

Reassessing Arctic Security: Canada's Policy Response to Geopolitical Shifts and Emerging Threats

Karen Everett and Katharina Koch

Before February 2022, there was a healthy academic debate about Arctic exceptionalism - whether the region was insulated from geopolitical tension, vulnerable to spillover effects, or situated somewhere in between. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, demonstrated that political spillover is not only possible but also has tangible regional and global consequences. This was evident in the temporary suspension of Arctic Council activities and its working groups, as well as Finland's and Sweden's historic decision to join NATO. Moreover, security concerns are further confounded with the consequences of climate change, thus increasing the strategic relevance of the Arctic. National Arctic strategies and policies provide insights into how states perceive and position themselves in the region. Similarly, military strategies shape and reflect a country's broader security priorities. In Canada's case, key policy documents such as the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019) (ANPF) and Strong, Secure, and Engaged (2017) (SSE) were formulated before the invasion of Ukraine, while the Arctic Foreign Policy (2024) and Our North, Strong and Free (2024) were developed and published afterwards. This temporal distinction raises important questions about how security discourses have evolved in response to the shifting geopolitical dynamics affecting relations within the Arctic and with near-Arctic states (e.g., China). To explore these changes, we examine the four policy documents through six key themes: 1) shifting perceptions of adversaries; 2) emerging new threats to the Arctic region; 3) the role of climate change; 4) energy security considerations; 5) investments in procurement and infrastructure; and 6) evolving relationships between Canada and its allies. In addition to analyzing the shifts revolving around these key themes, we also acknowledge a broader challenge inherent in policy-making - the above-cited strategic documents are designed to guide decision-making over multiple years. As a result, they do not account for rapidly changing geopolitical realities, thus raising critical questions about adaptability and effectiveness during times of uncertainty.

Introduction

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, scholars agree that the Arctic region has emerged as an arena of geopolitical tension (Bresnahan et al., 2022; Gricius & Fitz, 2022; Koch & Everett, 2024; Koivurova & Shibata, 2023). In addition, evaluations of current threats include

Karen Everett - Senior research associate, Chaire Louis-Edmond-Hamelin de recherche nordique en sciences sociales, Université Laval

Katharina Koch - Research associate, The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary

climate change and associated environmental transformation in the region, and potentially opening up new maritime routes in the Northwest Passage (NWP) due to melting sea ice (Cooley et al., 2020; Greaves, 2021; Guarino et al., 2020; Lackenbauer & Lajeunesse, 2014; Marten, 2023). Together, these factors have revived global interest in the Arctic as a region of strategic relevance. In response, Canada has adapted its security, defence, and foreign policy approaches to reflect shifting security dynamics, climate risks, and emerging economic opportunities in its northern and Arctic regions by investing into, for example, updated defence-related infrastructure.

Given these considerations, the analysis in this chapter addresses the question: How have Canadian federal discourses on Arctic state security changed in its official policy and strategy documents since 2017? To explore this question, we analyze four federal policy and strategy documents that span the period, including those before and after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine: *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE, 2017), the *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* (ANPF, 2019), *Our North, Strong and Free* (ONSF, 2024), and the Canada's *Arctic Foreign Policy* (AFP, 2024). These documents were selected because they outline Canada's evolving defense, security, foreign policy, and northern development priorities, offering insight into how Arctic security has been framed across different geopolitical and environmental contexts. This approach allows for a comparative analysis of Canada's tone, emphasis, and stated objectives and their transformations in response to shifting and emerging threats.

Our analysis highlights several findings: although themes such as northern and Arctic prosperity and environmental stewardship remain consistent across all four documents, there is a noticeable post-2022 shift toward more assertive language on defense, deterrence, and the strategic importance of Canada's northern territories, particularly also in the maritime domain which is increasingly threatened by climate change. This change is the result of both external factors, most notably renewed geopolitical tensions and accelerating climate change, which have prompted a shift in Canada's Arctic security approach. We find that amidst geopolitical shifts and state security threats being more clearly stated, Canada has placed increased emphasis on its Arctic region through increased investments in infrastructure, defense procurement, and surveillance capabilities aimed at asserting and enhancing security in the region.

Conceptual Framework and Methods

Conceptual Framework

Geopolitics can take more traditional forms focusing on the more geographical element of international relations or it can be more critical and focus on a variety of socially constructed issues that align more with governance and cooperation than traditional geopolitics (Bruun & Medby, 2014; Heininen, 2019; Offerdal, 2014; Wegge & Keil, 2018). It can also be a blend of the two. Within this space, there have been debates about whether the Arctic is an exceptional place, meaning that it is insulated from global geopolitical concerns, although possibly susceptible to geopolitical spillover, or if the region is part of the global geopolitical system.

The idea of exceptionalism emerged from cooperation on shared interests amongst regional actors, such as states and Indigenous Peoples, that followed Mikhail Gorbachev's 1987 speech which called for the Arctic to be a 'zone of peace.' Building on this moment, the notion of Arctic exceptionalism suggests that Arctic cooperation has persisted in isolation from political tensions elsewhere, although some argue this has been an active choice by regional actors rather than a

given preset (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017; Heininen, 2018, 2019). Other scholars argue, however, that the Arctic is not fully insulated from global events and that spillover is possible (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2019; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017). Nevertheless, exceptionalism was a popular narrative until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent, but temporary, pause of the Arctic Council. Indeed, various analyses suggested that Arctic exceptionalism was being challenged as spillover took place, for example in ‘soft’ organizations, such as the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and also with the accession of Finland and Sweden to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (for example: Gricius & Fitz, 2022; Koch & Everett, 2024; Koivurova & Shibata, 2023).¹ However, since the onset of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, some scholars have emphasized that Arctic exceptionalism is not solely about geopolitics, but rather how environmental issues are addressed, and how Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge are included in decision-making, particularly in the Arctic Council (see, for example Medby, 2023; Spence et al., 2023).

In contrast to this, other scholars argue that the “Arctic order historically, currently, and in the future reflects the world order” (Bertelsen, 2025, p. 1) or is “a space within it” (Morrison & Bennett, 2024, p. 15). Here, we often see discourses about growing great power dynamics, particularly involving China, Russia, and the United States/West/NATO and the threats this may pose to the Arctic region (Bertelsen, 2020; Huebert, 2019; Østhagen, 2021, 2023). In addition to the strategic competition between these actors, concerns about Russia tend to be military in nature while concerns about China’s engagement in the region tend to be scientific and economic (Klimenko, 2019; Østhagen & Lackenbauer, 2023).

Whether one views the Arctic through the lens of exceptionalism and spillover or as a region fully embedded in global geopolitics, the geopolitical situation in the Arctic has shifted in the past few years. These considerations do not exist in a vacuum and work hand in hand with climate change to shape the security environment in the Arctic.

Despite the profound environmental transformations underway in the Arctic, Canada’s pre-2022 security strategies have largely overlooked integrating climate change as a core strategic security concern (Greaves, 2016, 2021; Purdy & Smythe, 2010; Smith, 2010). This is considered an oversight because climate change and the potential opening up of the Arctic carry significant security implications for Canada, especially in the context of the Northwest Passage (NWP) (Huebert, 2011; Lackenbauer & Lajeunesse, 2014; Lalonde, 2020). Furthermore, environmental degradation, including thawing permafrost, collapsing shorelines, and intensifying wildfires, poses immediate and long-term threats to both infrastructure and community well-being in the North and Arctic (Lede et al., 2021; S. MacDonald & Birchall, 2020) and can negatively affect different aspects of human security (for example: Greaves, 2012; United Nations Development Program, 1994). The compounding effects threaten not only Canada’s Arctic communities but also Canada’s strategic position as an Arctic geopolitical actor.

