

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the Visit of the Defence and
Security Committee**

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

**Denmark, Greenland and Iceland
August 30 – September 4, 2010**

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its report on its participation in the visit of the Defence and Security Committee to Denmark, Greenland and Iceland from August 30 to September 4, 2010. Canada was represented by Senators Jane Cordy and Joseph A. Day.

The High North is increasingly gaining international attention as a potentially vital strategic area. Receding ice fields in the Arctic could open up previously inaccessible navigation lanes and provide access to potentially huge natural resource deposits. As a result, not only Arctic nations but other actors as far afield as the European Union and China have indicated their interest in developments in the region. Consequently, there are concerns that the legal and institutional framework in place, while currently ensuring low tension, could come under growing pressure from dynamics such as resource competition and increasingly assertive Russian behaviour.

In order to assess developments in the region and their global impact, 24 members of the parliaments of 15 different NATO nations travelled to Denmark, Greenland and Iceland August 30 to September 4, for a series of briefings and site visits that demonstrated the unique challenges presented by Arctic conditions as well as the environmental and geopolitical trends that will have ramifications ranging far beyond the High North.

The visit to the region allowed members to gauge for themselves not only the evolution of the situation on the ground, but also engage in extensive and substantial dialogue with each other and with subject-matter experts on what the role of NATO should be in the region, if any. The visit took place as NATO itself was reviewing its future roles and missions through the drafting of a New Strategic Concept.

The Delegation was composed of members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Co-operation, led by Sub-Committee Chair Senator Joseph A. Day (Canada). The group was joined by Assembly Vice President and Special Coordinator for the High North Senator Jane Cordy (Canada) as well as the Assembly's Secretary General David Hobbs. Parts of the visit were conducted jointly with the Defence Committee of the Danish Parliament.

The delegation was briefed by Danish Armed Forces in Copenhagen and the Danish Greenland Command; met with Greenlandic and Danish parliamentarians; visited Thule Air Base (USAF) and its Ballistic Early Warning Radar and Satellite Guidance Facility; travelled to Station Nord, the northern-most Danish military installation, less than 600 miles from the geographic North Pole; visited the Greenlandic ice cap; and finally, met with Icelandic officials in Keflavik.

REGION IN FLUX

Greenland itself is a massive, largely desolate island. Its territory represents roughly five times the size of France, within which a relatively small population of 57,000 makes a living largely from fishing (85% of its export revenues come from fishing).

Infrastructure is extremely limited; for example, there are no roads linking the various towns and settlements of Greenland. The effects of climate change on the environment were being seen and felt in a profound manner by local Greenlandic populations, the delegation heard from a local guide on a visit to the Greenlandic ice cap near the southwestern town of Kangerlussuaq. The guide provided numerous anecdotal examples of the impact dramatically rising temperatures and receding ice were having in the area, such as the threat to local animal life from changes in vegetation patterns. He asserted that for the first time, melting ice and unpredictable conditions had prompted Greenlandic authorities to forbid expeditions crossing the ice cap this summer. He told the delegation that the climactic and environmental changes he saw and experienced were accelerating.

The impact of these trends was underlined by Greenlandic member of the Danish Parliament Sofia Rossen and her Danish colleague Julie Rademacher, who takes a special interest in Greenlandic affairs. They told the delegation that weather patterns were changing and posing new challenges to local populations, for instance rendering the hunting or dog-sledding seasons unpredictable. On the other hand, local populations were appreciative of the benefits of the climate changes they were experiencing, which for instance made new crops and additional harvests possible for the small farming community. Increased tourism also represented a major boon to the local economy.

Greenland had gained 'self-rule' rights only in June 2009, with Denmark still heavily subsidizing the Greenlandic economy and providing for its defence and foreign policy. However, the parliamentarians suggested that the possibility of major discoveries of oil and gas in Greenlandic territorial waters¹, as well as the revenues from newly accessible mining territory, may eventually lead to economic independence. Only then would the prospect of full independence from Denmark be worth seriously assessing.

The broader international implications of the changing climate in the High North were summarized by Rear Admiral Henrik Kudsk, Commander, Island Command Greenland, who confirmed that the last several years have seen unprecedented reduction in ice levels on both the east and west coasts of the island, opening waters for navigation that had never been opened before.

The Arctic ice cap is melting rapidly – as much as 30% in the last 30 years, according to the Danish Defence Command's Rear Admiral Lars Kragelund. As a result, ice was disappearing from previously closed channels during some parts of the summer, and new shipping lanes could reduce the travel distance between Rotterdam and Yokohama by 40%, and from Rotterdam to Seattle by 25%. These potential shipping lanes also avoided pirate-infested channels.

The disappearing ice had also opened the door to a rapid growth of Arctic tourism. Rear Admiral Kudsk expected a total of 42 ships in 2010, some carrying as many as 4200 people, to make single or multiple trips in his area of responsibility.

Finally, the changing climate was increasing the likelihood that extraction of huge untapped and previously inaccessible reserves of oil and gas in the Arctic region might

¹ All three major Greenlandic political parties supported exploration efforts underway for oil and gas.

be possible. The delegation heard that these reserves had been estimated to account for as much as 25% of undiscovered global deposits.

