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North American Arctic Security Workshop

May 2024

Workshop Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North American Arctic Security Workshops (NAASW) were established in 2023 as a collaborative initiative between the North American Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN), the University of Greenland Ilisimatusarfik's Nasiffik Center (Nasiffik), and the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC). The series is designed to bring together stakeholders from across Canada, Greenland, the Kingdom of Denmark, and the United States to examine evolving defense and security challenges in the North American Arctic. The inaugural workshop was held in Nuuk, Greenland, in April 2023; the second in Iqaluit, Nunavut, in May 2024. Subsequent workshops are planned for a virtual engagement in 2025, and then in Alaska in 2026.

The 2024 Iqaluit Workshop was structured to:

- Explore current and emerging defense and security challenges relevant to the North American Arctic,
- Incorporate geographically grounded perspectives that illuminate regional security dynamics across the continent,
- Examine the range of factors that shape Arctic Indigenous security, including infrastructure, sovereignty, environmental change, and public safety,
- Employ both quantitative and qualitative methods to support research and educational initiatives, and
- Strengthen networks of Arctic security practitioners, Indigenous leaders, and policy experts through sustained dialogue and collaboration.



Several core themes from the 2023 Nuuk Workshop were reaffirmed in Iqaluit, with greater urgency and strategic clarity in 2024:

- **NORAD–NATO integration must be strengthened.** Coordinated domain awareness, information dominance, and strategic signaling are necessary across North American and transatlantic defense structures.
- **Dual-use infrastructure is central to Arctic defense.** Planners must define the form and function of infrastructure investments and ensure alignment with the Law of Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law.
- **The Canadian Rangers provide a model for localized service.** Their structure may inform future community-based security initiatives in Greenland and Alaska.
- **The North American Arctic defense and security paradigm is shifting.** Indigenous communities continue to serve as domain stewards in areas where military presence is limited. Integrating their perspectives into defense planning reflects not a departure from current practice, but a reinforcement of long-standing civil-military partnerships.
- **Integrated deterrence depends on Indigenous security.** The safety, stability, and inclusion of Arctic Indigenous communities are foundational to credible deterrence and mission effectiveness.
- **Trust-based relationships are essential.** Sustained engagement across federal, Indigenous, and local actors is critical to advancing regional security objectives.



Participants also identified novel and intensifying challenges that reflect the current global threat environment:

- **Geography no longer guarantees protection.** Pan-domain threats and hybrid warfare require new approaches to Arctic force posture and operational reach.
- **China and Russia pose distinct strategic challenges.** Russia represents the most immediate threat through its Arctic militarization. China seeks long-term influence via economic access, infrastructure development, and scientific engagement.
- **Nuclear dynamics are shifting.** As major powers modernize nuclear arsenals, North American Arctic defense planning must incorporate escalation scenarios and cross-domain implications.
- **Assumptions of a Sino-Russian Arctic alliance must be reassessed.** Their cooperation is opportunistic and asymmetric, with divergent interests and limited strategic trust.
- **Hybrid threats demand improved detection and response.** Allies must increase multi-domain situational awareness and invest in capabilities to counter non-kinetic, below-threshold activities.
- **Public awareness of NORAD modernization remains limited.** Efforts must address both technological upgrades and expanded collaboration with Indigenous communities and private sector partners.



- **Allies must balance short-term and long-term strategic planning.**

Defense strategies should account for both near-term contingencies and global power competition.

- **Critical minerals are strategic assets.** Greenland's position as a transatlantic bridge positions it to lead in supply chain development. To mitigate Chinese influence, Allies should inventory ownership structures and encourage NATO to articulate a strategy for economic security.
- **A NORAD/NORTHCOM Civil Council should be considered.** Such a body could convene defense, government, and industry stakeholders to align infrastructure investments and long-term planning.
- **An Arctic Indigenous Council should be established.** Indigenous Peoples must have a formal role in Arctic policy and security decision-making to ensure durable and inclusive governance.

NAASW continues to offer a vital platform for advancing defense dialogue that is both regionally grounded and strategically aligned. Indigenous communities bring indispensable insights into environmental conditions, mobility, and resilience—contributions that directly support an agile and responsive defense posture. As these workshops take place on Indigenous homelands, incorporating their perspectives is essential to achieving comprehensive situational awareness and building integrated deterrence in the North American Arctic. NAADSN, Nasiffik, and the Ted Stevens Center are committed to applying these lessons to future workshops, ensuring that outputs remain



operationally relevant, strategically informed, and responsive to evolving regional and global dynamics.



Iqaluit is located on Baffin Island and serves as the administrative and cultural center of the eastern Canadian Arctic. Photo reprinted with permission from R.A. Kee.

INTRODUCTION

The North American Arctic Security Workshops (NAASW) were established as a series in 2023 by the North American Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN), University of Greenland Ilisimatusarfik's Nasiffik Center (Nasiffik), and the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC), and represented by Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Dr. Rasmus Nielsen, and Randy “Church” Kee, respectively. The overall concept of NAASW is to gather diverse experts, stakeholders, and rightsholders from Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (with a specific reference to Greenland), and the U.S. to discuss multifaceted aspects affecting North American Arctic security. By design, the workshops conceptualize Arctic security from a considerably broader vantage point than traditional defense matters.

These unclassified workshops are designed as a sequenced series across the North American Arctic. The first workshop in the series was held in April 2023 in Nuuk, Greenland (Nuuk Workshop). The second workshop was held in May 2024 in Iqaluit, Nunavut (Iqaluit Workshop). The third is planned as a virtual event in early spring 2025, and the fourth in 2026 in Alaska. In planning the NAASW this way, the intent is to provide geographically unique perspectives that collectively compose a continental-wide mosaic of salient factors affecting the overall security of the North American Arctic.

Workshop planners remain attuned to two core considerations. First, NAASW supports the shared objectives of Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (Greenland), and the United States in fostering a secure and resilient Arctic where communities—particularly Indigenous Peoples—are strong, thriving, and safe. In alignment with these national goals, NAASW convenes discussions grounded in practical, sector-specific issues that influence



regional security across the North American Arctic, informed by geographically specific contexts.



*Participants from across Greenland/Denmark, Canada, and the U.S. gathered in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada to discuss Arctic security gaps.
Photo reprinted with permission from TSC.*

Second, the workshop design respects the national policies, legal frameworks, and defense arrangements of the three Arctic states, which are connected through NATO membership and, in the case of Canada and the United States, through the bilateral defense structure of NORAD. Discussions were structured to capture insights from across the North American Arctic, ensuring regional specificity while maintaining a shared strategic perspective.

The last century has featured oscillating cycles of interest, disinterest, energy, and apathy toward North American Arctic defense and security. Nevertheless, the Arctic defense and security environment is changing in real-time. Chinese efforts to strengthen access to and influence in the region; Russian aggression in Ukraine and retreat from

multilateral cooperation; Russian militarization of its Arctic zone; Russian and Chinese co-executed military exercises; and the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO have dramatically altered the status quo. In 2024 alone, the world witnessed the February 2024 release of Greenland's Arctic strategy: *Greenland in the World: Nothing About Us Without Us—Greenland's Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy 2024-2033* (*Greenland in the World*); the April 2024 release of Canada's *Our North Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*; and the U.S. Department of Defense *2024 Arctic Strategy*. These events unfold amid accelerating shifts in the Arctic operating environment, with direct implications for defense posture, force readiness, and the security of Indigenous communities across the region. Allied responses now reflect a broader understanding of the Arctic security environment—one that encompasses both traditional threats and non-kinetic challenges impacting stability, such as strained infrastructure, environmental change, and population resilience. This expanding focus enhances the credibility of integrated deterrence by linking operational presence with the defense of critical systems and communities. As one workshop keynote emphasized, this confluence of developments represents a generational opportunity for Arctic residents to shape evolving security approaches through deeper engagement with federal, state, and provincial authorities.