In response, Canada is advancing national strategies to enhance resilience to climate-related security threats in the Arctic. This includes modernizing both defense and civilian infrastructure, with a focus on northern communities that are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards and supply chain disruptions (Delaunay & Landriault, 2020; Lackenbauer & Koch, 2021; MacDonald & Birchall, 2020). A central aspect of this effort is energy security, referring to the stable access and availability of energy and the reliability of its supply. This is an issue of strategic

and human security dimensions in remote Arctic regions where alternatives are limited, and northern communities particularly face a dependency on often outdated diesel-reliant power plants to generate energy (Pinto & Gates, 2022). Energy security is thus a serious challenge in Canada but also other regions of the circumpolar Arctic, particularly when it comes to “uninterrupted availability of energy, or the security of supply” (DeWitt et al., 2020, p. 91). Nevertheless, a so-called ‘race for resources’ in an effort to access energy and other natural resources is unlikely to happen (Østhagen & Lackenbauer, 2023).

Taken together, these developments challenge assumptions of Arctic exceptionalism. As the following analysis illustrates, Canada’s recent defence and Arctic strategies take a more direct approach to naming adversaries and threats. The documents further reveal a growing awareness that, for example, environmental vulnerabilities and resulting risks to reliable energy infrastructure, have moved beyond local development concerns to become national security and geostrategic issues. Canada’s policy responses in the form of infrastructure modernization, for example, includes energy related infrastructure, while strengthened relations with allies signal a shift from viewing the Arctic primarily as a region of cooperation and human development to one that is increasingly shaped by traditional security logics and international power dynamics.

Methods

To assess how Canadian federal discourses on Arctic state security changed in its official policy and strategy documents since 2017, we look at Canada’s *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* (ANPF) and the *Arctic Foreign Policy* (AFP) as national Arctic strategies and policies that provide insights into how states perceive and position themselves in the region (see: Bailes & Heininen, 2012; Heininen et al., 2020) and *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) and *Our North Strong and Free* (ONSF) as military strategies that similarly reflect the country’s broader security priorities. Together, these documents span a period of seven years, capturing the period before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, offering insight into shifting narratives around security priorities, threat perception, and Canada’s role in the Arctic.

This comparison allows us to trace the discursive and policy-level adjustments Canada has made in articulating Arctic security partnerships in response to emerging geopolitical realities. The Government of Canada is the author for both the ANPF and the AFP (Government of Canada, 2019a, 2024a) while the Department of National Defence is the author of the SSE and ONSF (Department of National Defence, 2017, 2024). We recognize that the ANPF was co-developed with territorial and Indigenous partners and is inclusive of partner chapters representing multiple views and priorities. These chapters, however, are not included for analysis in this study because they are not integrated into the ANPF itself. Rather, the ANPF as presented in a PDF explains the importance of the strategies, yet the ANPF website explains that these chapters “do not necessarily reflect the views of either the federal government, or of the other partners” (Government of Canada, 2019b), which has been a critique of this document (Kikkert & Lackenbauer, 2019).

We also recognize that regional, foreign and defence policies may have different purposes and goals. However, the AFP states that “Canada’s foreign and defence policies are closely intertwined and complimentary” (AFP, 2024, p. 17), while the AFP and ONSF refer to the ANPF, and the ANPF refers to the SSE. Thus, the documents are analyzed together as they provide a broader understanding of Canada’s security and defence priorities in the Arctic. For ease of referencing,

we use abbreviations for the in-text citations (Table 1) while the full citation is found in the reference list.

Table 1: Document name abbreviations

Year	Full title	Abbreviation
2017	Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy	SSE
2019	Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework	ANPF
2024	Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence	ONSF
2024	Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy	AFP

We used a modified abductive method (Bingham, 2023) and began with a skimming review of each policy document to get a sense of what the documents discuss, and combined with the literature reviewed above, we identified the following concepts as important to understanding if and how shifts in security discourses have taken place and how emerging threats are identified and discussed:

- 1) shifting perceptions of adversaries
- 2) emerging new threats to the Arctic region
- 3) the role of climate change
- 4) energy security considerations
- 5) investments in procurement and infrastructure
- 6) evolving relationships between Canada and its allies

Next, we did a more thorough reading, and we each independently coded the documents and identified quotes from each document that aligned with the different concepts for analysis. Given that the defence strategies address more than just the Arctic, we primarily focused on quotes that were Arctic-specific or quotes that indirectly related to the Arctic and our research topic. This was followed by a joint review of all coding, during which overlapping quotes were consolidated into the final data set. Remaining quotes were assessed for relevance, and detailed discussions were held to reach consensus on their inclusion. Select quotes are presented in the analysis to illustrate how the documents frame and communicate key themes.

We recognize that Arctic security and state sovereignty are often discussed together in the Canadian context, however, we chose not to discuss state sovereignty in our analysis even though it is a pervasive theme in the documents. In particular, we agree with Huebert and Lagassé's (2025) position that these two concepts are not the same, are not interchangeable, and that state sovereignty is "an international law problem, and it deals with the determination and protection of the boundaries defining the Canadian Arctic" (Huebert & Lagassé, 2025, p. 14). Similarly, the political position on state sovereignty is "defending and demonstrating Canada's claims to full ownership over the Northwest Passage and the waters of the Arctic Archipelago" (Lajeunesse, 2020, p. 53), a stance that Canada has long argued and speaks directly to long-standing legal

disputes over Arctic maritime jurisdiction. Given these distinctions, we focus on security and its implications in the Arctic, rather than the legal aspects of Canada's Arctic jurisdiction.

Findings

Our findings are presented according to the six concepts. We have summarized the main themes, and quotes are used within each concept, where useful, to support the findings.

Shifting perceptions of adversaries

The ANPF does not address dealing with adversaries, thus we focus on the other documents. In terms of understanding who Canada's adversaries are, the SSE explains more generally that adversaries may emerge as a result of "major power competition" (SSE, 2017, p. 50). While not explicitly naming any adversaries, the document states that Russia and China are putting stress on the international order through their actions in Crimea and the South China Sea, respectively (SSE, 2017, p. 50). The discussion around adversaries was, however, not linked to the Arctic.

The AFP brings this discussion to the Arctic and indicates that adversaries may want to have more of a role in the region (AFP, 2024, pp. 4, 5). Like the SSE, the AFP comes shy of explicitly naming adversaries, but it does, however, seem to suggest Russia and China may be adversarial. In particular, after identifying some concerning activities of both states, the document then explains some tactics employed by "adversaries and competitors" (AFP, 2024, p. 8), possibly making an implicit link to Russia and China. Moreover, the document indicates that adversaries may come from the North Pacific region, although no state or organization was named in this regard (AFP, 2024, p. 33). The ONSF, on the other hand, is explicit that Russia is an adversary (p. vii), although this was not mentioned in an Arctic context.

Adversaries can also pose a range of threats. The SSE explains that adversaries can operate "in all domains" (SSE, 2017, p. 50), posing military and non-military threats. Similarly, the AFP recognizes the breadth of tactics used, including "economic coercion" (AFP, 2024, p. 5) and that "Adversaries and competitors also employ disinformation and influence campaigns, malicious cyber operations and espionage and foreign interference activities to target Canadians, including northerners" (AFP, 2024, p. 8). Both the SSE and ONSF recognize that diplomacy and military action are necessary when dealing with adversaries (SSE, 2017, p. 50; ONSF, 2024, p. vii), and the AFP and the ONSF are jointly addressing these matters (AFP, 2024, p. 47). Deterrence also contributes to these efforts. For example, the SSE explains that being a member of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and NATO helps with deterrence, seemingly in a defensive manner. The ONSF also stresses the importance of deterrence, and that "greater striking power" is needed (OSNF, 2024, p. 11), although it was not clear if this statement was about defensive or offensive action. These, however, are not the only threats identified in the documents.

Emerging new threats to the Arctic region

In this section, we focus on threats to the international order and threats that arise from growing interest in the Arctic. Climate change is identified but will be addressed as a distinct threat in the following subsection.

All four documents emphasize the importance of the 'international, rules-based order'² for security and stability. The ANPF recognizes that this order, including in the Arctic, is "not static" (ANPF,

2019, p. 49, 60), although it falls short of naming any direct or immediate threats. By contrast, the SSE, which was released two years prior, identifies Russia and China as possible threats. For example, it explains that the annexation of Crimea by Russia has challenged the existing global order (SSE, 2017, p. 50). While not in the context of this rules-based order, the SSE also expresses that “Russia’s ability to project force from its Arctic territory into the North Atlantic, and its potential to challenge NATO’s collective defence posture” (SSE, 2017, p. 79) is also a concern. As for China, the SSE suggests that China has increased its “influence globally” due to its “economic power” (SSE, 2017, p. 50). The SSE also expresses concerns about “Activities in the South China Sea” (SSE, 2017, p. 50) without explicitly naming China in this case.

