns among the like-minded Arctic states persist about the dual-use nature of China's activities, specifically over research security for malign intentions. With desire to be a global great power, China views it as policy necessity to be active in the Arctic as a regional of increasing attention.

China and Russia once envisioned ambitious cooperation through the Polar Silk Road, but its impact has been limited beyond investments in Russia. Involvement in international governance forums relative to the Arctic remains a key issue. Having served as an Arctic Council observer since 2013, China has attempted to sow doubts over the Council's longevity by hinting at alternative frameworks if it falters. Arctic Council ministerial-level meetings have been on pause since 2022. While China and Russia collaborate in the Arctic, such as increasing FSB-PRC Coast Guard cooperation, there are still questions surrounding the coordination of interests in their broader bilateral relationship. Questions of trust and divergent interests highlight the uncertainty of their partnership and the broader implications the lack of like-mindedness when it comes to how to approach the Arctic. Both countries have distinct interests that do not align with their national interests .

Discussion shifted to how both Canada and Norway can continue to prepare for meeting these drivers.Development in the circumpolar Arctic is being shaped by climate change and increasing traffic in sea lanes, creating new demands for maritime monitoring and management. Canada's mining and resource extraction will play a critical role in this evolving environment, while submarines are emerging as a key strategic asset. Though not nuclear-powered, modern submarines can offer extendeded range and endurance through advanced technologies tailored to current security needs. Equipped with 52 sensors and integrated with artificial intelligence, the new German-Norwegian 212CD submarines can process vast amounts of data into actionable information via human-machine interfaces. This will revolutionize the speed and scale of submarine operations.

Designed with a small environmental footprint, Norway's future submarine fleet will operate with crews of 28–30, running on green hydrogen, biofuels, and other sustainable fuels, aligning military capability with environmental responsibility. Canada has been invited to join the joint submarine building program, deepening

defence-industrial cooperation for interoperable combat platforms. Six of the future twelve 212CDs are currently under construction (two for Germany and four for Norway) at a cost of $8.1 billion Canadian.[10]

Despite this potential avenue for further cooperation, discussion noted that the Canadian Arctic and Northern Norway are significantly different. Norway's north is connected with the rest of the mainland and has developed infrastructure. Norway's land border with Russia, established in 1926, had long served as a bridge for business and intercultural exchanges until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Today, Norway participates in the sanctions regime against Russia but continues limited civilian cooperation through such initiatives as setting joint fish stock quotas in the Barents Sea. Although Russia's regime appears strong, its society is fragmented into "four Russia's" — major cities, provincial centers, and underdeveloped regions. Support in Russia for the war persists as long as urban populations remain unaffected, despite over 70,000 soldiers killed and more than 700,000 casualties in Ukraine. Russia is always ready to test western resilience and resolve. These challenges highlight the importance of deeper Norwegian (and broader Nordic) collaboration with Canada to find alignments reinforcing stability in the Arctic.

Canada's northwest border stands in stark contrast to Norway's northeastern one. The Klondike Gold Rush saw an influx of explorers seeking to exploit natural resources of the territory, outnumbering the population of Yukon at the time. The construction of the Alaska Highway during the Second World War, to provide resupply and reinforcements to from the US lower 48 to Alaska, was built without the consent of Yukoners. Construction of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line sites also brought socioeconomic impacts to communities located near the radars. These three events have shaped the region's perspective of defence and security over the territory's history. More recently, the June 2023 Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence Veterans report on Arctic security in a changing geopolitical and environmental landscape was followed the February hobbyist balloon incident. The balloon downed near Dawson City prompted an influx of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel and practitioners from other government departments into the community and territory, with the Canadian Rangers providing an existential role in coordinating the response. This incident highlighted the need for greater awareness in Ottawa of who the pertinent security actors are in the North, as well as increased knowledge of limitations from a lack of assets and infrastructure.

The 2024 Report of the Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council, of which NAADSN had 3 members serve, focused on and addressed issues such as the role of the Canadian Rangers in community resilience, preparedness, and capacity, maritime security in the Pacific, and critical minerals. The Yukon Government's intent is to be a constructive partner to both the federal government and its local communities, seeking a role in shaping national and regional approaches to northern defence.

Conclusion

Building off the findings in the Inaugural Gauntlet Seminar, which focused on proactive collaboration between like-minded Arctic states and partners to address grey zone activity, the Second Annual Gauntlet Seminar highlighted how the North American Arctic and European High North have become central to global security. Canada and Norway are pivotal actors in shaping security policy in their respective regions, with increasing

coordination and collaboration through new strategic documents. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally altered the Arctic security landscape, driving both Ottawa and Oslo to increase defence spending, modernize capabilities and military equipment, and deepen cooperation in and through NATO. Norway's historic 12-year defence plan reflects its enduring commitment to collective security. Likewise, Canada's *Our North, Strong and Free* prioritizes the security and sovereignty of the Canadian Arctic, and defence of the approaches to North America. Ensuring stability across the increasingly interconnected North Atlantic requires sustained investment, innovation, and a deeper integration and alignment of policy priorities to meet emerging threats in a continuously more complex strategic environment.

Notes

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