Three strategic imperatives stand out for North American Allies, partners, stakeholders, and rightsholders. First, public understanding of the Arctic's strategic relevance must be strengthened to sustain long-term policy attention and resource commitments. Second, defense and security professionals at national, provincial, and



state levels must recognize that the security of Indigenous communities is integral to the credibility and resilience of an integrated deterrence posture. Adversaries such as Russia and China continue to probe for opportunities to exploit political divisions, generate supply chain or energy disruptions, undermine sovereignty, or fracture trust between Arctic Indigenous communities and North American governments. Investment in the strength and stability of Arctic communities—including consultation with Indigenous Peoples and support for locally identified priorities—directly reinforces regional security and reduces the risk of adversarial influence.

Third, the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us” should remain central to how Arctic security is discussed and implemented. While there are diverse views on defense priorities and methods, enduring outcomes will depend on sustained dialogue, meaningful consultation, and long-term partnership. These practices enhance shared awareness, reduce operational blind spots, and ultimately strengthen defense cooperation across the North American Arctic.

NAADSN, Nasiffik, and the Ted Stevens Center shaped the Iqaluit Workshop with these evolving geophysical and geostrategic dynamics in mind. What do these shifts imply for North American Arctic defense and security? What are the implications for the Indigenous Peoples who live in and steward these regions? What new vulnerabilities confront North American Arctic Allies and partners in this context—and what steps can be taken to address them?

Central to these questions is how Allies can more effectively engage Indigenous partners and Northern communities in ways that reflect regional realities and support



mutual security interests. Workshop planners, as conveners of multi-sector dialogue, play a critical role in translating locally articulated priorities into actionable insights for decision-makers. The challenge now is to ensure that perspectives raised through NAASW—particularly those of Northern and Indigenous leaders—are incorporated into future defense planning and policy implementation across the North American Arctic.



*NAASW 2024 participants visiting the Legislative Building of Nunavut in Iqaluit.
Photo reprinted with permission from R.A. Kee.*

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The Iqaluit Workshop objectives were as follows:

- Explore current and emerging defense and security challenges relevant to the North American Arctic,
- Incorporate geographically grounded perspectives that illuminate regional security dynamics across the continent,
- Examine the range of factors that shape Arctic Indigenous security, including infrastructure, sovereignty, environmental change, and public safety,
- Employ both quantitative and qualitative methods to support research and educational initiatives, and
- Strengthen networks of Arctic security practitioners, Indigenous leaders, and policy experts through sustained dialogue and collaboration.

NAADSN, Nasiffik, and TSC purposefully designed NAASW as unclassified small gatherings, as opposed to a “salon” construct, so that participants could roll up their sleeves, ask critical questions, and exchange ideas. These workshops are designed as a sequenced series, starting on the eastern side of the North American Arctic (Greenland), moving through Canada (Iqaluit and virtual), and iteratively working westward to the Alaskan Arctic region. The workshops adhere to Chatham House Rule to create a neutral, safe space for participants to engage in open and frank discussion. Strategic foresight analysis is built into the agenda to allow for participants to express diverse ideas and opinions in a respectful manner, all while building and strengthening relationships. Finally,



youth, as future leaders in the Arctic, and Indigenous Peoples are engaged in every aspect of NAASW.

More specifically, the Iqaluit Workshop was rooted in principles of dignity, kindness, and respect. The workshop was held in a hybrid format, focusing on in-person discussions in Iqaluit and limited virtual participation using MS Teams. Workshop planners devised a collaborative structure that allowed for Arctic experts, researchers, students, and practitioners to convene and discuss emerging regional security challenges. The Iqaluit Workshop convened over a three-day-period, with keynotes, panel discussions, and end-of-day periods for reflection and discussion. The first panel on Day 1 included the lighting of the *qulliq*, a traditional lamp that women used to keep their families warm for centuries in the Arctic. In addition, a strategic foresight activity was conducted throughout the workshop. Participants were introduced to strategic foresight on Day 1 with discussion of the accessible Arctic. On Day 2, participants critically examined Arctic sectors of security (military, political, economic, environmental, societal) and different threats to, in, and through the Arctic. On Day 3, participants looked to the future and considered what is likely to change by 5-, 15-, or 30-year horizons across the themes. Workshop planners believe that there is enduring value in strategic foresight activities in which a multidisciplinary community of participants with varied backgrounds, working together as a team, seeks to offer ‘foresight’ rather than forecasts of future conditions.



LIGHTING OF THE QULLIQ, INTRODUCTION TO IQALUIT AND INUIT NUNANGAT

An award-winning Inuk artist, filmmaker, and storyteller born and raised in Iqaluit welcomed us to her community with the lighting of the *qulliq*—a half-moon-shaped soapstone lamp containing oil, arctic cotton (*saputi*), and moss (*ijju/maniq*). While the wick slowly burned, she tended to it with a hook-shaped *taqquti*. In their capacity of tending to the *qulliq*, women are honored for being life carriers and for bringing warmth and energy within their homes. Through her personal and family story, poignant insights into social, economic, and cultural dynamics in Nunavut were offered, as well as the importance of centering discussions on people and listening to the voices of those who know the land and culture intimately.



Lighting of the qulliq.

Photos reprinted with permission from (left) M. Schell and (right) R.A.Kee.

Subsequent presentations provided substantive overviews of the history of claims implementation and devolution in the territory, structures of Inuit governance and democracy in Canada, and Inuit-Crown relations since 2017. Nunavut is both the least populated and the largest of the provinces and territories of Canada (an area the size of

Western Europe), with a population of about 31,000 people in 25 communities dispersed in an area of 2 million km² of land and water (about 20% of Canada) and boasting 40% of Canada's coastline. About 70% of Inuit can speak Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun (two dialects of the Inuit language). The audience learned about the Nunavut Agreement, a Constitutionally protected agreement between Inuit of Nunavut and the Crown in Right of Canada, which reflects the Inuit desire for self-government through a public government and their own territory. Accordingly, the Government of Nunavut (GN) is a public government like other provincial and territorial governments in Canada, representing all of the people living in the territory. A devolution agreement signed on 18 January 2024 between the GN, the Government of Canada, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated sets out the process for transferring control over Nunavut's public (Crown) lands and resources to the GN. Devolution will allow the people of Nunavut (*Nunavummiut*) to make decisions on how public lands and resources are used and developed, and will enable *Nunavummiut* to better control the pace of development and maintain *Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq*, or environmental stewardship. One of the presentations also explained Canada's *Inuit Nunangat* Policy, endorsed in 2022, which seeks to direct how federal departments and agencies design and deliver policies, programs, and services that apply to Inuit and across *Inuit Nunangat* as a distinct geographic, cultural, and political region. An overview of Inuit-Crown co-development principles was provided:

- Co-development is the process by which Inuit and the Crown work together in good faith to advance shared objectives, including to amend or modify existing initiatives or develop new ones;



- Co-development is substantive and maximizes collaboration;
- Prioritizing human rights;
- Complementing Inuit rights;
- Active leadership;
- Joint design and delivery;
- Working in good faith;
- Consensus-based approach;
- Respect for governance and decision-making;
- Recognizing resourcing requirements.

