

ACTIVITY REPORT



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North at Trent 2025-2026 Lecture Series

All Eyes on the Arctic: Where Geopolitics and Security Intersect

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Each year the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University organizes a series of public talks on the “North” broadly defined. Building on Trent’s established role as a centre of innovation on northern research and in combination with the Roberta Bondar Fellowship in Northern Studies, these lectures are a key feature of academic life at Trent. On 28 November 2025, “All Eyes on the Arctic” was presented by [Dr. Rasmus Leander Nielsen](#) and [Dr. Marc Lanteigne](#) which explored Greenland’s foreign policy strategy and Norway’s efforts to combat hybrid threats. Co-sponsored by the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN), this event was held at The Pit, Lady Eaton College, Symons Campus, in Peterborough, Ontario.

Greenland Foreign Policy in the Midst of Geopolitical Tensions with Rasmus Leander Nielsen

[Nasiffik](#) – the name of the Centre for Foreign & Security Policy at Ilisimatusarfik/University of Greenland – means “outpost” or “outlook post” in Greenlandic. This centre’s work examines Greenland’s roles in the world. Part of this effort has been to commission two Greenlandic public opinion polls on the foreign and security issues facing the island (see notes), in 2021 and 2024. This polling has happened concurrent with Greenland increasingly assuming a foreign and security role from the Kingdom of Denmark, reflected in the publication by the Government of Greenland (Naalakkersuisut) of its new foreign, security, and defence policy paper [Greenland in the World: Nothing About Us Without Us](#) in 2024. Greenland’s first policy was codeveloped with Denmark and the Faroes Islands in 2011 as [Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011– 2020](#).

Dr. Nielsen explained that Greenland was now being governed by a grand coalition comprising 4 of the island’s 5 parties. This allowed for a coherent document on Greenland’s foreign relations, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, to be published in 2024. The document reflected Greenland’s growing autonomy in defence and security. However, the reelection of Donald Trump marked the return of a profound American interest in annexing

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Greenland dating back to the start of his first administration. This motivated in early 2025 revisiting *Nothing about us without us*, and working on the next phase of Greenland's foreign and security security policy.

Nielsen provided a broad outline of what this updated Greenlandic policy will look like. These included three measures:

- more connectivity with its allies;
- embracing a greater military presence on the island; and
- a stronger willingness to take international responsibility.

These measures would make Greenland better able to deal with a more complicated Arctic by increasing its deterrence value and helping to keep regional bodies like the Arctic Council alive. This was particularly important as [Greenlander Kenneth Høegh is the new Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials](#), effectively guiding the Arctic Council during the next two years.

Having contextualized the policy environment, Nielsen pivoted his presentation to examine the polling data he and [Dr. Maria Ackrén](#) had been accumulating. While their second poll from 2024 was a bit dated given the pressure that the second Trump administration has since placed on the island, it helps to situate Greenlanders' foreign and security policy preferences. [The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland](#) from 2024 also complements the first 2021 poll, establishing a baseline that allows for the tracking of changes over time.

The 2024 poll highlights Greenlander's attitudes towards various actors. Greenlanders are displaying a growing affinity towards NATO and the EU, with a majority of 60% indicating they would vote to rejoin the later should the opportunity arise. Furthermore, while Greenland has no desire to build their own military, they do see Iceland as a model to emulate for future dealings with NATO. Interestingly, Greenlanders are not scared of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Nielsen explained that this is due to Greenland's fisheries doing substantial business with the PRC, seeing them as a valuable customer rather than a threat.

Greenlanders' most favoured actors are the Arctic Council, Canada, and Iceland. Canada has just recently opened a [consulate in Greenland's capital of Nuuk](#), joining the EU, Iceland, and the United States. France will soon open a consulate in Nuuk in well. Greenlanders wish to increase trade with Canada. Additionally, given the deep familial bonds between Nunavut and Greenlandic Inuit, the island hopes to increase direct flights between them, building on the [Air Greenland connection](#) that was recently reestablished. Ultimately, Canada is seen as a friendly source of stability and growth during a period of foreign and security policy upheaval for Greenland.

The Nature of Grey Zone Arctic Threats: Lessons from Norway with Marc Lanteigne

Dr. Marc Lanteigne is a co-lead of the [Grey Zone](#) research group with Associate Professor [Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz](#) and Professor [Gunhild Hoogensen Gjrv](#) at Norway's Arctic University in Troms (UiT). The Grey Zone seeks to understand and address hybrid threats and warfare, particularly ways in which it is defined and understood as a concept, as well as what and how different threats are perceived, from individual, society, to state and international levels of analysis. The Grey Zone also explores managing possible threats, crises, and warfare through local preparedness and societal trust, national preparedness strategies, Total Defence, and Whole of Government and Comprehensive Approaches.