Geography dictated that the increased activity surrounding the three major developing areas of interest in the High North – oil and gas, tourism, and shipping – will be seen from Greenland's shores first, according to Rear Admiral Kudsk. The waters these activities would traverse were characterized by sparse population, a hostile climate, and great variation in ice cover. They were also largely uncharted, a situation that created obvious dangers yet largely did not deter boats seeking to navigate them.

DANISH POLICY TOWARDS THE HIGH NORTH

Denmark has good reasons to focus on the High North, according to the Danish Defence Command's Rear Admiral Kragelund. The first was the fact that Greenland remained a part of the Danish Kingdom and Denmark therefore had to assure its defence, and enforce sovereignty on its territory.

Denmark's seafaring tradition was another factor driving its High North policy: Given that 90% of world trade is moved by ship, and that 10% of this total is conducted by Danish owned or operated ships, Denmark is directly concerned by these developments.

Finally, Denmark of course has a strong national interest in monitoring the development of natural resource deposits and the heightened international interest that they had generated.

In response to these interests, Denmark maintains six permanent installations in Greenland, and has committed a limited number of inspection vessels and air assets in order to perform a range of tasks from military defence and maintenance of sovereignty and surveillance, to hydrographic surveying and support to science missions. Danish defence forces also are tasked with missions more commonly associated with Coast Guards, including search and rescue as well as environmental disaster consequence management.

The Danish Kingdom's presence (and therefore sovereignty) in the most remote Greenlandic areas was assured by the SIRIUS dog sledge patrol unit based in the east, according to Rear Admiral Henrik Kudsk. The unit included six two-man dog teams, endowed with police authority, who over a five-year period traversed all sledge-capable areas in the national park that makes up much of Greenland's surface.

The delegation also visited Station Nord, a remote Danish military installation less than 600 miles from the north pole on the north-east corner of Greenland, witnessing the harsh environment that the few personnel deployed there must cope with. The tiny base is resupplied 10 times in a year via its full size 1,800 meter gravel air strip, which the personnel keeps clear throughout the year. Beyond supporting the runway's occasional use, the Station provided support to scientific expeditions, and generally served to demonstrate Danish sovereignty.

The recently-agreed Danish Defence Agreement 2010-2014, a consensus document among all major parties governing five years of defence budgeting and planning, contained a number of Arctic-related stipulations. It mandated a reorganization which

was to create a unified Arctic Command by combining the current Island Command Greenland and Island Command Faeroes. Other measures the Agreement stipulated included the development of an Arctic Response Force (to be designated from existing capabilities, not built from scratch), and a detailed risk analysis of the Greenlandic area as well as the potential future tasks of the Danish Armed Forces there (including assessment of the Danish use of Thule Air Base) as the situation evolves.

Regional cooperation was a central focus of Danish policy in the Arctic, according to Defence Minister Gitte Lillelund Bech, who pointed to the "shared interest" in maintaining tensions low through international cooperation. Rear Admiral Kragelund reminded the delegation that under the Illulissat Declaration, the 'Arctic 5' (Denmark, Russia, U.S., Canada, Norway) had committed to address any disputes through existing international legal structures. Denmark had also recently signed an agreement on deepened cooperation with Canada in the Arctic, including joint training. Kragelund suggested cooperation with the United States was also quite close, in particular as regarded Thule Air Base.

RESPONDING TO A CHANGING REGION: ATTENUATING RISKS

A total of up to five Danish military vessels are available to respond to contingencies on the coasts of Greenland, which are roughly the same size as those of the United States. These limited assets were not designed specifically for search and rescue but had been adapted to that purpose, according to Rear Admiral Kudsk. He therefore expressed strong concern regarding the dramatic rise in cruise ship traffic over the last several years, in particular because the rapidly opening waters were largely uncharted. Weather conditions, including ice, had already caused several major accidents. Many of these ships were ill-suited for travel under harsh arctic conditions (lacking appropriate survival gear, hull reinforcement, or navigational aids, for example). The possibility of a cruise ship in difficulty could become disastrous should conditions make search and rescue even more difficult than the vast distances and limited means already dictated.

The Thule Air Force Base Commander also expressed concern about the increased ship traffic. For the first time, in 2010 two cruise ships made their way to waters in close proximity to the base. Colonel Mark Allen suggested that if ship traffic – whether commercial or tourist – continued to increase, the support functions his base provided could rapidly be overwhelmed.

In response to these challenges, the Admiral suggested that the International Maritime Organization should mandate additional safety measures for navigation in the region, such as requiring that ships travel in convoys to assist each other in case of emergency, that they be properly equipped, and that they report to local authorities appropriately to ensure proper monitoring. International cooperation among Arctic neighbours on information sharing and search and rescue and improving monitoring capabilities in the region was also critical.