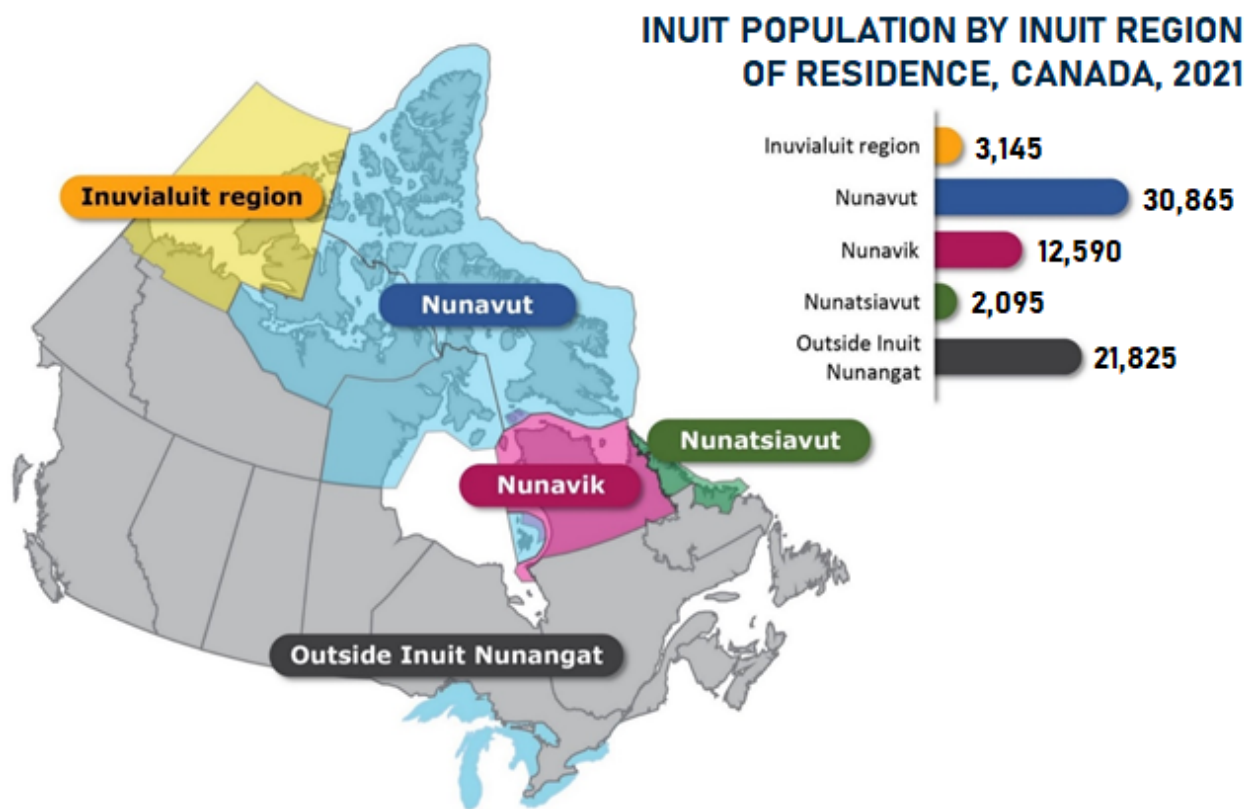


Figure source: Statistics Canada, 2021

The introductory panel revealed important differences between governance systems in Nunavut and neighboring Greenland, both of which are territories with predominantly Inuit populations. Nunavut is Canadian territory with a public government that forms part of Canada's federal system, which overlaps geographically with the largest land claim settlement region in Canada. Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark with extensive self-rule under the 2009 Self-Government Act, which means Greenlandic control over most domestic affairs and Denmark retaining authority for defense and foreign affairs.



KEY THEMES

The Iqaluit Workshop brought together diverse experts from Canada, Greenland, Denmark, and the U.S. to discuss multifaceted aspects affecting North American Arctic security. The following section synthesizes major themes, ideas presented, and information exchanged during the workshop.

The Evolving Security Environment

This panel examined how a rapidly evolving security environment is reshaping North American defense relations, NORAD coordination, and broader collaboration among Arctic Allies and partners. Discussions focused on the most pressing defense and security challenges in the North American Arctic, including threats from China and Russia, the compounded impact of environmental stressors, and the urgent need for coordinated action among the U.S., Canada, and Greenland to address emerging risks.

Historically, North American defense strategy relied on geographic distance as a buffer against conventional threats. That assumption no longer holds. Adversaries have closely studied how the U.S., Canada, and Greenland operate in the Arctic and have adapted their strategies to exploit perceived vulnerabilities—particularly in the areas of deterrence, detection, defense, and pan-domain coordination. The threat landscape is increasingly shaped by geophysical, geopolitical, and geostrategic developments. These include heightened Chinese surveillance activity near North American territory, expanded Russian military operations in the region, deployment of hypersonic weapons, cyber intrusions, transnational criminal activity, and a growing array of gray zone tactics.



Threats and Interests: China and Russia

North American Arctic Allies must remain acutely aware of the distinct—and diverging—strategic interests and threat profiles posed by China and Russia. These actors must not be conflated. While both challenge regional stability, their behaviors, objectives, and capabilities in the Arctic are different in scope, intent, and trajectory.

China is not an Arctic state and maintains limited military presence in the region. Nonetheless, it poses a long-term strategic challenge. As a global nuclear power and a leader in emerging technologies, China's actions in the Arctic—particularly in the cyber, space, and surveillance domains—carry direct implications for North American security. The 2023 high-altitude balloon incidents illustrated China's increasing willingness to conduct defense-related intelligence operations near or within sovereign airspace. Despite a shift toward soft power engagements such as scientific research and commercial investment, these activities may serve dual-use purposes and warrant close scrutiny.

China's long-term interest in the Arctic is also driven by energy security. As the world's largest energy consumer, China remains heavily reliant on imported oil and gas, much of which transits through contested maritime chokepoints. To mitigate this vulnerability, China is pursuing alternative supply routes, including Arctic shipping lanes and overland energy corridors through Russia. These dependencies may eventually drive increased Chinese presence in the Arctic, particularly in Eastern Siberia, to secure access and diversify energy sources. For North American defense planners, this raises critical questions about domain awareness, over-the-pole surveillance, and the potential



militarization of Arctic supply lines. Energy security remains a strategic center of gravity for China—and a long-term factor in shaping regional dynamics.

Russia represents the more immediate, near-term military threat. As an Arctic state with established territorial claims and forward-deployed capabilities, Russia maintains active strategic interests in the region. Although weakened by the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia continues to invest in Arctic military infrastructure, including airfields, air refueling capabilities, and naval assets that expand its operational reach to Greenland and across the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap. Participants emphasized that while a direct Russian kinetic attack on the North American Arctic is unlikely under current conditions, the risk of spillover from broader geopolitical tensions cannot be discounted. The notion of Arctic “exceptionalism” no longer holds.