The message from the Minister of National Defence in the ONSF further states that Russia’s continued aggression against Ukraine and China’s actions in the Indo-Pacific region are actions that affect international order (ONSF, 2024, p. x). In the context of the Canadian North, the Minister continues to explain that “We are seeing greater Russian activity in our air approaches, and a growing number of Chinese vessels and surveillance platforms are mapping and collecting data about the region” (ONSF, 2024, p. iv). This is significant and signals a shift from the ANPF. The ANPF, for instance, mentions that Arctic research could have security implications (ANPF, 2019, p. 19, 50) without naming a cause for concern. Similar to the ONSF, the AFP states that “China is also active in Arctic research, much of which can be considered dual use” (AFP, 2024, p. 14). Thus, the concern about China is not only related to its economic interests and activities in the Arctic, which have emerged since the release of China’s Arctic Belt and Road Strategy in 2018.

The AFP further explains that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has affected circumpolar cooperation (AFP, 2024, pp. 5, 7) and as a result, Russia is increasing its cooperation with China. To this end, the AFP explains that “Russia and China are aligned in their desire to undermine the liberal-rules-based international system, but the power asymmetry between them often highlights the divergence in their interests. Russia is increasingly dependent on China and is reversing its historic posture by opening its Arctic to China” (AFP, 2024, p. 7). While Canada expresses concern about China’s actions and interest in the Arctic, it also states that “Canada will cooperate with China to address pressing global issues—such as climate change—that have impacts on the Arctic” (AFP, 2024, p. 15), indicating that political relations, including in the Arctic, are not black and white.

Another security consideration for Canada is the growing interest in the Arctic by non-Arctic states and actors. The SSE identifies both, increased economic activities (including tourism) and scientific research, as potential security concerns (SSE, 2017, p. 51). This sentiment is echoed in the ANPF, including concerns about “irregular movements of people and goods” (ANPF, 2019, p. 19) along with cross-border movements of drugs, crime, and human smuggling (ANPF, 2019, pp. 41, 84). Thus, situational awareness, accomplished through strategic investments in regional surveillance capabilities, is an important mechanism for addressing these concerns.

By contrast, the ONSF and the AFP shift away from cross-border crimes and focus on geopolitics. For instance, the ONSF explains that Canada is no longer isolated from competitors attempting to assert their presence in the Arctic. To be sure, the ONSF states that “our competitors adopt an increasingly assertive role on the world stage, including through increased investments in their militaries and in new military technologies” (ONSF, 2024, p. vi). Similarly, the AFP expresses concern that “As in other regions, strategic competition in the Arctic is growing, with non-Arctic

states and actors increasingly expressing foreign policy or security aspirations, thereby pushing for greater roles in Arctic affairs” (AFP, 2024, p. 14), alluding to China’s role in the Arctic in particular.

The role of climate change

All four documents identify climate change as a major issue for the Arctic. The ANPF explains that “the Canadian North is warming at about three times the global average rate” (ANPF, 2024, p. 4) and by the time the ONSF and AFP are released, this number has increased to four times the rate (AFP, 2024, p. 4; ONSF, 2024, p. iv). While the documents recognize that there can be some economic benefits to a warming region, like access to natural resources (ANPF, 2019, p. 4; SSE, 2017, p. 79) and potential new shipping opportunities (SSE, 2017, p. 70; AFP, 2024, p. 7, 13; ONSF, 2024, p. iv), there are also many security threats and other risks.

The documents link climate change and security issues. For example, both the SSE and ANPF link increasing accessibility with the intersection of climate change and technology (ANPF, 2024, p. 4; SSE, 2017, p. 51), and particularly technologies that operate in cold weather (ANPF, 2024, p. 50). The AFP continues along these lines and explains that “With retreating sea ice and new technologies improving navigation and accessibility, foreign activity in the Arctic will continue to increase, bringing with it related safety, security and environmental challenges” (AFP, 2024, p. 13). However, the ONSF also explains that “A rapidly changing climate, new challenges to global stability, and accelerating advances in technology are affecting the foundations of Canadian security and prosperity” (ONSF, 2024, p.1). This connection to global stability introduces an element of geopolitics to climate change which is distinct from the other documents that focus solely on security and safety.

The SSE also links climate change to military security by stating that environmental changes can result in “increased international attention and military activity” in the region (SSE, 2017, p. 52). There is also a military connection in the AFP, albeit from a different perspective, as Canada will:

encourage all allies to join NATO’s Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence, which is based in Montréal. Working with the Department of National Defence, we will also leverage the centre’s expertise to promote research and knowledge sharing on climate security threats in the Arctic and elsewhere (AFP, 2024, p. 37).

Indeed, climate change is both a security and defence concern. Climate change has implications for safety, both on the sea and on the land. For example, the ANPF, AFP, and the ONSF recognize that climate change is linked to wildfires (ANPF, 2024, p. 18; AFP, 2024, p. 13; ONSF, 2024, p. 24), something that has been a growing concern across the entire country, including in the North. The ANPF, SSE, ONSF make the connection between climate change-related and non-environmental disasters as well as the need for bolstering search and rescue capabilities (ANPF, 2019, p. 4, 45; SSE, 2017, p. 51, 52; ONSF, 2024, p. 3, 12, 24).

Finally, the ANPF and the AFP also make a link between climate change and different aspects of human security. Both documents express that climate change is negatively affecting food security for many Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous communities (ANPF, 2019, p. 18, 42; AFP, 2024, p. 13). Climate change also has consequences for the built environment; the ANPF states that infrastructure and housing are being affected (ANPF, 2019, p. 32), while the AFP states that there is “the destabilization of critical and civilian infrastructure” (AFP, 2024, p. 13). All documents

indicate that climate change in the Canadian North and Arctic has wide-ranging implications beyond traditional and geopolitical threats.

Energy security considerations

Energy security is a recurring theme across the ANPF and the AFP, although not directly emphasized in either the SEE or ONSF. The ONSF only mentions energy in the context of natural resource development, referring to the competition in the Arctic over Canada's "natural resources" (ONSF, 2024, p. 4). However, within the ANPF, energy infrastructure is mentioned in the context of "longstanding inequalities" related to infrastructure that continue to disadvantage northern Indigenous communities which lack access to clean and reliable energy, alongside other infrastructure gaps related to transportation, communications, and health services (ANPF, 2019, p. 16).

Particularly in the ANPF, a pressing issue for northern Indigenous communities was identified as the continuous reliance on diesel; with "nearly two-thirds of Arctic and northern communities" (ANPF, 2019, p. 44) depending exclusively on diesel fuel, which is costly to transport, and a significant source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges by threatening the resilience of infrastructure and increasing the complexity of "constructing new infrastructure" in the North (ANPF, 2019, p. 44).

To address these issues, the federal government has begun supporting the development of cleaner, more resilient energy infrastructure. For instance, funding was granted for the planning of the Taltson hydroelectricity expansion project³ in the Northwest Territories, which was identified as a "priority infrastructure project" (ANPF, 2019, p. 6). This expansion project represents a concrete step toward reducing diesel dependence and increasing access to clean energy in the region.

Additionally, energy security is framed in the AFP within the context of international cooperation, particularly with the United States. "Energy security" is listed as a key area for bilateral cooperation alongside climate change, supply chains, critical minerals and sustainable development (AFP, 2024, p. 26). Finally, a focus on critical minerals in the AFP intersects with energy security indirectly by pointing to the Arctic's role as a potential source of critical minerals needed for the global low-carbon transition. While not directly focused on energy infrastructure, the AFP's focus on "critical minerals", such as lithium and nickel, reinforces the idea that the region's resource development must be pursued in partnership with territorial and provincial governments and aligned with broader goals of sustainability and diversification (AFP, 2024, p. 13).

