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Editor’s Note

In volume 5 issue 5 of the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, we return to the theme of Arctic security—a topic rendered more pressing in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s continued aggressive behavior in the region and beyond. This issue is a collaborative effort with the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Center for Arctic Security and Resilience. Guest editors Lt Col Richard D. Newton, PhD, USAF, retired; MSG Troy J. Bouffard, MA, USA, retired; and LTC Cameron D. Carlson, PhD, USA, retired, bring together a stellar cast of authors from across the Arctic to present disparate views on a variety of issues facing the region, including great-power competition, Nordic allies and partners, NATO, international fora, reactivation of US Arctic forces, and more.

In the issue’s lead senior leader perspective, “Campaigning at the Top of the World,” Gen Glen D. VanHerck, commander USNORTHCOM & NORAD, explores the criticality of the Arctic to the United States’ homeland security and the threats posed by China and Russia. Next, in “Arctic Strategy: Deterrence and Détente,” Maj Gen Rolf Folland, Chief of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, argues that Norway should lean its Arctic strategy more toward deterrence to avoid exploitation by a revisionist and aggressive Russia while continuing to mitigate a potential security dilemma through active dialogue and cooperation on regional matters. Then, in “Forging the Arctic Warrior,” MG Brian S. Eifler, USA, and Troy J. Bouffard present insights involving the importance of developing DOD’s Arctic Warriors and the role of the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center–Alaska. In “Landpower, Security, and the European Arctic,” MG Peter B. Andrysiak, Jr., USA, and Lt Col Richard D. Newton, PhD, USAF, retired, examine emerging military threats in the European Arctic and High North that are challenging the United States, its allies, and its partners. Then, in “Special Operations Command North,” BG Shawn R. Satterfield, USA, and Lt Col Sky B. Jensen, USAF, explain how Special Operations Command North operationalized its “Northern Approach” during exercise Arctic Edge 2022 and concludes with a description of lessons learned being applied; tactics, techniques, and procedures being put into action; and a vision for future SOF operations being adopted in the Arctic. In our final senior leader perspective, “Alaska’s Strategic Importance,” Gen James N. Mattis, USMC, retired, delivers an address to the Fairbanks Military Appreciation Banquet in which he highlighted Alaska’s growing role in global security as the...
Arctic warms and the Indo-Pacific region becomes the primary theater of concern for our nation’s military defense.

In the issue’s first feature article, “The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Freezes Moscow’s Arctic Ambitions,” Dr. Elizabeth Wishnick and Dr. Cameron Carlson explore how the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has upended and re-shaped Arctic security, institutions, and partnerships. Then, in “Securing a Blue Arctic Century, Dr. Walter Berbrick explores the roles, relevance, and limitations of existing international institutions and mechanisms to address the underlying conditions that could lead to misperceptions and instability in the Arctic region. Next, in “Why China Is Not a Peer Competitor in the Arctic,” Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Dr. Adam Lajeunesse, and Ryan Dean conclude that the Arctic states are the “peers” in the Arctic strategic equation, and however much Beijing desires to become a “polar great power,” China remains firmly in the second tier of Arctic stakeholders—and competitors. In our first view article, “Melting a Chinese Iceberg,” CAPT Tuan N. Pham, USN, retired, suggests that to counter China’s asymmetric Arctic strategy, Washington should heed Sun Tzu and pursue an enduring cumulative strategy of integrated deterrence and gray-zone campaigning to undercut China’s Arctic strategy, weaken the developing Sino-Russian Arctic alliance, curb Beijing’s aspiring Arctic Council ambition, and undermine China’s developing Arctic partnerships by holistically, asymmetrically, and continuously imposing costs, encouraging restraints, denying the benefits or objectives, and winning the narratives. Next, in “Above the Arctic,” Lt Col Kjetil Bjørkum, Royal Norwegian Air Force, examines how the use of space will provide increased security in the Arctic and suggests three lines of effort in a combined space strategy among allies in the Arctic. Then, in “The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security,” MAJ W. Barrett Martin, USA; MAJ Michael K. Tovo, USA; and MAJ Devin Kirkwood, USA, explore various requirements needed for the Department of Defense to be competitive in the Arctic region, focusing on US Army Arctic Special Operations Forces. In “Special Operations Forces and Arctic Indigenous People,” LTC James R. Morton, Jr., PhD, USAR, and Dr. Ryan Burke explore the need for special operations forces to engage with and learn from the Indigenous peoples of North America, including those in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland.