Key concerns include the activities of Russia’s Northern Fleet, based on the Kola Peninsula. This fleet houses Russia’s most capable naval forces and strategic deterrent assets. In the event of conflict, Russian forces would likely seek to project power into the North Atlantic via the GIUK Gap, threatening NATO resupply and transatlantic lines of communication. Continued monitoring, detection, and containment of Russian naval movements through this chokepoint remains a strategic priority for NATO and its Arctic members.

In contrast, North American Arctic geography offers operational advantages. The Bering Strait remains a vital chokepoint through which Russian naval access could be restricted—though this would require close coordination between the United States and



Canada. Strategic locations such as Alaska Command (ALCOM), the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and U.S. Pacific Fleet assets play key roles in safeguarding this frontier.

Effective long-term strategy must account for both immediate Russian threats and China's long-term positioning. Western decision-making processes—constrained by democratic accountability—are being tested by the rapid, centralized decision cycles of authoritarian states. Meanwhile, U.S. and Allied defense resources are stretched globally. North American Arctic security strategy must balance near-term deterrence with long-term resilience.

Greenland's geostrategic location and resource potential are central to this calculus. Greenland's critical mineral reserves offer an opportunity to counter Chinese dominance in key sectors, but only if dual-use infrastructure is developed to support both economic and strategic objectives. Investments in ports, airstrips, and logistical hubs can serve commercial functions while also supporting NATO operations—enabling resupply, refueling, and force projection across the region.

In sum, China and Russia are positioning themselves to shape Arctic outcomes in ways that challenge North American interests. In the short term, success in Ukraine and credible deterrence in the Indo-Pacific—particularly regarding Taiwan—are essential to maintaining strategic stability. In the longer term, Arctic Allies must anticipate the cascading effects of global power competition on regional security. This includes monitoring Chinese energy dependency, mitigating opportunities for adversarial access or investment, and maintaining influence over global energy flows. These efforts will be critical to preserving strategic advantage in the North American Arctic.



Sino-Russian Collaboration

Although China and Russia have expanded coordination in recent years—particularly in energy trade and diplomatic forums—their relationship remains asymmetrical. Russia is increasingly isolated on the global stage and reliant on Chinese economic support, positioning it as the junior partner in this strategic alignment. Despite growing public narratives around alignment, North American Arctic Allies must avoid overestimating the depth or coherence of Sino-Russian collaboration, especially in the Arctic.

There are shared interests between the two powers, including the development of the Polar Silk Road and cooperative messaging in multilateral settings. However, China has approached Arctic collaboration with Russia cautiously. Shipping along the Northern Sea Route has declined, largely due to China's efforts to avoid secondary sanctions tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Preserving access to Western markets and protecting its global reputation have taken precedence over deeper engagement in Arctic infrastructure projects with Russia.

While diplomatic coordination continues, strategic trust between the two remains limited. Their long-term objectives in the Arctic are not fully aligned. China prioritizes stable access to global markets and resources, while Russia views the Arctic as a platform for projecting military power and asserting sovereignty. North American Arctic Allies must remain alert to coordinated influence operations—particularly narratives aimed at framing NATO as a source of instability in the region.



Additionally, Russia's stated interest in establishing a BRICS-affiliated research station at Pyramiden, Svalbard, warrants close scrutiny. A presence at this former Soviet mining outpost could enable dual-use scientific activities with potential military or intelligence applications, especially if undertaken jointly with Chinese entities. Arctic states should treat such developments as possible vectors for surveillance, data collection, and influence operations under the guise of scientific cooperation.

The Nuclear Threat

The Arctic security environment is increasingly shaped by the reemergence of nuclear considerations. A significant and underappreciated transformation is underway in global nuclear force postures, as major powers realign and modernize their deterrent strategies. The United States, China, and Russia are all actively upgrading their arsenals—not only to reinforce strategic deterrence, but also to enhance delivery systems that suggest a shift toward broader warfighting capabilities.

For Arctic Allies and partners, this evolving landscape demands urgent attention. All-domain awareness must be strengthened, globally integrated layered defense architectures advanced, and weapons systems modernized to address new and emerging threats. Of particular importance is the need to improve coordination between NATO and NORAD to account for shifting threat vectors and reduce potential seams in deterrence and defense.

For the United States and Canada, this includes full modernization of the North Warning System (NWS) and the development of capabilities to counter emerging threats such as hypersonic missile systems. Regional planning should also incorporate scenario-



based exercises that consider deterrence failure and escalation dynamics. As one participant noted, any breakdown in deterrence may raise the prospect of tactical nuclear use—an outcome with profound strategic consequences.

China, meanwhile, is expected to expand its surveillance and response infrastructure to monitor U.S. posture shifts in the Arctic, further complicating escalation dynamics. At the same time, Russia continues to modernize its nuclear forces, including assets based in the High North. Arctic Allies must remain clear-eyed about these developments. The presumption that the nuclear threat is a Cold War legacy no longer holds. The current strategic environment demands renewed focus on nuclear stability and the integration of Arctic posture into broader deterrence planning.

Allied Collaboration: Preparedness and Awareness

In addition to ongoing efforts to modernize NORAD—particularly through upgrades to the North Warning System—North American Arctic Allies must enhance collaboration across multiple domains, including awareness, capabilities, and preparedness. Strengthening these areas through integrated partnerships, including with Indigenous communities, is essential to advancing credible deterrence and improving operational effectiveness in the region.

Awareness, both situational and domain-specific, is increasingly recognized as a core component of integrated deterrence. For instance, the New Danish Defense Agreement prioritizes situational awareness, with specific focus on Greenlandic and Faroese cooperation. Similarly, Canada has made substantial progress through national



operations such as CAF's LIMPID and NANOOK, and through community-based contributions from the Canadian Rangers

Interagency and Allied coordination remains critical. This includes partnerships between the Canadian Coast Guard, Transport Canada, Alaska Command (ALCOM), and Joint Arctic Command (JACO) in Greenland. These joint activities and exercises not only demonstrate persistent presence but also contribute to regional stability by reinforcing interoperability and preparedness. Building on these efforts is essential for strengthening the collective defense posture and enhancing resilience across the North American Arctic.



Participants consider how and where the Arctic is more accessible, leading to new security challenges for remote communities, and impacting regional defense exercises.

Photo reprinted with permission from M.Schell.

Hybrid Threats

The second panel focused on how North American Arctic Allies can respond to adversary challenges across the cyber, space, air, maritime, land, and information domains. Discussion centered on identifying the most significant hybrid threats affecting the region, the risks they pose to national and regional security, and how Allies can enhance pan-domain awareness to detect, attribute, and respond to such activities. The panel also explored the role of intelligence sharing and strategies for overcoming barriers to intergovernmental information exchange.

Four key messages emerged. First, Arctic security must be viewed through a lens that extends beyond traditional military frameworks. The region's security environment encompasses homeland defense, critical infrastructure protection, and the well-being of Indigenous communities. Given the strategic cost and escalation risk associated with conventional conflict, Arctic Allies must adopt a broader conception of resilience. Hybrid threats in the region include cyber intrusions, economic coercion, transnational criminal activity, health-related disruptions, and environmental shifts—such as altered maritime access linked to sea ice loss. These threats are not isolated; adversaries may deploy hybrid tactics in parallel with conventional operations, creating ambiguity and complicating deterrence and response.

