

ACTIVITY REPORT



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All Eyes on the Arctic: Where Geopolitics and Security Intersect

North at Trent 2025-2026 Lecture Series

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On 28 November 2025, the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN) organized an event entitled “All Eyes on the Arctic: Where Geopolitics and Security Intersect,” as part of the North at Trent Lectures - a series of multi-disciplinary public talks at Trent University on the North and Arctic. This multi-hour event featured lectures from two experts on Arctic geopolitics and security and a rewarding discussion with undergraduate and graduate students. The first lecture was delivered by Dr. Rasmus Leander Nielsen, the head of Nasiffik (Centre for Foreign and Security Policy) and Associate Professor in the Department of Arctic Social Science and Economics at Ilisimartusarfik (University of Greenland), who specializes in Greenlandic foreign policy. The second lecture was delivered by Dr. Marc Lanteigne, Professor of Political Science at UiT: The Arctic University of Norway, who specializes in Chinese and East Asian politics and international relations, including China’s role in the Arctic.

With Canada’s most recent defence policy stating that the “most urgent and important task we face is asserting Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic and northern regions,”¹ Greenland and Norway have also recently released foreign and security policies addressing the pressing threats facing their respective northern regions. While Canada, Greenland, and Norway all have their own distinctive Arctic contexts, they also face many similar threats from climate change to foreign interference. These presentations aimed to examine the threats facing Greenland and Norway, their responses, and sought insights into what Canada can learn from its Arctic neighbours.

Greenlandic Foreign Policy in the Midst of Geopolitical Tensions

Dr. Nielsen’s lecture centred on domestic Greenlandic politics, Greenland’s updated 2024 foreign policy strategy, the perception of foreign and security policy for Greenlanders, and opportunities for Canada to deepen its political and economic ties with Greenland. Dr. Nielsen first described the outcome of the most recent Greenlandic general election in March 2025, which saw the formation of a grand coalition of four out of five

parties. The leader of The Democrats party, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, was selected as Greenland's Prime Minister and Naleraq, the main pro-independence party, as the opposition.² Dr. Nielsen emphasized that this election was especially significant due to US President Donald Trump's earlier threats to take over Greenland for national security purposes, as well as the Kingdom of Denmark, which includes Greenland, holding the chairship of the Arctic Council from 2025-2027. While the election's focus on Greenland's foreign policy appears to be counterintuitive to the 1953 Danish Constitution, which states that foreign and defence policy is the sole prerogative of Denmark, Dr. Nielsen explained that in practice, Greenland has gained a substantial amount of independence to direct its own foreign policy. This is also exemplified by Greenland's 2024 foreign policy strategy, *Greenland in the World: Nothing about us without us*.

Dr. Nielsen explained that *Greenland in the World* is the first update since the last was released in 2011. Overall, Greenland's foreign policy strategy emphasizes the nation's unique place as the only Arctic country in the Kingdom of Denmark. As a result, the policy reaffirms Greenland's urge to become an independent state, while currently taking a central leadership role in the Kingdom of Denmark's chairship of the Arctic Council from 2025-2027. Dr. Nielsen also remarked that the foreign policy strategy contains a substantial shift in the political attitudes towards increased military presence in Greenland and Greenlandic engagement towards defence policy. For instance, while the strategy reiterates a longstanding view that "Greenland generally rejects any increased military presence in its territory," the strategy also states that due to increased geopolitical focus on Greenland and the Arctic, Greenland must contribute to debates and discussions regarding defence policy "whether we like it or not."³

Despite *Greenland in the World* being less than two years old, Dr. Nielsen remarked that the new Greenlandic government is already considering revisiting the strategy amidst ongoing statements from US President Donald Trump to annex Greenland without ruling out the use of the military. Dr. Nielsen explained that a potential change to the foreign policy strategy could be to tone down the strategy's clear emphasis on strengthening ties to the US — with the 2024 strategy stating that "the United States is one of Greenland's closest allies,"⁴ — while increasing the focus on international cooperation with the European Union and Canada.