In our first commentary of the issue, “Polar Nights, White Nights, and Normal Days and Nights,” Dr. Lester W. Grau uses Russian test results to emphasize the striking operational impact of Arctic visibility on Arctic warfare. Finally, in “The Three-Fold Path of the Snow Dragon,” CPT Christopher Barich, Minnesota Army National Guard, explores the impact of Chinese influence operations in the Arctic.
Please see the back inside cover of this issue for an important announcement from Air University Press regarding future publishing on the Arctic.

DR. ERNEST GUNASEKARA-ROCKWELL
Editor-in-Chief
Defending the homeland is the number one priority for the United States, the Department of Defense (DOD), and my commands: North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM). NORAD’s area of responsibility includes the North American Arctic, and USNORTHCOM is the DOD’s advocate for Arctic capabilities. We know too well the Arctic is not only critical to the United States and Canada but is of growing importance to our strategic competitors: the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Russia. To ensure the Arctic remains stable and secure, the United States and its allies and partners must demonstrate a consistent commitment to the region.

Environmental change is having a profound impact in the Arctic. Melting sea ice exposes resources that were previously inaccessible and opens new areas for commerce and shipping. Increasing access creates potential areas for friction among nations. The PRC and Russia have made clear their intentions for the region through recent national strategic documents. Each country desires to challenge international norms and alter the behaviors of our allies and partners. Left unchecked, the PRC and Russia desire to bring threats closer to North America, eroding global security and strategic stability, and ultimately challenging our ability to defend the homeland.

Russian president Vladimir Putin’s recently announced naval doctrine designates the Arctic Ocean as an area of particular importance. Russia is aggressively militarizing the Arctic while proclaiming intent to infringe upon freedom of navigation in the Northern Sea Route. Russia will likely continue to enhance military capabilities and develop the region’s infrastructure. These enhancements will strengthen Russian air and coastal defense capabilities, expand nuclear deterrent capabilities, and increase Russia’s ability to place North America at risk. Russia’s geographic proximity to the Arctic makes it the most acute security concern to North America. Russia’s irresponsible behavior in Ukraine highlights why all Arctic nations should be concerned with Russian activities in the region.

As a self-declared “near-Arctic nation,” the PRC is attempting to establish a foothold in the northern latitudes. The PRC has consistently increased its scientific, economic, and military activities in the Arctic over the past five years and is working toward increasing Beijing’s influence through economic exploitation to
gain access to vital natural resources. The PRC is applying all instruments of national power to enhance its Arctic influence, expanding initiatives such as the Polar Silk Road. Ultimately, the advanced threat capabilities that the PRC and Russia can bring to the Arctic region reduce US and ally leaders’ decision space and erode our credible deterrence options.

The good news is that the United States is also enhancing our commitment to the Arctic. The United States seeks a stable Arctic region characterized by adherence to internationally agreed upon rules and norms. NORAD and USNORTHCOM are focused on ensuring the entire region remains peaceful, stable, and cooperative. The United States’ 2022 National Defense Strategy outlines the importance of “campaigning,” or aligning our activities over time to maintain our competitive advantage and support our defense priorities. A key piece of campaigning is presence, specifically having the relationships and access to operate in the region. As I advocate for capabilities for the Arctic, I also advocate for being in the Arctic.

Figure 1. A joint forcible entry operation. Paratroopers from 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 11th Airborne Division conduct a joint forcible entry operation from C-17s and C-130s during the first Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center Exercise (JPMRC) 22-02 at Donnelly Drop Zone, near Fort Greeley, Alaska, 12 March 2022. JPMRC 22-02 is the first home station regional combat training center rotation that focuses on large-scale combat operations in an Arctic environment. (Photo courtesy of the US Army)
For NORAD and USNORTHCOM, campaigning importantly includes military exercises in the northern latitudes to test and demonstrate capability, readiness, and our will to operate. Executing large-scale joint and multinational force exercises under Arctic conditions exhibits credible deterrence while showcasing robust US defense capabilities. Campaigning requires close work with regional allies, partners, organizations, and institutions in the pursuit of shared objectives. We are stronger together, and our competitors know they do not benefit from the same relationships. Our integrated approach has a profound deterrent effect on competitors.