Second, geography can no longer be treated as a natural defense barrier. Arctic remoteness does not preclude adversary activity. North American Arctic Allies must anticipate persistent competition—particularly from China and Russia—and reinforce their operational presence, force readiness, and capacity for rapid response. While China is



unlikely to initiate direct territorial confrontation, panelists emphasized its growing use of gray zone tactics, including proxy actors, information operations, and dual-use platforms. These methods are increasingly relevant in the Arctic and should not be dismissed as regionally irrelevant.

Third, adversaries exploit ambiguity in detection, attribution, and jurisdiction to shape strategic outcomes. The Arctic's physical isolation and the complex governance landscape—marked by overlapping local, state, federal, and international authorities—create exploitable seams. To counter this, Allies must adopt a whole-of-government approach grounded in shared situational awareness. Enhanced intelligence sharing, particularly across sensor networks from sea to space, is essential. Institutionalizing data sharing through mechanisms such as the Arctic Global Observation System could provide near-term gains in identifying and mitigating hybrid threats, including covert vessel movements or illicit resource exploitation.

Fourth, Arctic developments must be understood within a global strategic context. When China and Russia deploy naval assets near Alaska, the intended signal often extends beyond the region. These operations are part of broader messaging campaigns—whether to assert Chinese maritime claims in the South China Sea or to express opposition to U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs). Strategic signaling also includes political provocations, such as fishing expeditions or patrols near the Aleutian Islands, intended to test U.S. responses and shape public discourse. In one instance, China positioned vessels to challenge perceptions of U.S. control, while leveraging state media to delegitimize U.S.



maritime operations as politically motivated, despite U.S. recognition of lawful transit rights under international law.

These strategic communications are part of a coordinated effort to incrementally erode norms, probe defensive gaps, and shift the narrative. Adversaries are operating at the margins—testing thresholds, exploiting ambiguity, and projecting influence in ways designed to avoid triggering direct conflict. North American Arctic Allies must remain vigilant, recognizing that hybrid competition is increasingly unfolding in proximity to the homeland, and that actions in the Arctic are tied to a broader global contest for influence, access, and control.



Panel participants highlighted how Arctic regional fora play a role in Arctic defense and security before engaging in answering audience questions.

Photo reprinted with permission by R.A. Kee.

Economic Security Through an Arctic Lens

This panel examined how shifts in the operating environment, intensifying geopolitical competition, and evolving economic interests are shaping Arctic economic security. The discussion focused on key challenges across the Circumpolar North, the intersection between economic and national security, and how North American Arctic Allies can align economic development with strategic objectives—particularly in relation to the Indo-Pacific. Panelists explored opportunities to strengthen Indigenous and Northern economies through dual-purpose investments that enhance both community resilience and territorial security.

Infrastructure remains one of the most significant economic security challenges in the Arctic. From a defense perspective, infrastructure is both an operational enabler and a visible marker of presence. Strategic infrastructure includes transportation networks (ports, roads, airfields, and railways), energy systems, and telecommunications across land, sea, air, and space. These systems are vital not only for projecting force but also for supporting Northern communities and ensuring year-round accessibility.

Energy security was a recurring theme. Participants emphasized the need to increase energy redundancy and reliability through diversification—incorporating wind, solar, tidal, geothermal, hydro, biomass, and, where appropriate, nuclear energy. Strengthening energy infrastructure supports both regional stability and continuity of operations under stress.

Where feasible, infrastructure investments should serve dual-use purposes—contributing to defense objectives while enhancing civil resilience. Achieving this requires



close coordination among governments, defense institutions, and the private sector. One recommendation called for the establishment of a Civil Council under NORAD and NORTHCOM to align investment priorities and identify shared value. However, participants also underscored the importance of assessing dual-use projects through the lens of the Law of Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law. Even if legal risk is low, it is critical to evaluate how infrastructure could be perceived, targeted, or used in conflict scenarios.

Indigenous well-being and economic inclusion are not peripheral concerns—they are central to mission success and regional stability. Indigenous communities are often the first to observe changes in the Arctic operating environment, making their participation essential to enhancing domain awareness, logistical access, and early warning capacity. Economic exclusion and marginalization create conditions that can be exploited by adversaries through investment overtures or disinformation campaigns—posing direct risks to Allied influence, infrastructure security, and public trust. Building durable security partnerships in the North therefore requires more than periodic engagement; it demands structured processes that ensure Indigenous rightsholders are integrated into planning and decision-making from the outset. These relationships enhance operational reach, reduce friction in times of crisis, and contribute to a defense posture that is both credible and locally supported.

Geopolitical calculations also weigh heavily on economic security in the region. Since 2014, Russia has viewed the Arctic through a confrontational lens, using its Arctic resource base to offset strategic dependencies and reposition itself globally. Though



Chinese infrastructure investment in the North American Arctic remains limited, Russia may offer China expanded concessions as its global isolation deepens. These developments could generate pressure from Beijing to alter the balance of influence in Arctic institutions such as the Arctic Council.

China's primary instruments of power are economic—and increasingly agile. North American Arctic Allies have yet to fully confront the scope and sophistication of Chinese economic influence operations in the region. A prominent area of concern is critical minerals. These resources present a generational opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to benefit through meaningful equity ownership, governance roles, and decision-making authority. However, this sector also represents a clear vector for Chinese strategic penetration.

China seeks to dominate global critical mineral supply chains, effectively positioning itself as the “OPEC of critical minerals.” While previous threats to foreign investment were often met with legislation, Chinese entities have found ways to circumvent existing safeguards—particularly through academic and corporate research partnerships. Participants noted that many Chinese graduate students are engaged in critical mineral research, and that external funding is often routed into Canadian university and lab systems.

To mitigate this, several actions were proposed:

- Develop an inventory of Chinese ownership and influence over critical mineral projects, university research programs, and processing facilities in North America.



- Strengthen foreign investment screening legislation to close regulatory loopholes and limit indirect control of strategic assets.
- Establish a NATO economic security framework to coordinate Allied responses and secure supply chains.

Finally, panelists cautioned that Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark—both middle powers—may be inadvertently drawn into great power competition through economic entanglements. While these nations maintain strong Allied commitments, growing reliance on foreign capital or technology in strategic sectors could complicate future defense or foreign policy decisions. For example, if a Greenlandic infrastructure project critical to both commercial development and military logistics were co-financed by a Chinese state-owned enterprise, questions could arise over data access, operational control, and supply chain security—placing Denmark in a diplomatically constrained position. Sustained strategic awareness and coordinated policymaking will be essential to avoid being leveraged by adversaries in the evolving geopolitical landscape.

NORAD and North American Defense Modernization

The theme of the panel was NORAD modernization in the context of emerging technologies in an era of strategic competition. This panel addressed how NORAD modernization plans to address emerging all-domain threats to Canada and North America and the associated gaps in continental defense; the policies, capabilities, force adjustments, and infrastructure needed to meet current and future threats to the North American Arctic across all domains; the implications for Canada-Greenland-U.S. defense relations, the NORAD partnership, and collaboration with other Allies and partners to



enhance security in and around North America; and how North American defense modernization can enhance cooperation with federal/national and territorial/state government partners and Indigenous Peoples to address current and future threats to the region.