THULE AIR BASE

The delegation visited Thule Air Force Base, a physical demonstration of the U.S.'s continued interest in Greenland's strategic position in the High North and its key role in missile defence. Thule is the U.S. Air Force's largest overseas installation, featuring the

world's only white runway². Employing 2% of Greenland's workforce, the base was built in 1951 to accommodate up to 10,000 personnel; at the time of the delegation's visit, approximately 600 personnel (a mix of mostly U.S. and Danish active duty personnel and contractors) served at Thule. The location of the base – a “top of the world vantage point” – enabled constant vigilance across the polar region and thus was a critical element of the U.S. missile defence architecture.

At Thule, the delegation received a mission brief from Base Commander Colonel Mark Allen, visited the massive radar installation called the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) and Detachment 3, a unit that tracks satellites (man-made/controlled and other, such as debris). Thule also supports sea operations with its own deepwater port and fuel transfer capabilities, and lends support to activities as varied as military exercises, re-supply of Allied forces, and scientific research. Colonel Allen suggested Thule could potentially support a wider range of activities in the future, taking advantage of a strong Danish-U.S. partnership and the extensive facilities maintained at Thule under harsh Arctic conditions.

The BMEWS system tracked earth orbiting objects; its capacities allowed it to track a softball-sized object 3000 miles away. It tracked up to 475 objects of interest a day (out of the 10,000 it picked up). While its primary mission was to warn of missile launches, 95% of its resources were spent undertaking space surveillance. Detachment 3, also known as the Thule Tracking Station, provided telemetry, tracking and command functions for US and allied satellites – mainly those in polar orbits – performing missions such as weather observation, intelligence, and global positioning.

THE ICELANDIC PERSPECTIVE

Iceland is the only state whose territory is entirely in the Arctic³, according to Jónas Allansson, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and although Icelandic policy was under reassessment, there was no question it sought to play its full role in the region. Trends in the High North presented clear economic opportunities; Iceland could become a major transshipment hub for shipping and resource movement, for example. But it also presented potential security challenges, which Iceland believed must be addressed in multilateral fora, in particular the Arctic Council.

Indeed, Allansson underlined Iceland's interest in promoting the increasingly political Council, rather than alternative groupings (such as meetings of the Arctic coastal states) that might exclude Icelandic participation. International cooperation on issues ranging from countering possible eco-terrorist or organized crime threats to sharing Arctic-capable technologies, and avoiding militarization, was the key towards successful management of ongoing trends in the Icelandic view.

Notions of what constitutes ‘security’ in the High North should increasingly be defined more broadly to include safety, especially in the High North, according to Tinna Vidarsdottir, formerly the head of the recently-defunct Icelandic Defense Agency.

² The runway is painted white to reflect sunlight so that the permafrost beneath does not melt.

³ Iceland is South of the Arctic Circle but is clearly an Arctic nation.

However, acknowledging a broader conception of security should not mean ignoring the developing military-strategic situation in the High North, Vidarsdottir told the delegation. Contrary to the statements of many public officials, there *is* increased military interest in the High North, and to ignore it would be imprudent, she said. Since the 2006 departure of U.S. military personnel from Iceland, there have been 64 unidentified aircraft flights by Russian planes through NATO's air surveillance space around Iceland. These planes do not follow the rules of international airspace such as prior notifications of flight plans. She suggested to the delegation that an accident involving these flights could not be ruled out..

Iceland's contributions to security in the High North in this regard included the infrastructure (radar installations) it provided, the logistical and personnel support it contributed to operating the infrastructure, and the well-established direct links its capabilities had into NATO's defence systems.

CONCLUSION: A NATO ROLE?

From a Danish perspective, Greenland is NATO territory and therefore comes under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Danish Rear Admiral Henrik Kudsk (Island Command Greenland Commander), reminded the delegation when asked about a possible Alliance role in the High North. He suggested the daily cooperation among the Arctic NATO members was made easier by their Alliance ties, and that recent bilateral agreements with Iceland and Canada had similarly benefited from the NATO context. From a Danish perspective, 'upscaled' international cooperation was essential to maintaining 'downscaled' tension in the High North, the Admiral underlined. Any NATO involvement, however, should be seen as a complement to existing cooperative arrangements rather than a substitute, he said. NATO could usefully play a role in increasing maritime awareness, and could continue to facilitate cooperative efforts on a range of challenges in the region.

Icelandic security analyst Vidarsdottir underlined the need to fully utilize international cooperation such as regular air policing missions by Allies and bilateral cooperation with Norway, as well as military exercises such as the regularly held Northern Viking series, to ensure the Alliance is present and properly equipped to handle possible future scenarios. The Alliance must look north, she said, underlining the need for NATO to have a visible presence in the north in order to properly respond to both 'hard' security and 'soft' safety contingencies. NATO may have a role in mobilizing necessary resources to respond to a disaster, and it must be prepared to play that role by making appropriate preparations rather than waiting for a crisis to emerge.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Senator Joseph A. Day
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
ACTIVITY	Visit of the Defence and Security Committee
DESTINATION	Denmark, Greenland and Iceland
DATES	August 30 – September 4, 2010
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Senator Jane Cordy, Senator Joseph A. Day
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$8,995.95
ACCOMMODATION	\$2,804.11
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$1,240.46
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$225.17
TOTAL	\$13,265.69