In August 2022, the DOD opened the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, the Department’s newest regional center. Aligned under USNORTHCOM, the Ted Stevens Center represents the DOD’s commitment to building strong networks of security leaders to educate, advocate, and advance shared interests. The center will provide a platform for collaboration to shape thinking about Arctic security and will institutionalize knowledge to improve our strategic decisions regarding investments in critical Arctic capabilities and infrastructure. The center will promote the Arctic as a peaceful and stable region where international cooperation based on shared values is paramount.

The changing Arctic environment and increasing competitor activities in the region should invoke a sense of urgency in all of us. We cannot afford to cede the Arctic to competitors without accepting risk to North America and our homeland. More work remains to effectively deter malign competitor activities and ensure an Arctic region governed by a rules-based international order. Our efforts to develop and demonstrate Arctic capabilities, and to establish or strengthen multilateral organizations to address Arctic concerns, are clear indicators of progress.

Gen Glen D. VanHerck, USAF
General VanHerck, is the 26th commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command and 9th commander of US Northern Command, headquartered at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado. He is a graduate of the US Air Force Weapons School and is a command pilot with more than 3,200 hours in more than a dozen aircraft. As the commander of USNORTHCOM, he is the DOD’s Arctic Capabilities Advocate.
Abstract

The guiding principle for NATO’s political strategy toward Russia for the past 50 years was defined in the 1967 Harmel Report—a dualistic approach based on deterrence and détente. This double-track approach came as a response to intense Cold War relations in the mid-1960s that required a revision of the Alliance’s policy. The Harmel Report is still relevant, but the dynamics on the northern flank have changed. This article offers valuable insight into how Norway must rebalance its Arctic policy against the strategic backdrop of increased global rivalry, Arctic volatility, and the war in Ukraine. It argues that Norway should lean its Arctic strategy more toward deterrence to avoid exploitation by a revisionist and aggressive Russia while continuing to mitigate a potential security dilemma through active dialogue and cooperation on regional matters.

The Arctic is resuming an important geopolitical role. The primary driver for revitalized interest is the effect of global warming. Declination of the Arctic ice cap is creating economic opportunities as untapped resources become available and new waters become navigable. The resource-rich region is estimated to hold large amounts of undiscovered oil, natural gas, and minerals and shorter shipping routes between Europe and Asia are becoming accessible. Growing signs of a great-power “scramble” for the Arctic are emerging, and Russia has claimed expanded jurisdiction and bolstered its military presence in the region. As the Russian invasion of Ukraine has proven to the world, President Vladimir Putin is no stranger to illegal aggression and violation of international law. Russia clearly has the military superiority in the Arctic region, and Putin has already shown the willingness to grab territory in Europe. This raises questions of whether Russian revisionist ambitions along its southern and western European border will metastasize to the Arctic and threaten the cooperative climate that has characterized the region in the post–Cold War era.

Norway has had “1000 years of peace” with Russia, and the two Arctic neighbors’ relationship has been characterized by dialogue, predictability, and cooperation. But the relationship is asymmetrical, and Norway has based its security policy on a balance between deterrence through NATO membership and reassur-
Arctic Strategy

ance through dialogue in combination with self-imposed restrictions on allied presence and activity. The Norwegian policy in the Arctic will remain a combination of deterrence and détente, but Russia’s growing military capability, assertiveness, and explicit use of force is calling for a renewed balance.