A significant portion of Dr. Nielsen's lecture also focused on a 2024 opinion poll on foreign and security policy in Greenland, conducted by Nasiffik (the Centre for Foreign and Security Policy) at Illisimatusarfik (the University of Greenland). This is the second such poll, with the first iteration in 2021. The 2024 survey revealed interesting trends and findings regarding how Greenlanders view their place in foreign and security policy, as well as Greenland's role in the Arctic and the international stage in general. For instance, despite the prevalence of rhetoric framing the Arctic as a region of growing global interest and military threats, Greenlanders have consistently rated these challenges as some of the lowest facing Greenlandic society, while higher living costs and the economic situation in general have consistently been rated as the greatest challenges facing Greenlandic society.⁵

Other notable findings include Greenlanders' perceptions of cooperation with other countries and organizations, with Greenlanders in both 2021 and 2024 saying that Greenland should cooperate the most with Iceland (2021: 90.0%, 2024: 80.6%), Canada (2021: 85.2%, 2024: 79.9%), and the Arctic Council (2021: 87.0%, 2024: 79.0%).⁶

In terms of Greenlanders' perception of the NATO defence alliance, in 2024, 65.1% of Greenlanders viewed NATO as a "positive" alliance, compared to 3.8% viewing NATO as a "negative" alliance. This represents a slight decrease in support of NATO compared to 2021, in which 75.5% of Greenlanders viewed NATO as a "positive" alliance, and 2.8% viewed NATO as a "negative" alliance.⁷

On the other hand, considerably more Greenlanders want to join the EU, with 40% responding "Yes" and 60% responding "No" in 2021, compared to 60% responding "Yes" and 40% responding "No" in 2024.⁸ Despite the vast majority of Greenlanders wanting closer cooperation with many Western countries, including the US, Dr. Nielsen highlighted how Greenlanders also tended to reject US policies towards China, with 79.5% of Greenlanders stating that Greenland "should not follow US politics towards China," compared to 20.5% stating that Greenland "should follow US politics towards China."⁹ The survey ends by asking Greenlanders if "Greenland should have its own military?" 63% of Greenlanders in 2024 responded "No," compared to 70% in 2021.¹⁰ Notably, this finding responds to a point made in *Greenland in the World*, which states that "we need to discuss whether we should introduce a military or civilian national service in Greenland."¹¹

Dr. Nielsen also inserted a significant caveat to the findings of this survey, indicating that this polling occurred before the current Trump administration. As a result, it would be interesting to see changes in Greenlanders' responses amidst ongoing threats regarding Greenland's sovereignty. When asked about any changes in Greenlanders' perceptions of the existing US military presence in Greenland, particularly at Pituffik Space Base, Dr. Nielsen stated that, in general, Greenlanders continue to accept and understand the value of an existing US presence in Greenland for deterrence purposes. It remains to be seen whether that acceptance will shift.

The Nature of Grey Zone Arctic Threats: Lessons from Norway

Dr. Lanteigne's lecture centred on the prevalence of hybrid and grey zone threats facing Norway, particularly from Russia and China, and what this tells us about Russian and Chinese intentions in the European High North. Dr. Lanteigne began by stating that Russia is engaging in a serious amount of hybrid threats in Northern Norway, with the broad intention of eroding trust in government, creating political divides, and putting Russia in a better light. Hybrid threats can be broadly defined as actions conducted by state or non-state actors that combine overt and covert military and non-military means to undermine or harm a target.¹² Oftentimes, hybrid threats operate in the so-called "grey zone," which is the space between peace and open warfare. Dr. Lanteigne also remarked that hybrid threats are especially tricky to manage in the NATO context, as these actions are often meant to test the resolve and limits of the alliance's collective defence commitments.

As Professor of Political Science at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø – the largest city in Northern Norway at almost 70° North and about 400 kilometres from the Russian border – Dr. Lanteigne emphasized the variety and frequency of Russian hybrid threats facing Norway's people and infrastructure. These threats include GPS jamming on civilian and military aircraft, the cutting of undersea cables, the flying of drones around critical infrastructure, espionage, and the spreading of disinformation. Dr. Lanteigne noted that Russian disinformation towards Norwegians seeks to push a narrative that NATO is an imperial power in the Arctic, that Sweden and

Finland were unwillingly dragged into NATO, and that NATO is a militarizing and aggressive force in the Arctic that is threatening Russia's national interests. Dr. Lanteigne also recounted the arrest of José Assis Giammaria, a supposed "Brazilian" national researching at the Arctic University of Norway, who was discovered to be a Russian spy named Mikhail Mikushin, as another prime example of Russian tactics within Norwegian society.¹³

A significant portion of the lecture focused on the increasing prevalence of hybrid threats and grey zone actions in the Norwegian Archipelago of Svalbard by both Russia and China. Pursuant to the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, all signatories must recognize "the full and absolute sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago." However, signatories may also engage in "all maritime, industrial, mining, and commercial operations on a footing of absolute equality" without impediment.¹⁴ This has allowed China, and particularly Russia, to establish permanent industrial and scientific footholds on the Archipelago that are occupied by their own citizens. For instance, Russia established two permanent coal mining settlements, Barentsburg and Pyramiden (with the latter now abandoned), and China established a scientific research station in Ny-Ålesund.