Investments in procurement and infrastructure

All four documents recognize the strategic importance of Arctic infrastructure development for Canada's national security, but especially the AFP and ONSF emphasize the vulnerability of Canadian critical infrastructure to the effects of climate change, including wildfires, flooding and permafrost degradation. Each document stresses the need for robust infrastructure to support security operations, economic activities, and environmental resilience in the North and Arctic. However, there are some important differences.

The ANPF emphasizes that during the public consultation phase, participants "noted that partnering with communities and investing in regional infrastructure will solidify Canada's regional presence while exercising its sovereignty" (ANPF, 2019, p. 34). While referring in this case to

civilian infrastructure, such as the “Hudson Bay Railway Line” (ANPF, 2019, p. 27) to improve community accessibility, the ANPF’s Safety, Security and Defense chapter focuses more on defence related infrastructure. In this chapter, the ANPF links directly to SSE, emphasizing the need for defense infrastructure in the North and Arctic, again to “enforce Canada’s sovereignty” (ANPF, 2019, p. 82).⁴ Both the ANPF and the SSE focus in this case on strengthening military presence and strategic defense installations in the North and Arctic⁵.

The installation of modern and technology-driven surveillance systems are a common focus across all four policy documents, likely reflecting the remoteness of the Canadian North and Arctic. The ANPF draws on the SSE by reinforcing the need for investments in satellite-based surveillance and radar systems, aiming to improve Canada’s ability to track activity in the region from a distance (ANPF, 2019, p. 79). Similarly, the SSE proposes the adoption of advanced technologies like drones and satellites for more agile and responsive monitoring, including “space-based surveillance assets” (SSE, 2017, p. 15), ensuring rapid intervention if necessary.

In addition, the AFP advocates for enhanced cooperation with NATO and other allies to share surveillance responsibilities and bolster security through multilateral efforts, particularly through the procurement of new Arctic-capable infrastructure such as ice breakers through the “ICE Pact”⁶ (AFP, 2024, p. 18) between Canada, Finland and the United States. Meanwhile, the ONSF highlights the importance of “Over-the-Horizon-Radar systems” (ONSF, 2024, pp. 12–13), particularly in the context of NORAD modernization and the evolving geopolitical situation in the Arctic.

The AFP stresses the need for “multi-use infrastructure that also meets the needs of the territories, Indigenous Peoples and northern communities” (AFP, 2024, p. 18). Similarly, the ONSF references “multi-purpose infrastructure that serve the Canadian Armed Forces, other federal partners, territorial governments, Indigenous partners, and northern communities, wherever possible” (ONSF, 2024, pp. 25–26). The ONSF also cites the ANPF by stating that throughout the design and implementation process for such multi-purpose infrastructure, “we will engage Indigenous Peoples and northern communities, in line with the principle of “nothing about us, without us”” (ONSF, 2024, pp. 25–26). Furthermore, the ONSF also aims to align northern and Arctic security needs with new defense capabilities, especially in the context of emerging threats such as those posed by Russia and China, discussed earlier, as well as climate change which increases the vulnerability of existing infrastructure to environmental disasters, such as wildfires and permafrost degradation (ONSF, 2024, p. 24).

Evolving relationships between Canada and its allies

Canada’s approach to alliances and partnerships has evolved across the four documents. While all four frameworks highlight the value of international cooperation, their emphasis and framing of allied relationships have grown more security-focused over time.

The ANPF reflects a predominantly diplomatic and cooperative orientation. It promotes constructive engagement with the other Arctic states, including Russia, a commitment to a rules-based international order, and the importance of multilateral governance through the Arctic Council. The ANPF furthermore highlights the importance of working with “Territorial and provincial governments and Indigenous partners” to ensure the North and Arctic remains peaceful and collaborative (ANPF, 2019, p. 20). It also states that Canada seeks “appropriate opportunities

to resolve, peacefully and in accordance with international law, Canada's three outstanding boundary disputes, one with the United States in the Beaufort Sea and two with the Kingdom of Denmark regarding the Lincoln Sea and Hans Island, as well as any continental shelf overlaps" (ANPF, 2019, p. 64). This was resolved in 2022 (Global Affairs Canada, 2022) with the implementation to be finalized (AFP, 2024, p. 5)

In terms of cooperation between allies in the Arctic, the SSE recognizes the eight Arctic states as the primary actors but also "recognizes the increasing interest of non-Arctic states and organizations and will work cooperatively with all willing partners to advance shared interests on safety and security" (SSE, 2017, p. 90). The SSE thus situates allied relationships at the centre of Canada's defence strategy. It prioritizes Canada's contributions to NATO and NORAD, emphasizing in this context particularly the close cooperation with the United States as Canada's "most important ally" which serves as the foundation for the continental defence of the North American continent (SSE, 2017, p. 60). SSE essentially frames peaceful alliances as cornerstones that enhance Canada's ability to respond to global crises and conduct peace operations in other countries (SSE, 2017, p. 14).

The shift towards a security-centric interpretation of alliances in the Arctic becomes more explicit in the AFP which integrates Arctic security deliberately into Canada's foreign and defence policy. Similarly to the SSE, the AFP frames Arctic defence as an integral part of safeguarding NATO's "Northern and Western flanks" (AFP, 2024, p. 4). It also emphasizes Canada's shared responsibility with the United States and other Arctic allies, specifically the Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Indeed, the AFP frequently refers to NATO's strategic position in the "European High North" (AFP, 2024, p. 8) and emphasizes Canada's connection with the European Nordic countries in the context of Russia's actions in Ukraine (AFP, 2024, p. 26). In this sense, cooperation is no longer a possibility which differs from the framing in the ANPF prior to 2022 where Canada was starting to re-engage with Russia in areas of shared interest. The AFP also singles out investments in Arctic capability to Canada's overall contributions to NATO and NORAD, especially in the context of deterrence (AFP, 2024, p. 4).

The ONSF reinforces the pivot towards the strategic positioning of Canada's allies by describing them as central to Canadian deterrence and "prosperity at home" (ONSF, 2024, p. 13). The ONSF repeatedly affirms Canada's commitment to NATO and NORAD, highlighting the importance of allied interoperability, joint exercises and defence modernization, particularly in the Arctic, together with the United States. Indeed, the United States is named as Canada's "closest ally" (ONSF, p. 12). The ONSF positions Canada as a strategic partner and ally whose Arctic security-related investments bolster the broader security of the North American continent and the global rules-based order. It also links Arctic security to the Indo-Pacific region, reflecting a widened strategic lens that integrates the Arctic directly into Canada's global defence strategy (ONSF, 2024, p. 5), which differs quite significantly from the SSE.

Discussion

The language in the documents around the role and potential threats faced in the Canadian North and Arctic tends to align with the literature reviewed earlier. Our six themes are also interconnected, showing that geopolitics, security, and environmental considerations do not occur in isolation from one another.

From a geopolitical perspective, the focus is on Russia and China's role globally and in the Arctic, reflecting what we see in the literature. For example, the SSE mentions China's economic power and Russia's military capabilities, particularly in the Arctic (SSE, 2017, pp. 50, 79-80) which are geopolitical considerations that may have implications for the Arctic affairs (Klimenko, 2019), seemingly indicating a risk of spillover.

With the ONSF and the AFP, however, the Arctic and global geopolitics takes a central role. For instance, the ONSF is concerned about competitors accessing the region (ONSF, 2024, p. vi) and the AFP identifies the growing cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic (AFP, 2024, p. 7) following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This challenges the 'rules-based international order' that is likely predicated on the global system based on American unipolarity. Concerns about this have been identified by Huebert (2019), although Bertelsen (2025) cautions that the world order is becoming bipolar with NATO+ and BRICS++⁷ as powerful coalitions, with the United States and China as the main actors, respectively, in the Arctic via "Sino-American bipolarity" (p. 569). China, however, recently indicated it will scale back some of its regional activities amid changing relations between the United States and Russia (Sarkisian, 2025). How this global situation will thus develop in the Arctic remains to be seen.