NORAD modernization—intended to enhance sensing, tracking, and engagement capabilities—has evolved in three broad phases. First, in the post-WWII phase, the USSR was a competitor who could attack the U.S. The second phase occurred between 1990-2007, when NORAD became more internally focused and concerned with terrorist threats and hijacked aircraft. The third phase is from 2007-present, where NORAD is focused both externally (particularly on Russia) and internally. There are three key threats to NORAD at present. First, since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, North America is now defined as the northwestern flank of NATO. Consequently, NORAD has strengthened its relationship with its Nordic allies. Second, there is the China threat. Third, North American Arctic Allies are grappling with environmental threats, which directly impact infrastructure and regional accessibility in some domains.

The panelists agreed that this round of modernization must be more robust if North American Arctic Allies are to address these key threats. Modernization must first and foremost represent a process among government, industry, which will provide creative solutions and ongoing R&D, and Indigenous communities. There must be investment in local Arctic communities—and there is a strong start in this regard with favorable consideration to Inuit-owned companies in the procurement process. The North American Arctic Allies must go beyond cooperation to real partnership with Inuit communities,



panelists emphasized, which requires new ways of doing things through an inclusive approach to national defense. For its part, the Greenlandic Government is increasing its knowledge of NORAD, and insisting that deeper knowledge and participation of Arctic Indigenous Peoples must anchor NATO. The Greenlandic Government intends to intensify contact with U.S. and must maintain positive dialogue about the Pituffik space base to secure local comprehensive initiatives.

Modernization includes replacing the NWS hardware and technology systems, which are rapidly aging; developing secure cloud-based command-and-control systems that allow dispersed decision-making; enhancing shared domain awareness and information dominance not only within NORAD but between NORAD and NATO; upgrading infrastructure impacted by environmental change; developing infrastructure to support platforms such as the F35; upgrading over the horizon radar systems; and improving human performance/regaining soldier skills and training. The latter should include incorporating Indigenous techniques, which obviously benefits from closer engagement with Northerner-based knowledge holders with on-the-land expertise.

Various participants expressed concerns about the 2028 implementation deadline. The urgency is clear—threats to North American security are increasing, and public awareness on both sides of the Canada–U.S. border must be elevated. North American Arctic Allies should communicate these threats in a precise and proportionate manner, avoiding alarmism while reinforcing the need for vigilance and preparedness. The overarching message is clear: strength at home enables strength abroad. In the Canadian



context, messaging should also emphasize national pride and the defense of sovereignty as core elements of the modernization effort.



*Participants work in breakout sessions to identify critical gaps and concerns.
Photo reprinted with permission from R.A.Kee.*

Disaster Preparedness and the Canadian Rangers

The environmental risk and emergency preparedness panel examined how environmental and geopolitical changes are shaping future defense requirements across Inuit Nunaat and the broader North. The discussion focused on how a changing operating environment is affecting security operations in the North American Arctic; the challenges associated with search and rescue (SAR) and disaster response; the adequacy of current

collaborative frameworks; and the potential for alternative models, including increased reliance on local authorities or civil defense forces, to reduce dependency on military assets during hazard-induced emergencies. Panelists also considered how military force generation, employment, and support structures might be adapted to enhance resilience and respond more effectively to the growing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, while also contributing to the mitigation of environmental degradation.

The Canadian Rangers panel examined how militaries can improve engagement with Northern jurisdictions and Indigenous Peoples to fulfill commitments towards reconciliation and meaningful consultation with Indigenous Peoples while also strengthening domestic and continental defense and security capabilities and operations. This panel addressed the key contributions that the Canadian Rangers make to Canada's Arctic defense and security; how they simultaneously build community resilience; and how the Canadian Rangers might serve as an exemplar or best practice for Greenland and Alaska.

Panel members noted there is increased interest in weather and emergency preparedness due to the uptick in acute environmental disruption over the past few years. Communities are witnessing more frequent, severe, intense, and unpredictable storms and disasters across the North American Arctic. For example, the “sea storm” season used to run from the middle of October through December. However, that season is now six months long, due to rising sea surface temperatures, rising sea levels, and less shore ice for protection for storm surges.



Perhaps the strongest message to come out of this panel is that environmental stability is not only a matter of physical safety—it is foundational to human well-being. When discussing the security implications of environmental disruption, it is essential to adopt a holistic perspective that includes spiritual and ceremonial dimensions as well, especially from a human rights standpoint. Events such as floods and wildfires can profoundly affect the cultural continuity and daily life of Indigenous Peoples.

Participants noted that emergency preparedness planning is complicated by the cascading effects of a single disruptive event. Such events can generate significant and unpredictable ripple effects – often lasting longer and proving more severe than previously encountered. These dynamics can divert resources and attention in multiple directions. To address this, Allies must engage with and support local communities throughout the planning process. In addition to operational readiness, governments must also invest in relationship-building and sustained community engagement as part of a broader preparedness strategy.

Emergency preparedness also is challenged by personnel issues. These are not necessarily recruitment challenges, but retention challenges, as first responders have a high propensity for burn out and mental health concerns. Community first responders need to be given the time, energy, and tools to heal. Community first responders not only have to deal with current traumas, but also the colonial violence to which Indigenous Peoples have been subjected in Canada, which is still in their collective conscience. Community is about care and respect. It is about the things that can be provided to communities to be better



prepared to support their friends and neighbors and family and churches, because that will keep a community together.

Another key challenge identified by the panel is regional infrastructure. During joint exercises between Canadian and U.S. search and rescue forces, communities often lacked the capacity to support deployed personnel due to limitations in time, distance, and geography. North American Arctic communities are generally remote and small, with infrastructure that is not equipped to absorb large-scale surges in personnel during emergency events, let alone planned events. This underscores the urgent need for greater infrastructure investment across the Arctic.

Coordination across levels of government also presents a persistent challenge, particularly due to gaps in knowledge, communication, and clearly defined authority. Jurisdictional complexity often creates ambiguity around roles and responsibilities, leading to inefficient or delayed response. Participants recommended establishing a community public safety officer role within Northern communities – someone responsible for coordinating emergency preparedness, search and rescue, marine safety, and fire prevention across local actors. Local officials often serve in multiple roles and face resource constraints; improving situational awareness, training, alignment, and interagency communication would significantly enhance operational effectiveness. However, participants also noted that funding such a position may be difficult, as local first responders are often paid from separate and inconsistent budget sources.

Three best practices were discussed. One notable example for enhancing remote emergency preparedness response systems is the Arctic Basic Education Program, co-



developed on 6 May 2024 in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland by JACO, the Greenlandic Government, the Kingdom of Denmark, and civilian authorities. The program aims to establish a long-term, resilient framework by investing in youth and preparing local communities for service in armed forces and emergency roles.

The curriculum delivers essential skills and certifications that enable students to pursue careers in defense, law enforcement, or fire services – regardless of whether they hold a high school diploma. This approach broadens educational pathways and improves career prospects for Greenlandic youth. Hands-on training includes a three-week onboard experience aboard active patrol vessels, where students rotate through various operational roles. Participants also earn firefighter certification with slow driving qualifications. The program concludes with a six-week internship, hosted either at headquarters or across three designated police stations.

A second highlighted practice is the Alaskan National Guard. National Guardsmen are playing an increasingly critical role as severe and unpredictable weather patterns continue to generate more frequent and complex response demands. Regular deployment or reserve components during disasters helps maintain operational proficiency and ensures readiness across the full spectrum of conflict. However, this growing reliance poses a risk: if the National Guard is needed concurrently for a major theatre conflict, there could be significant capacity constraints.