Dr. Lanteigne highlighted how these permanent presences are being used by Russia and China as vectors for hybrid threats targeting Norway's authority over the Archipelago. For example, Norwegian authorities recently required the removal of two stone lions posted in front of China's research station in Ny-Ålesund. This illustrates the tension between Chinese nationalism and symbolism on sovereign Norwegian territory versus Norway's desire to maintain a neutral and purely scientific environment.¹⁵ Furthermore, during the summer of 2024, a cruise ship with 183 Chinese tourists docked in Ny-Ålesund to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Chinese research station, and among them was a woman dressed in a Chinese military uniform. This incident drew diplomatic repercussions, with the Chinese embassy in Oslo being called in for a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁶

Russia, on the other hand, has engaged in more overt hybrid threats through its permanent settlements in Svalbard. For instance, in 2023 Russia staged a small "military-style" parade in Barentsburg, which included vehicles, a helicopter, and snowmobiles driven by men in military uniforms to celebrate Russia's national day and their victory in the Second World War.¹⁷ Dr. Lanteigne also remarked how Russia is looking to diversify and further entrench its presence in Svalbard by pushing to build a BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) science centre in its other settlement of Pyramiden, despite Norwegian opposition. Dr. Lanteigne explained how many of these Russian and Chinese are interpreted by Norway as contravening the Svalbard Treaty, which prohibits the archipelago from being "used for warlike purposes."¹⁸ To that end, Dr. Lanteigne argued that Norway is in a tough position, with the question of how Norway can balance enforcing its laws and sovereignty over Svalbard, while not creating a rationale and justification for Russia and China to disregard the Svalbard Treaty altogether.

The two lectures delivered by Dr. Nielsen and Dr. Lanteigne offered a unique perspective on threats facing two of Canada's Arctic allies, Greenland and Norway. Through their lectures, students were able to see how the Arctic contexts of Greenland and Norway are distinct from both each other and from Canada. Greenland is a country straddled between Europe and North America with a unique political and governance system with differing interests from Denmark. Whereas Norway directly borders Russia, facing significant amounts and

variety of hybrid threats. For Canada, there is a great opportunity to encourage the like-minded Arctic states to learn from one another, sharing approaches and information in a growing and complex threat environment.

Endnotes

- ¹ Government of Canada. 2024. *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/north-strong-free-2024.html>, ix
- ² Miranda Bryant. 2025. "Greenland election: Democrat party wins surprise victory amid spectre of Trump." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/12/greenland-election-opposition-democrat-party-wins-surprise-victory-amid-spectre-of-trump>.
- ³ Government of Greenland. 2024. *Greenland in the World: Nothing about us without us*. [https://paartoq.gl/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Greenlands Foreign -Security and Defense Policy 2024 2033.pdf](https://paartoq.gl/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Greenlands_Foreign_Security_and_Defense_Policy_2024_2033.pdf), 11.
- ⁴ Government of Greenland, *Greenland in the World: Nothing about us without us*, 17.
- ⁵ Rasmus Leander Nielsen and Maria Ackrén. 2024. "The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland." https://uk.uni.gl/media/4bwb5ict/survey-report-leander_ackre-n_final.pdf, 5.
- ⁶ Leander Nielsen and Ackrén, "The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland", 8.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ¹² Hybrid CoE. n.d. "Hybrid threats." Accessed 11 January 2026. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/hybrid-threats/>.
- ¹³ Associated Press. 2023. "Academic arrested in Norway as a Moscow spy confirms his real, Russian name, officials say." <https://apnews.com/article/norway-russia-brazilian-university-spy-1f93f5ddb7195f4b70fb394bf3403ef3>.
- ¹⁴ "The 1920 Svalbard Treaty." 1920. https://library.arcticportal.org/1909/1/The_Svalbard_Treaty_9ssFy.pdf.
- ¹⁵ Jonassen, Trine. 2025. "China Asked to Remove Lion Statues in Svalbard." *High North News*. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/china-asked-remove-lion-statues-svalbard>.
- ¹⁶ Jonassen, "China Asked to Remove Lion Statues in Svalbard."
- ¹⁷ Alte Staalesen. 2023. "Russia stages military-style propaganda parade on Norway's Svalbard archipelago." *The Barents Observer*. <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/russia-stages-militarystyle-propaganda-parade-on-norways-svalbard-archipelago/163025>.
- ¹⁸ "The 1920 Svalbard Treaty."