The often-quoted potential "opening" up of the Arctic due to melting sea ice in the public discourse is recognized by Canada in the documents as both a threat and an opportunity (see for example ONSF, 2024, p. v). On the one hand, Canada assumes it enables expanded economic activity, such as through the NWP, which is emphasized across the documents (SSE, 2017, p. 79; ANPF, 2019, pp. 4, 60, 74; ONSF, 2024, p. 4). On the other hand, increased accessibility raises strategic concerns about Canada's ability to monitor, control, and protect its Arctic territory. This has reignited debates over Arctic defence capabilities (Huebert, 2011; Lackenbauer & Lajeunesse, 2014; Lajeunesse, 2020), with researchers arguing that climate change intersects directly with national and international security concerns (Dean, 2022; Dean & Lackenbauer, 2019; Greaves, 2016, 2021; Lackenbauer & Koch, 2021; Lajeunesse & Lackenbauer, 2020). Huebert's (2019) concept of the "New Arctic Security Triangle Environment" (NASTE) captures these dynamics by identifying the United States, Russia, and China as key actors shaping the region's geopolitical future. This forces Canada to reconsider its strategic priorities in light of both environmental vulnerability and global power competition.

Given that geopolitical discussions in the Arctic revolve around relations between Russia, China, and the United States, where does that leave Canada? The four documents indicate that a combination of military deterrence and diplomacy are the best way to deal with adversaries and threats from other states seeking an Arctic presence, and possibly asserting their strategic position in the region. As previously shown, Canada recognizes emerging new actors in the SSE, ONSF, and AFP and situates itself as an ally among its Arctic partners. All documents reiterate the importance of Canada's relationship with the United States and the post-2022 documents indicate the importance of Canada's relationship with the Nordic countries. Certainly, this is the deterrence aspect of Canada's Arctic security through membership and participation in NORAD and NATO. While the Canadian government has tended not to favour NATO activities in the Canadian Arctic, Charron (2017) notes that the SSE "opens the possibility for a NATO exercise in the future" (p. 1). Charon and Fergusson (2023), however, explain that NORAD should be the preferred

deterrence mechanism in the Canadian Arctic as NATO's interest "remains primarily limited to the approaches to the North Atlantic, especially the GIUK gap" (p. 21).

To this end, the ONSF emphasizes NORAD's contribution to North American security, including in the Arctic (for example: ONSF, 2024, pp. 12-13). As for NATO, the ONSF reiterates NATO's importance and indicates that Canada shares responsibility in contributing to security at "NATO's northern and western flanks" (ONSF, 2024, p. 4) while the AFP states that "Canada will continue to be an active participant in NATO exercises and operations, including in the European High North" (AFP, 2024, p. 22). The AFP is thus "reinforcing that Canada accepts the relevance and importance of the Alliance in the region" (Lackenbauer, 2024, p. 11). The AFP and ONSF, however, fall short of directly stating that these operations and exercises will take place in the Canadian Arctic.

While there is consistency across the documents in identifying the United States as Canada's main ally and security partner, there are differences in how other international Arctic countries are represented since the SSE was released. In particular, the ONSF and the AFP place greater emphasis on collaboration with the Nordic countries reflecting a post-2022 shift toward closer alignment with the other Arctic NATO partners. These countries are portrayed not only as "like-minded" states (for example: AFP, 2024, p. 48) but also as critical partners contributing to defence and security in the Arctic. This is evidenced in the sections AFP dedicated to Canada-Nordic cooperation (AFP, 2024, p. 27) and subsequently reinforced through Anita Anand's (Canada MFA) visit to Helsinki in summer 2025 to further discuss Arctic and security issues (Global Affairs Canada, 2025). In addition, Canada has strengthened its security partnerships with the Nordic countries, pledging to collaborate more closely on Arctic surveillance, maritime security, and broader regional stability, which was also emphasized in the AFP.

As for the diplomatic aspect of Arctic security, international cooperation can play an important role for Canada in mitigating some of these threats. Indeed, Young et al (2021) note that the Arctic of the 2020s is now a "zone of peaceful competition" and is a "critical arena in the global climate emergency and as an area of increasing sensitivity in terms of great-power politics" (p. 20). Thus, Arctic states can continue to cooperate in a number of areas linked to the environment, shipping, and research (Young et al., 2021). Along similar lines, Bennett (2021) notes that the Arctic Council's exclusion of traditional security has "arguably contributed to Arctic security and stability" (p. 45) even if there is disagreement amongst members. For example, Russia has never been framed as a close partner in Canada's Arctic and defence frameworks. However, the ANPF adopted a more optimistic tone, suggesting the potential for functional cooperation with Russia in specific areas related to scientific research and environmental monitoring (ANPF, 2019, p. 63). This conveyed a vision of the Arctic as a zone of peaceful engagement and multilateral collaboration, even amidst broader geopolitical tensions that erupted since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

However, this does not mean that Arctic cooperation is insulated from geopolitics and that "the Arctic's "tripolarization" between the United States, Russia, and China is taking place atop deeply institutionalized cooperation" (Bennett, 2021, p. 49). To this end, the Arctic Council is mentioned in all documents, except for ONSF. There is consistency in the language used to describe the Arctic Council's critical role in circumpolar cooperation.⁸ However, the AFP notes that due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "there will be no business as usual with Russia" (AFP, 2024, p. 7),

thus demonstrating that environmental security and geopolitical tensions are interconnected.⁹ Moreover, any remaining space for bilateral Arctic cooperation appears to have diminished, with the ONSF in particular highlighting Russia as a growing “adversary” (ONSF, 2024, p. viii) whose activities pose direct risks to Canada’s northern security environment. This reflects the idea of spillover (for example: Kämpylä & Mikkola, 2019) or that ‘global geopolitics exists in the Arctic’ perspective (for example: Bertelsen, 2025) discussed earlier and reinforces the need for diplomatic solutions to challenges in the Arctic.

At the same time, Canadian defence and Arctic strategies have expanded their understanding of security beyond traditional military threats. Especially the AFP and the ONSF emphasize the role of environmental security, even if not naming it as such, by highlighting the security implications of climate change. While climate change is an area for international cooperation, it is increasingly central to both Canada’s domestic and international security considerations, particularly in the Arctic, where its effects are most pronounced. Although climate change is the underlying driver of increased access and shifting power dynamics, Canadian security documents have been slow to fully incorporate climate as a structuring factor in threat assessments and capability planning. As Greaves (2021) argues, SSE acknowledges the security implications of climate change only superficially and “fails to incorporate climate into its analysis” (p. 185). This might be changing.

Canada’s commitment to establishing the NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE) in Montreal in 2024 exemplifies the Alliance’s newfound focus on the climate change-security nexus. The founding members claim that the centre will contribute to research and expertise in managing climate-linked security risks, particularly in the Arctic (Government of Canada, 2024c). Climate change is referenced in both the ONSF and AFP, and the AFP especially moves beyond earlier strategies such as the SSE by explicitly acknowledging the impacts of climate change “as threat multipliers” (AFP, 2024, p. 13). This language marks a departure from SSE and ANPF earlier approaches that have either downplayed or compartmentalized climate risks in defence planning (Greaves, 2021). From melting sea ice and thawing permafrost to more frequent wildfires and mudslides that threaten critical infrastructure, the consequences of a warming climate increasingly pose direct challenges to human security in Canada’s North and Arctic by threatening, for example, energy security (DeWitt et al., 2020; Lede et al., 2021; MacDonald & Birchall, 2020).

These disruptions not only endanger the livelihoods of northern inhabitants, but also have broader implications for Canada’s national defense and security in the Arctic. As climate change accelerates the loss of Arctic (summer) sea ice, the ONSF and AFP anticipate growing accessibility in the region, not only for northern communities but also for foreign states and commercial actors with strategic or economic interests in the Arctic. Indeed, the document explains that “... we will continue to support municipalities and economic development organizations in seeking and retaining FDI in the North while ensuring that Canada’s environmental and national security interests are protected” (AFP, 2024, p. 46). Moreover, in 2018, China declared itself a “near-Arctic state” and has increasingly sought to engage in Arctic resource development through acquisitions by state-owned enterprises (Barnes et al., 2021). A notable example was the proposed purchase of the Doris North gold mine near Hope Bay, Nunavut, by Shandong Gold, which is a Chinese state-owned company. However, this acquisition was blocked in 2020 by the federal government on national security grounds, illustrating the way in which foreign investment in critical northern

infrastructure is increasingly viewed through a security lens, a perspective reflected in the AFP (Lackenbauer & Koch, 2021).