A third best practice is the Canadian Rangers, who exemplify effective emergency response in the Arctic. Their model is recommended as an exemplar for initiatives spanning the region from Alaska to Greenland. The Canadian Rangers serve as the eyes, ears, and



voice of the military in the Canadian North. Their connection to the Arctic is deeply rooted, and their approach is inherently holistic. Because they are embedded in local communities, they engage across vast areas through trusted relationships build on familiarity and mutual trust. These connections, coupled with local knowledge and situational awareness, enable effective communication and coordination in austere conditions.

There are several operational challenges associated with the Canadian Rangers organization. First, there is a persistent shortage of human resource support, particularly in the form of Regular Force and Primary Reserve clerks and Ranger Instructors needed to sustain activities. Second, ongoing environmental changes and increased activity in remote regions are placing additional pressure on existing response capacities. Third, while Rangers rely on modern communications and liaison with joint response and rescue centers, connectivity and coordination remain persistent challenges. Clear lines of communication must be maintained, with timely information sharing across and back down the chain of command – critical for effective and live-saving response.

At the foundation of strong emergency response and preparedness is the quality of relationships. North American Arctic Allies, across all levels of government and sectors, must consistently invest in understanding roles, responsibilities, and capabilities – and in sharing knowledge and lessons learned at the community level. Collaborative learning and trust-building are essential for improving future response efforts.



How Arctic Regional Fora Factor into Security

This panel focused on identifying opportunities for strategic and operational collaboration among Arctic Allies and partners, both within and beyond existing regional frameworks. Discussion centered on how regional governance fora, national policies, and Indigenous institutions shape Arctic security and stability. Key themes included the role of local actors in defense-relevant decision-making; the potential for dual-purpose investments to strengthen both community resilience and territorial integrity; and opportunities to deepen NATO and NORAD coordination beyond exercises. Participants also considered where defense and security might intersect with emerging initiatives such as the proposed Arctic North American Forum, introduced in *Greenland in the World*.

A range of Arctic governance mechanisms was examined in relation to their implications for defense cooperation and Indigenous engagement. For example, Canada's treaty obligations—such as Treaty 8 (1899) and Treaty 11 (1921–22) in the Northwest Territories—establish a foundational legal relationship with Indigenous Peoples. More recently, the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has become a guiding framework. Canada's formal adoption of the Declaration in legislation means that it can now inform the interpretation of domestic law. Article 30 of UNDRIP is especially relevant, as it prohibits military activities on Indigenous lands without effective prior consultation. For defense planners, this underscores the need to align strategic posture with legal obligations and community engagement.

Greenland's recently released *Greenland in the World* strategy also carries significant weight in shaping future Arctic governance. Its core principles include



maintaining the Arctic as a region of low tension; ensuring Greenlandic participation in relevant multilateral fora; preserving the Arctic Council; advancing intergovernmental collaboration among Alaska, Canada’s Northern Territories, and Greenland; and building shared capabilities in renewable energy, research, education, supply chain resilience, and labor mobility.

Participants emphasized that governance cannot be meaningfully discussed without recognizing the long history and present-day contributions of Indigenous Peoples. Historical patterns of exclusion have limited the legitimacy and effectiveness of Arctic governance institutions. Efforts to elevate Indigenous visibility—across foreign policy, defense, and security—are critical to reversing that trend. Examples such as the 1973 Arctic Peoples’ Conference, which led to the formation of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, and the ongoing work of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, demonstrate the capacity and institutional presence of Indigenous actors on the global stage.

Panelists argued that the time has come to more deliberately advance Indigenous leadership in Arctic security. Defense cannot be narrowly defined as protection against kinetic threats; it must include infrastructure resilience, food security, education, and the protection of vulnerable populations—including Indigenous women and families. Serving as Permanent Participants on the Arctic Council, while valuable, is no longer sufficient. The suspension of dialogue with Russian Indigenous counterparts due to geopolitical tensions has further limited the scope of current engagement.

To strengthen legitimacy and resilience in Arctic governance, participants recommended the establishment of an Arctic Indigenous Council with a formal role in



shaping regional policy. Indigenous communities must have a voice in any forum where Arctic affairs are discussed—not simply as stakeholders, but as partners with sovereign interests and operational insights. Their inclusion is not just a matter of equity—it is essential to building an Arctic security architecture that is durable, representative, and strategically sound.



Small group discussion facilitated critical conversations between government, civilian, and Indigenous participants. Photo reprinted with permission from M.Schell.

Bolstering Supply Chain Resilience in the Arctic

This panel focused on methods for enhancing supply chain resilience in the North American Arctic. Discussions centered on key security risks and vulnerabilities affecting supply chains across the region, particularly those related to critical minerals, development, and food and health systems. Panelists examined how North American Arctic Allies can strengthen supply chain resilience by reducing reliance on imported critical minerals – especially those essential to enhancing military capabilities. The

conversation also addressed how threats to critical infrastructure are identified, assessed, and mitigated; what types of infrastructure investments are required now and in the future; and how dual-use investments can simultaneously bolster defense readiness and civilian resilience.

The North American Arctic presents unique logistical challenges due to extreme environmental conditions, small and remote communities, complex governance structures, and persistent resource constraints. These factors make it difficult to establish and maintain robust supply chains, which are nonetheless vital to supporting communities, economic development, and military operations.

Historically, the U.S. military's supply chain strategy has been focused beyond domestic territory – primarily on sustaining forward operations in regions such as Korea, Somalia, and Europe. These global supply lines underpin U.S. prosperity and security. The current challenge is for North American Arctic Allies to apply similar strategic attention to domestic and regional supply chains in order to sustain prosperity and guarantee security closer to home.

The strategic opportunity lies in dual use infrastructure. In Greenland, for example, public-private partnerships are supported through government grants and loans that reduce the cost of entry for private sector investment. This lowers the financial barriers, increases access to resources, and enhances the development of infrastructure that serves both civilian and defense purposes. These investments simultaneously strengthen supply chains and bring tangible benefits to Greenlandic communities. Community development is built into this model by design. Local input is codified in contracts, and



legal enforcement ensures compliance- helping align economic development with national security objectives.

Supply chain resilience is especially critical in the domain of critical minerals. Greenland's role in this sector is strategically important for both Europe and North America. Critical minerals underpin defense production and high-tech innovation, and Greenland is uniquely positioned to lead in this space due to its resource base, governance structures, and geographic location. The convergence of globalization, geopolitical tension, national security priorities, and environmental change driven pressures highlights the urgency of developing resilient, regionally anchored supply chains. Greenland's historic ties to both North America and Europe, along with its access to European Union markets, make it a natural bridge. Its strategic location and mineral reserves offer a significant opportunity for North American and European partners to invest in defense-aligned mineral supply chains.

It also is important to highlight that dual use infrastructure can improve accessibility across the Arctic. This is particularly relevant for Greenland, where Denmark is negotiating a new defense agreement that could support funding for these types of initiatives. However, caution was raised. The discussion emphasized the need to consider local perspectives which are often most vulnerable when large-scale decisions are made in national capitals. While supply chain resilience and energy transitions are broadly seen as positive goals, questions remain about who benefits. Despite Greenland's mineral wealth, Northern communities continue to face persistent economic, social, and mental health challenges.