Lanteigne noted that there was a North/South divide on threat perception that ran through Norway. Southern Norway viewed their security through the prism of NATO, fully embracing the alliance's point of view. Northern Norway was much more nuanced towards Russia. While they did not like Putin nor his regime, they were pragmatic towards dealing with Russia.

Russia has engaged in a series of hybrid threats against Norway to erode trust in their government. The Grey Zone was created to research these threats. Lanteigne partially defined hybrid threats as falling short of military action and include lots of mis and disinformation on the Arctic with the goal of creating alternative narratives to the truth and thus distrust. Hybrid threats also target infrastructure, with Lanteigne providing specific examples like the cutting undersea cables to Svalbard or the operation of drones near Troms airport. These actions are to demonstrate the vulnerability of infrastructure.

Lanteigne noted that growing People's Republic of China (PRC) interest to map the Arctic raises not just hybrid threats but also the concept of dual use science – data that can be applied for military considerations. How can this dual-use danger be managed? He explained that the PRC has lots of money for research and has positioned itself for the future rather than an older NATO/US Cold War mentality. President Trump's geopolitical realignment has been a massive boon for the PRC, helping pave the way for growing its influence in the Arctic.

A place of interest for growing PRC influence is Svalbard. The unique century old treaty that governs Svalbard allows for scientific research by states other than Norway. The PRC setup the Yellow River Research Station in the town of Ny-Ålesund in 2003. However, the station does not welcome visiting researchers. Furthermore, the station's entrance is flanked by large stone lions, advertising the PRC's presence. Recently, a Chinese cruise ship visited Ny-Ålesund where nationals disembarked with PRC flags, one even wearing a People's Liberation Army (PLA) uniform in front of the station celebrating research and underscoring the PRC's presence in Svalbard and thus the larger Arctic.

Russia has also engaged in symbolic acts that underscore its presence in Svalbard. In 2022, Russia held a military parade in Svalbard to celebrate the invasion of Ukraine. Other actions include the flying of Soviet flags and posting of Soviet-era slogans at Russia's settlements of Barentsburg and Pyramiden. These symbols have been complemented with the mounting of a Russian Orthodox cross. Despite the displays, non-Russian researchers cannot visit either settlement in Svalbard.

Lanteigne concluded with the idea that these sorts of hybrid threats call into question Norway's control of Svalbard and its interpretations of the Treaty of Spitzbergen (Svalbard). Both the PRC and Russia oppose the status-quo in Svalbard and can call on hybrid tactics to try to shift things into their favour. However, by their nature, hybrid tactics can be hard to observe and thus measure, obfuscating the political threat they pose.

Conclusion

Both presentations speak to international geopolitical pressures spilling into the Arctic and affecting those who call the region home, suggesting that this pressure will change the status-quo. Both Greenland and Norway are building capabilities to mitigate or prevent changes that neither want. Greenland is making its foreign and security preferences clear through polling and policy while Norway is working to “shine a light” on the hybrid threats that it is facing, seeking to expose the fears they generate and the alternative narratives they are driving. Both Nielsen and Lanteigne make clear that geopolitics and security interests increasingly converge in the Arctic.

About the Speakers

Dr. Rasmus Leander Nielsen is Head of Nasiffik (Centre for Foreign & Security Policy) and Associate Professor at the Department of Arctic Social Science and Economics, Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland). He holds a PhD from the University of Southern Denmark and has previously worked as editor-in-chief at an online magazine and as assistant lecturer at the University of Copenhagen. His main research interests include Greenlandic foreign policy, Arctic security and cooperation, and International Relations and EU-studies. Dr. Nielsen is a widely used expert and commentator on Greenlandic and Arctic Affairs.

Dr. Marc Lanteigne is a Professor of Political Science at UiT: The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, 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.

Notes

[Maria Ackrén & Rasmus Leander Nielsen, *The First Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland* \(Nuuk: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Stockholm & HS Analyse, February 2021\).](#)

[Maria Ackrén & Rasmus Leander Nielsen, *The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland* \(Ilisimatusarfik: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung & EPINION, December 2024\).](#)

[Vivian Motzfeldt, *GREENLAND IN THE WORLD Nothing about us without us Greenland's Foreign, Security and Defense Policy 2024-2033 – an Arctic Strategy* \(Nuuk: Naalakkersuisut / Government of Greenland, Ministry for Statehood and Foreign Affairs, February 2024\).](#)

[Rasmus Leander Nielsen, "Greenland's foreign policy strategy being revisited," *Quick Impact*, 1 December 2025, https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/25dec1-greenlandFP-RLN.pdf.](https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/25dec1-greenlandFP-RLN.pdf)

["The Grey Zone," UiT The Arctic University of Norway, https://uit.no/research/thegreyzone.](https://uit.no/research/thegreyzone)

[Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011– 2020* \(Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011\).](#)