In response to these intersecting environmental and geopolitical developments, Canada's defence strategy has prioritized security-related infrastructure development and procurement as core security measures. The ONSF outlines plans for enhanced "northern operational support hubs" (ONSF, 2024, p. 25), including new airstrips, logistics facilities, satellite ground stations, modernized piers and runways, and carbon-neutral military bases. It also highlights procurement of Arctic-adapted all-terrain vehicles, strengthened submarine fleets, and expanded surveillance capabilities using specialized sensors and maritime patrol vessels (ONSF, 2024, pp. 25-26). Scholars such as Huebert (2016, 2022) argue that such investments are not merely logistical necessities but are vital to deterring foreign encroachment in the Arctic. Indeed, the ONSF emphasizes Canada's need to respond to growing military competition in the region, noting the deployment of foreign "submarines, long-range aircraft and hypersonic missiles" (ONSF, 2024, p. iv). This evolving security landscape requires not only robust military assets, but also resilient infrastructure capable of withstanding both environmental change and geopolitical pressure.

The ANPF also highlights the need for improved data to support climate-related and environmental decision-making. For example, it notes that "the current lack of baseline data poses major challenges to evidence-based decision-making" (ANPF, 2019, p. 19). Given the need for circumpolar data, this is undercut by the absence of any clear strategy for engaging with Russia, which comprises nearly half of the Arctic, in the AFP. Instead, "Russia is committed to further developing its scientific cooperation with non-Western countries, especially Asian countries such as China and India" (Vidal & Saas, 2025, p. 2). As previously mentioned, Canada has some skepticism about China's actions in the Arctic, but the AFP also notes that addressing climate change is a possible point for cooperation between Canada and China (AFP, 2024, p. 15), perhaps offsetting this geopolitical development and working towards more comprehensive data collection. In the post-2022 geopolitical environment, where relations with Russia have further deteriorated due to its invasion of Ukraine, the prospects for meaningful scientific collaboration on Arctic climate data remain limited.

Conclusion

This analysis has shown that there has been a shift in the Canadian federal language used to describe the state's security-related global strategic environment as expressed in the SSE, ANPF, ONSF, and AFP. The SSE and ANPF, published in 2017 and 2019, respectively, reflect a period characterized by an emphasis on cooperation and stability in the Arctic. In contrast, the AFP and ONSF, both released in 2024, can provide insights into whether Canada is adapting its language and priorities in response to a deteriorating global security environment, increased great-power competition, and the resurgence of military threat perceptions linked to Russia.

First, regardless of whether one subscribes to the exceptionalism/spillover or the 'global geopolitics is in the Arctic' stance, the post-2022 documents position the broader geopolitical and security landscape in an Arctic context, particularly in the AFP which states that spillover has taken place (AFP, 2024, p. 7). That said, while some of the academic literature is suggesting that unipolarity is transitioning to multipolarity (for example: Bertelsen, 2025; Vidal & Saas, 2025), this is not specifically reflected in the language used in the documents. For example, the language used

in the documents tends to focus on specific countries rather than naming BRICS+ or Sino-American bipolarity when talking about a global or rules-based order.

Second, and connected to the first point, the documents released post-2022 are more direct in how the actions of Russia and China in the Arctic may pose a security threat to Canada. At the same time, there are differences between the defence strategies (SSE and ONSF) and the foreign policy focused documents (ANPF and AFP). The AFP, for example, is clear that Russia's actions in Ukraine are unacceptable and that cooperation cannot take place at this time, but the AFP also remains somewhat diplomatic as it does not directly state that Russia is an adversary. This is also reflected in the ONSF. Moreover, it is noted in the AFP that China's Arctic intentions should be met with skepticism, but the same element of diplomacy exists stating that cooperation is still possible in areas of shared interest.

Third, Canada's Arctic security and defence strategies rely on stable alliances that underpin continental and regional Arctic stability. The effects on the bilateral security relationship between the United States and Canada from recent tariffs on trade of certain goods remain uncertain, as Canada navigates a new and unpredictable economic relationship with the United States. However, at the time of writing, institutional cooperation continues uninterrupted. Notably, NORAD remains a key joint organization responsible for protecting North American (and Arctic) airspace.

Finally, the post-2022 documents reflect a shift in how climate change is framed as a security threat. This is not to suggest that climate change was absent from the SSE and ANPF, which both acknowledged its potentially damaging impacts on northern infrastructure, ecosystems, and community health and well-being. However, in the most recent policy documents, particularly the ONSF, climate change is presented explicitly as a national and international security concern. Language such as 'threat multiplier' signals a discursive shift away from recognizing climate change purely as a human security threat. Instead, the ONSF and AFP position it as a traditional security issue by explaining that resulting environmental changes exacerbate geopolitical instability, complicate military readiness, and create vulnerabilities that require defense-sector responses, including a renewed policy focus on infrastructure and enhanced situational awareness.

This discursive shift is significant because it links environmental issues with national defense planning instead of treating it as a soft security concern contained within domestic borders. Climate change, as presented particularly in the ONSF, is a risk that can undermine Canada's ability to operate in and protect its Arctic region, not only from environmental threats harming northern communities but also from strategic competitors. While our analysis found that Canada acknowledges climate change as a threat for northern and Indigenous communities, it is also being increasingly integrated into Canada's international and traditional security discourse in a changing geopolitical environment. This emphasis is driven by the content and tone of the ONSF and AFP, which link environmental threats with foreign interference and rising military competition. In this sense, climate change is not only a humanitarian crisis but also a driver of strategic adaptation that is reshaping Canada's Arctic priorities in an increasingly contested and uncertain geopolitical environment (Welsh, 2024).

However, the challenge with policy and strategic documents, such as these, is that they are meant to guide policy decisions for a period of time (ex. ANPF is applicable until 2030) and cannot account for any sudden changes to the international order, geopolitics shifts, unexpected security threats or even changes in government. To account for this fluidity, new policies can be written as

an addendum to existing policy frameworks, such as the AFP which is meant “to supplement the International chapter of the ANPF” (AFP, 2024, p. 5) in response to the fallout of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the changing security environment resulting from a growing outside interest in the Arctic. This allows the goals of the ANPF, domestically and internationally, to advance while reflecting the current and ongoing situation. Notably, the ONSF announces that Canada will be getting a new National Security Strategy, updated “every four years” and that “Defence will undertake strategic policy reviews in the same four-year cycle” (ONSF, 2024, p. 15), indicating the need for flexible decision making to keep pace with geopolitical and security.

Notes

1. Lackenbauer and Dean ([2020](#)) provide a detailed review of different forms of exceptionalism and their critiques.
2. This phrase or a variation of it is used in the documents. In an Arctic context, the AFP defines it as “the sum of international rules, norms and institutions that govern international affairs there” (AFP, 2024, p. 5, footnote 2). The SSE refers to the “rules-based international order” in a more global sense as the system that underpins Canadian security (SSE, 2017, p. 59) and global stability (SSE, 2017, p. 50) while the ONSF tends to use ‘international order’, although twice noting this system relies on the ‘rule of law’ (ONSF, 2024, pp. 11, 14). The SSE does not use this phrase in relation to the Arctic.
3. The Taltson Hydro Expansion Project expands the “existing Taltson generating station and integrate the Northwest Territories’ hydro capacity into one hydro grid”. The project contributes to a corridor designed to include infrastructure related to “transportation, energy and communications, that would provide clean hydro energy to the mineral-rich Slave Geological Province” ([Government of Northwest Territories, n.d.](#)).
4. This is an example of the conflation between state sovereignty and security as the addition of defence infrastructure actually contributes to Canada’s security, but in and of itself cannot contribute to sovereignty.
5. Investments include replacement or upgrading of Canada’s fighter CF-18 fighter aircraft fleet, establishing new communications technology, upgrading of existing transport vehicles, and investments in remotely-controlled technologies for the purpose of increasing domain awareness and surveillance capabilities in the Arctic (ANPF, 2019).
6. In July 2024, Canada, Finland and the United States formed the Icebreaker Collaboration Effort (ICE Pact) by signing a Memorandum of Understanding to collectively increase the “capacity to design, produce, and maintain arctic and polar icebreakers” by “enhancing information exchange and procompetitive industrial collaboration” ([Government of Canada, 2024b](#)).
7. Bertelsen (2025) notes that NATO+ is the “NATO countries and Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea, under clear US leadership” while BRICS++ is “the BRICS+ grouping and many other countries” (p. 7).