North American allies must approach supply chain resilience with an understanding that it directly intersects with food and health security. These supply chains must be built to sustain and strengthen local communities, not just strategic goals. That requires leveraging the skills and expertise of local stakeholders and businesses. Overlooking local suppliers increases supply chain vulnerability. In addition to prioritizing dual-use strategies, North American Arctic Allies must ensure that economic development initiatives do not create openings for foreign actors to exploit regional vulnerabilities or interfere in domestic supply chains. Local empowerment and security must remain central to all Arctic infrastructure and development planning.

Emerging Leaders and the Future of the Arctic: “Nothing About Us Without Us”

Participants emphasized that national governments and Indigenous communities often approach security with different frameworks, historical experiences, and goals. These differing perspectives are essential to understand if future defense and security strategies are to be both credible and enduring. Panelists expressed a shared view that security policy must be informed by lived experience and that historical patterns of marginalization—across multiple national contexts—continue to shape present-day trust and engagement. As one emerging leader noted, Indigenous communities are often skeptical of state-led security efforts, citing past patterns of broken promises and inconsistent commitments, whether from Chinese, Canadian, American, or Danish institutions.

Emerging leaders articulated five interlinked security priorities for North American Arctic Allies:



- **National security is Indigenous security, and Indigenous security is national security.** These are not separate or competing concepts; secure Arctic communities are foundational to regional stability.
- **National security is cultural security.** The preservation of Indigenous languages, traditions, and the land itself are viewed as inseparable from broader security goals. When dominant systems marginalize Indigenous language and identity, it creates conditions of vulnerability that adversaries can exploit.
- **National security is economic security.** Investments in education, youth development, and mental health services are necessary not only for community well-being but for preventing longer-term instability.
- **National security is community security.** Social conditions—including missing and murdered Indigenous women, elder abuse, childcare gaps, and inadequate infrastructure—are directly tied to security and resilience in the Arctic.
- **National security is personal security.** The legacies of colonization continue to affect individuals and families in deeply personal ways. Acknowledging these lived experiences is essential to building trust, advancing reconciliation, and fostering more inclusive policymaking.

Panelists underscored that Indigenous Peoples must not only be heard but also meaningfully included in decision-making processes that affect their communities and homelands. The North American Arctic is not merely a theater of strategic interest—it is



home to longstanding communities with deep cultural, historical, and territorial ties.

Moving forward requires calm, respectful dialogue and sustained listening.

These insights offer valuable guidance for national security institutions. Recognizing Indigenous perspectives as part of a broader effort to build resilient and legitimate defense postures will help ensure that Arctic strategies reflect the realities of the people who live there—and whose partnership will be critical to mission success.



Emerging leaders panel discuss those security challenges affecting both the region and younger residents. Photo reprinted with permission from M.Schell.

THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Iqaluit Workshop convened participants from Canada, Greenland, the Kingdom of Denmark, and the United States to address multidimensional aspects of North American Arctic security. NAADSN, Nasiffik, and the Ted Stevens Center employed a workshop structure that integrated presentations, scenario analysis, and dialogue among a diverse group of participants, including civilian experts, government officials, Indigenous leaders, emerging professionals, and defense practitioners.

Contemporary events over the past year shaped the tenor and tone of the Iqaluit Workshop, introducing greater urgency and strategic focus. Several themes carried forward from the Nuuk Workshop, while others emerged as new imperatives in 2024.

Themes Carried Forward from the Nuuk Workshop:

- **Dual-use infrastructure is essential.** Infrastructure that serves both civil and defense needs must be prioritized and evaluated within the frameworks of the Law of Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law.
- **Integrated deterrence must include Indigenous security.** Operational credibility and effectiveness depend on the stability and inclusion of Arctic Indigenous communities.
- **The Canadian Rangers offer a replicable model.** Locally based service in remote areas supports both civil resilience and defense presence, with potential applicability in Greenland and Alaska.
- **The North American Arctic defense and security paradigm is shifting.** Indigenous Peoples' principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us" is



increasingly central. Civil-military partnerships—grounded in trust and mutual benefit—are critical to addressing a broad spectrum of security challenges.

- **Trust-building is foundational.** Enduring relationships across military, governmental, and Indigenous actors enhance mission legitimacy and regional awareness.
- **Workshops must balance national and Indigenous perspectives.** As these dialogues are held on Indigenous homelands, planning must ensure that Indigenous definitions of defense and security are incorporated meaningfully.

New and Emerging Themes from the Iqaluit Workshop:

- **North American Arctic Allies are no longer protected by geography.** The rise of pan-domain and hybrid threats demands rethinking deterrence, surveillance, and forward presence.
- **China and Russia pose distinct, strategic threats.** China's approach centers on long-term access and influence through economic and scientific instruments; Russia remains the near-term military concern.
- **The global nuclear threat environment is evolving.** Allies must reassess continental defense architecture and escalation scenarios in light of nuclear modernization by China and Russia.
- **Hybrid warfare is accelerating.** Allies must improve their ability to detect, attribute, and respond to below-threshold threats across all domains.



- **The notion of a Sino-Russian Arctic alliance must be reevaluated.**

Strategic trust is limited, and Arctic objectives diverge. Allies must assess this relationship with nuance and clarity.

- **Strategic planning must address long-term competition.** Defense and security investments must account for broader geopolitical trends—especially Chinese economic statecraft and global energy dependencies.
- **Public understanding of NORAD modernization must be strengthened.** As radar and detection systems are upgraded, broader collaboration—with industry and Indigenous communities—will be essential for operational readiness.
- **Critical minerals are strategic assets.** Greenland is well-positioned to lead resilient supply chain development. Allies should inventory Chinese ownership and advocate for a NATO economic security strategy.
- **A NORAD/NORTHCOM Civil Council should be explored.** This entity could align public and private infrastructure investment priorities and deconflict planning across sectors.
- **An Arctic Indigenous Council should be established.** Indigenous representation in decision-making fora must be formalized to support inclusive governance and durable security outcomes

Future Arctic security dialogues must move beyond solely national or sub-national frameworks to incorporate the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples as strategic contributors to regional stability. These workshops take place on the homelands of Indigenous



communities whose knowledge, experience, and definitions of security are essential to understanding the full operating environment. A credible and durable approach to North American Arctic defense—and to integrated deterrence more broadly—requires that Indigenous perspectives be treated as integral to policy development, planning, and execution.

CONCLUSION

The insights generated through the Iqaluit Workshop will directly inform planning for the 2025 event, as NAADSN, Nasiffik, and the Ted Stevens Center work to ensure that future dialogues remain relevant to evolving defense priorities. Continued consultation with Indigenous partners will be central to this process—not only to broaden participation, but to ensure that regional expertise and lived experience help shape strategic outcomes. As the Arctic grows in geopolitical significance, the credibility of North American deterrence will increasingly depend on defense strategies that are responsive to local realities, informed by diverse perspectives, and grounded in trusted relationships. Ensuring that workshop outputs translate into actionable steps—relevant to both defense planners and Arctic communities—will be critical to advancing a secure and resilient North American Arctic.





Thank you to all participants of the 2024 North American Arctic Security Workshop—your insights and collaboration continue to shape a stronger, more resilient Arctic security community. On behalf of (left) P. Whitney Lackenbauer for NAADSN, (middle) Randy “Church” Kee for TSC, and (right) Rasmus Nielsen for the University of Greenland. Photo reprinted with permission from R.A. Kee.