8. For example, the SSE calls it the “premier body for cooperation in the region” (SSE, 2017, p. 50) and the ANPF and AFP both call it the “pre-eminent forum for international Arctic cooperation” (ANPF, 2019, pp. 56, 58; AFP, 2024, p. 11).
9. For a more detailed discussion on this, see: Gricius and Fitz (2022) and Zellen ([2023](#)).

References

- Bailes, A. J., & Heininen, L. (2012). *Strategy Papers on the Arctic or High North: A Comparative Study and Analysis*. Centre for Small State Studies Institute of International Affairs, University of Iceland.
- Barnes, J., Exner-Pirot, H., Heininen, L., & Lackenbauer, P. W. (Eds.). (2021). *China's Arctic Engagement: Following the Polar Silk Road to Greenland and Russia*. North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN).
- Bennett, M. (2021). The future of the Arctic: Tripolar or three-dimensional chess? In J. D. Kim & C. E. Morrison (Eds.), *Science, Technology and the Path Forward for a New Arctic* (pp. 43–53). Korea Institute and East-West Center.
- Bertelsen, R. G. (2020). Arctic security in international security. In G. Hoogensen Gjørsv, M. Lanteigne, & H. Sam-Aggrey (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security* (pp. 57–68). Routledge.
- Bertelsen, R. G. (2025). Divided Arctic in a divided world order. *Strategic Analysis*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2025.2453322>
- Bingham, A. J. (2023). From data management to actionable findings: A five-phase process of qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231183620. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231183620>
- Bresnahan, A., Lackenbauer, P. W., & Larocque, B. (2022). International Arctic responses to the further Russian invasion of Ukraine: Key sources. *NAADSN - Strategic Perspectives*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2022/03/joint-statement-on-arctic-council-cooperation-following-russias-invasion-of-ukraine.html>
- Bruun, J. M., & Medby, I. A. (2014). Theorising the thaw: Geopolitics in a changing Arctic. *Geography Compass*, 8(12), 915–929. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12189>
- Charron, A. (2017). *NATO, Canada and the Arctic* (NATO Series). Canadian Global Affairs Institute. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/cdfai/pages/3636/attachments/original/1524875385/NATO_Canada_and_the_Arctic.pdf?1524875385
- Charron, A., & Fergusson, J. (2023). NATO is not needed in the North American Arctic. In H. Larsen & Z. Paikin (Eds.), *Europe, the Arctic and Asia: Balancing Competing Priorities in Canadian Foreign Policy* (pp. 16–22). The Institute for Peace & Diplomacy. <https://peacediplomacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Balancing-Competing-Priorities-in-Canadian-Foreign-Policy.pdf>

- Cooley, S. W., Ryan, J. C., Smith, L. C., Horvat, C., Pearson, B., Dale, B., & Lynch, A. H. (2020). Coldest Canadian Arctic communities face greatest reductions in shorefast sea ice. *Nature Climate Change*, 10(6), 533–538. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0757-5>
- Dean, R. (2022). Speaking security: Constructing Canada's 2009 northern strategy. *The Polar Journal*, 12(2), 303–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2022.2137090>
- Dean, R., & Lackenbauer, W. (2019). Geostrategy and Canadian defence: From C.P. Stacey to a twenty-first century Arctic threat assessment. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 20(1), Article 1. <https://jmss.org/article/view/69488>
- Delaunay, M., & Landriault, M. (2020). Connectivity and infrastructure—The Arctic digital divide. In J. Weber (Ed.), *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation* (pp. 231–248). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45005-2_14
- Department of National Defence. (2017). *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Department of National Defence. <http://dgaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>
- Department of National Defence. (2024). *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*. Department of National Defence. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/corporate/reports-publications/2024/north-strong-free-2024-v2.pdf>
- DeWitt, M., Stefánsson, H., & Valfells, Á. (2020). Energy security in the Arctic. In G. Hoogensen Gjørvi, M. Lanteigne, & H. Sam-Aggrey (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security* (pp. 91–101). Routledge.
- Exner-Pirot, H., & Murray, R. W. (2017). Regional order in the Arctic: Negotiated exceptionalism. *Politik*, 20(3), 47–64.
- Global Affairs Canada. (2022, June 14). *Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark, Together with Greenland, Reach Historic Agreement on Long-Standing Boundary Disputes* [News Release]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2022/06/canada-and-the-kingdom-of-denmark-together-with-greenland-reach-historic-agreement-on-long-standing-boundary-disputes.html>
- Global Affairs Canada. (2025, August 18). *Minister Anand to Travel to Finland to Advance Nordic Partnerships and Arctic Cooperation*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2025/08/minister-anand-to-travel-to-finland-to-advance-nordic-partnerships-and-arctic-cooperation.html>
- Government of Canada. (2019a). *Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*. Government of Canada. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/ForcePDFDownload?url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca%2fDAM%2fDAM-CIRNAC-RCAANC%2fDAM-NTHAFF%2fSTAGING%2ftexte-text%2fnth-arctic_northern_policy_framework_1662642171557_eng.pdf
- Government of Canada. (2019b, September 22). *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>

- Government of Canada. (2024a). *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy*. Government of Canada.
<https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/assets/pdfs/publications/arctic-arctique/arctic-policy-politique-en.pdf>
- Government of Canada. (2024b). *Memorandum of Understanding Among the Government of Canada, the Government of the Republic of Finland, and the Government of the United States of America Regarding a Trilateral Framework for the Production of Arctic and Polar Icebreakers* [International treaties].
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-services-procurement/services/acquisitions/defence-marine/icebreaker-collaboration-effort-pact/memorandum-understanding.html>
- Government of Canada. (2024c). *NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence*.
https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/nato-otan/centre-excellence.aspx?lang=eng
- Government of Northwest Territories. (n.d.). *Taltson Hydro Expansion* [Information].
 Government of the Northwest Territories. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from
<https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/en/projects/taltson-hydro-expansion>
- Greaves, W. (2012). Insecurities of non-dominance: Re-theorizing human security and environmental change in developed states. In M. A. Schnurr & L. A. Swatuk (Eds.), *Natural Resources and Social Conflict: Towards Critical Environmental Security* (pp. 63–82). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Greaves, W. (2016). Securing sustainability: The case for critical environmental security in the Arctic. *Polar Record*, 52(6), 660–671. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247416000218>
- Greaves, W. (2021). Climate change and security in Canada. *International Journal*, 76(2), 183–203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207020211019325>
- Gricius, G., & Fitz, E. B. (2022). Can exceptionalism withstand crises? An evaluation of the Arctic Council's response to climate change and Russia's war on Ukraine. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(3), ksac042. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksac042>
- Guarino, M.-V., Sime, L. C., Schröder, D., Malmierca-Vallet, I., Rosenblum, E., Ringer, M., Ridley, J., Feltham, D., Bitz, C., Steig, E. J., Wolff, E., Stroeve, J., & Sellar, A. (2020). Sea-ice-free Arctic during the last interglacial supports fast future loss. *Nature Climate Change*, 10(10), 928–932. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0865-2>
- Heininen, L. (2018). Arctic Geopolitics from classical to critical Approach—Importance of immaterial factors. *Geography, Environment, Sustainability*, 11(1), 171–186.
- Heininen, L. (2019). Special features of Arctic geopolitics—A potential asset for world politics. In M. Finger & L. Heininen (Eds.), *The Global Arctic Handbook* (pp. 215–234). Springer.
- Heininen, L., Everett, K., Padrtova, B., & Reissell, A. (2020). *Arctic Policies and Strategies-Analysis, Synthesis, and Trends*. IIASA. DOI:10.22022/AFI/11-2019.16175
- Huebert, R. (2011). Climate change and Canadian sovereignty in the Northwest Passage. *The Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies*, 4, Article 4.
<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cpmss/article/view/36337>

- Huebert, R. (2016). Security challenges in the Arctic. In E. Conde & S. Iglesias Sánchez (Eds.), *Global Challenges in the Arctic Region* (pp. 364–384). Routledge.
- Huebert, R. (2019). The new Arctic strategic triangle environment (NASTE). In P. W. Lackenbauer & S. Lalonde (Eds.), *Breaking the Ice Curtain? Russia, Canada, and Arctic Security in a Changing Circumpolar World* (pp. 75–92). Canadian Global Affairs Institute.
- Huebert, R. (2022). Health security, environmental security, and hard security in the Arctic: A complex relationship. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 5(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v5i1.4267>
- Huebert, R., & Lagassé, P. (2025). *Strategic Outlook: Canada in Dangerous Times*. Conference of Defence Associations Institute. <https://cdainstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Strategic-Outlook-2025.pdf>
- Käpylä, J., & Mikkola, H. (2019). Contemporary Arctic meets world politics: Rethinking Arctic exceptionalism in the age of uncertainty. In M. Finger & L. Heininen (Eds.), *The Global Arctic Handbook* (pp. 153–169). Springer.
- Kikkert, P., & Lackenbauer, P. W. (2019). Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework: A roadmap for the future? In L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Barnes (Eds.), *Redefining Arctic Security—Arctic Yearbook 2019* (pp. 322–331). Arctic Portal.
- Klimenko, E. (2019, December). *The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic*. SIPRI. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/sipribp1912_geopolitics_in_the_arctic.pdf
- Koch, K., & Everett, K. (2024). Arctic border governance in a post- invasion era: How Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 shifts Arctic borders. In G. Rekvig & M. Finger (Eds.), *Global Arctic: The New Dynamics of Arctic Governance* (pp. 61–104). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4868-9_4
- Koivurova, T., & Shibata, A. (2023). After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022: Can we still cooperate with Russia in the Arctic? *Polar Record*, 59(e12), 1–9. Cambridge Core. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247423000049>
- Lackenbauer, P. W. (2024). *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Key Takeaways for Arctic Security Practitioners and Scholars* (Policy Primer). North American and Arctic Defence Security Network. <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/24dec-CAFP-Lackenbauer-NAADSN-Policy-Primer.pdf>
- Lackenbauer, P. W., & Dean, R. (2020). Arctic exceptionalisms. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 327–355). Foreign Policy Institute/Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University SAIS.
- Lackenbauer, P. W., & Koch, K. (2021). Northern and Arctic security and sovereignty: Challenges and opportunities for a northern corridor. *The School of Public Policy Publications*, 14(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.11575/sppp.v14i1.72084>
- Lackenbauer, P. W., & Lajeunesse, A. (2014). *On Uncertain Ice: The Future of Arctic Shipping and the Northwest Passage* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3078889). Social Science Research Network. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3078889>

- Lajeunesse, A. (2020). Arctic geopolitics and security from the Canadian perspective. In J. Weber (Ed.), *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation* (pp. 41–55). Springer.
- Lajeunesse, A., & Lackenbauer, P. W. (2020). Defence policy in the Canadian Arctic: From Jean Chrétien to Justin Trudeau. In T. Juneau, P. Lagassé, & S. Vucetic (Eds.), *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice* (pp. 365–382). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lalonde, S. (2020). The U.S.-Canada Northwest Passage disagreement: Why agreeing to disagree is more important than ever. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order*. Foreign Policy Institute/ Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs.
- Lede, E., Pearce, T., Furgal, C., Wolki, M., Ashford, G., & Ford, J. D. (2021). The role of multiple stressors in adaptation to climate change in the Canadian Arctic. *Regional Environmental Change*, 21(2), 50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-021-01769-z>
- MacDonald, S., & Birchall, S. J. (2020). Climate change resilience in the Canadian Arctic: The need for collaboration in the face of a changing landscape. *Canadian Geographies / Géographies Canadiennes*, 64(3), 530–534. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12591>
- Marten, K. (2023). Geopolitics and security in the changing Arctic. In T. Clack, Z. Meral, & L. Selisny (Eds.), *Climate Change, Conflict and (In)Security: Hot War* (1st ed., pp. 55–76). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003377641>
- Medby, I. A. (2023). Arctic conflict and co-operation. *Geography*, 108(1), 38–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00167487.2023.2167367>
- Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). 1: The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>
- Offerdal, K. (2014). Interstate relations: The complexities of Arctic politics. In K. Offerdal & R. Tamnes (Eds.), *Geopolitics and security in the Arctic: Regional dynamics in a global world* (pp. 73–96). Routledge.
- Østhagen, A. (2021). The Arctic security region: Misconceptions and contradictions. *Polar Geography*, 44(1), 55–74. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1080/1088937X.2021.1881645>
- Østhagen, A. (2023). Unboxing Arctic security relations and dynamics. In A. Mineev, A. Bourmistrov, & F. Mellemvik (Eds.), *Global development in the Arctic: International cooperation for the future* (pp. 47–61). Routledge.
- Østhagen, A., & Lackenbauer, P. W. (2023). Security dynamics in, through, and over the Arctic “region.” In *Towards a Sustainable Arctic* (1–0, pp. 1–24). WORLD SCIENTIFIC (EUROPE). https://doi.org/10.1142/9781800613225_0001
- Pinto, H., & Gates, I. D. (2022). Why is it so difficult to replace diesel in Nunavut, Canada? *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 157, 112030. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2021.112030>
- Purdy, M., & Smythe, L. (2010). From obscurity to action: Why Canada must tackle the security dimensions of climate change. *International Journal*, 65(2), 411–433.

- Rahbek-Clemmensen, J. (2017). The Ukraine crisis moves north. Is Arctic conflict spill-over driven by material interests? *Polar Record*, 53(1), 1–15. Cambridge Core. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247416000735>
- Sarkisian, A. (2025, March 21). “Games within games:” China hits at withdrawing its Arctic claims. *Nunatsiaq News*. <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/games-within-games-china-hints-at-withdrawing-its-arctic-claims/>
- Smith, H. A. (2010). Choosing not to see: Canada, climate change, and the Arctic. *International Journal*, 65(4), 931–942.
- Spence, J., Alexander, E., Rødven, R., & Harriger. (2023). What makes the Arctic exceptional? Stories of geopolitics, environments and homelands. In L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Barnes (Eds.), *Arctic Yearbook 2023: Arctic Indigenous Peoples: Climate, Science, Knowledge and Governance* (pp. 387–403). Arctic Portal. https://issuu.com/arcticportal/docs/full_version_ay2023
- United Nations Development Program. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994*. Oxford University Press. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr1994encompletenostats.pdf>
- Vidal, F., & Saas, L. (2025). Fragmented Arctic science: Permafrost as a salient feature in the divergence between geopolitical and chronopolitical perspectives. *Polar Science*, 101207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polar.2025.101207>
- Wegge, N., & Keil, K. (2018). Between classical and critical geopolitics in a changing Arctic. *Polar Geography*, 41(2), 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2018.1455755>
- Welsh, J. M. (2024). Tough choices for Canada in a new geopolitical environment. In N. Hillmer, P. Lagassé, & V. Rigby (Eds.), *Canada Among Nations 2023: Twenty-First Century National Security* (pp. 35–56). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67015-2_3
- Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2021). The ‘New Arctic’ as a zone of peaceful competition. In J. D. Kim & C. E. Morrison (Eds.), *Science, Technology and the Path Forward for a New Arctic* (pp. 20–42). Maritime Institute and East-West Center.
- Zellen, B. S. (2023). As war in Ukraine upends a quarter century of enduring Arctic cooperation, the world needs the whole Arctic Council now more than ever. *The Northern Review*, 54, 137–160. <https://doi.org/10.22584/nr54.2023.005>