Russian Intentions in the Arctic

To comprehend fully the new challenges in the Arctic, it is vital to analyze Russia’s intentions in the region. Understanding Moscow’s aims in the Arctic through analyzing Russia’s policy documents is a challenging enterprise that includes a substantial element of assumptions. Public documents from Moscow offer basic principles and trends but may also deliberately convey misleading signals to influence political dynamics. However, this article highlights three main observations driven by the changing physical nature of the Arctic and more demanding security dynamics between key actors in the region. First, the region has emerged as an important resource base vital for bolstering the Russian economy. A weak economy has long been Russia’s Achilles’ heel; the economic situation has deteriorated even further as a result of sanctions imposed after Russia’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea—sanctions that were substantially tightened after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This has made the region crucial for Russia’s economic future. Second, Moscow will strengthen its control over vast Arctic resources by dealing with the expanded continental shelf and the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as within Russia’s jurisdiction. The latter is disputed by other Arctic actors, especially the United States, because it challenges freedom of navigation. Third, Russia’s regional focus seems to be gradually shifting from cooperation to deterrence. New indications of strengthened Arctic security measures and regional militarization are particularly intensified in policy documents published after 2014. With Russia becoming somewhat of a pariah state in Western international relations by 2022, the climate for cooperation appears rapidly dwindling, and increased reliance on deterrence seems to be becoming the new normal.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation from 2016 states Russia’s ambition of being a great power in a multipolar world where national sovereignty and force are essential. The concept reveals a realist view on international relations, where sovereign states are the main actors competing in a zero-sum game of power and security. Reflecting this, force—and especially military force—is important. A key element in Russian strategic culture is the propensity to use force to achieve strategic objectives, demonstrated lately in the Ukraine. On the one hand, the policy documents clearly indicate Moscow wants to pursue Arctic policies that “preserve peace, stability and constructive international cooperation.” On the other hand, it signals that “Russia will be firm in countering any attempts
to introduce elements of political or military confrontation in the Arctic.” Herein lies the greatest uncertainty with Russian intentions for the Arctic: Moscow’s dual-track communication and inclination to use military force to reach political objectives. The 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine revealed Russia’s ability to engage in hybrid modus operandi and Moscow’s ability to test the Western security framework’s limits. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine was yet another and more explicit and overt testing of the Western security framework, albeit this time ending up with conventional military operations resembling tactics and strategy dating back to the Second World War. One should be careful not to have a short-sighted view of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as it needs further research and thorough analysis, but it shows the Moscow’s willingness to use force to achieve Russia’s objectives, and the wide spectrum of military, political, and diplomatic tools Moscow is willing to employ to achieve its national interests. The reassuring argument is that Russia is dependent on international collaboration in the Arctic to realize its economic potential due to lack of investment resources, offshore technology, and human knowledge and, therefore, likely will continue to solve questions of Arctic sovereignty through international law and multilateral institutions like the Arctic Council. However, Moscow’s Arctic policy is also characterized by fear of Western expansion and a struggle for strategic depth, a deep-rooted fear that has likely deepened after its 2022 exploits.

Prior to 2022, Gleb Yarovoy, in his chapter “Basics of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period Until 2020 and Beyond,” revealed this fear and signaled that Russia will build-up and modernize its military capabilities to ensure national security and protect its northern border. Russia’s National Security Strategy highlighted that NATO’s encirclement through regional build-up, expansion, and posture closer to Russian borders is a threat to Russian national security in the Arctic. Russian military doctrine makes the same point of holding NATO as the nation’s main external military threat and points to the necessity of increasing Russian military capabilities in the High North. The inclusion of Sweden and Finland into NATO is likely to fit this Russian narrative. So, although the Russian policy documents emphasize stability and multilateral cooperation in the Arctic, military build-up and offensive behavior reveals Moscow’s fear and militarized threat assessment.

**Russia’s Military Build-up in the Arctic**

Russia has strengthened and modernized its nuclear and conventional capabilities across the board. Since 2008 it has enhanced its military capability in all areas in the Arctic by investing in mobile systems, special forces, new military bases, infrastructure, and long-range precision weapons. In 2019, the Chief of
Defence Valery Gerasimov launched the new defense concept “active defence.” This concept emphasizes high readiness, mobility, strong coordination, and massive firepower.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, the Northern Fleet Command has been modernized, transformed into Joint Strategic Command North, and further developed to be one of five Russian military districts.\textsuperscript{16} Moscow has centralized command authority of all the Russian military units in the Arctic, including the Russian Navy’s nuclear-strike capabilities. The reinforcement concept has been modernized, and together with improved force readiness, this ensures that the northern command relatively quickly can achieve short-term local superiority by reinforcing Kola with troops and equipment by rail and air. Several new long-range precision-guided strike weapons, particularly sea- and air-launched systems, have entered into service. Common for most of them is that they can deliver both nuclear and conventional warheads. Different variants of the land- and sea-launched Kalibr cruise missile, the air-launched hypersonic intermediate-range missile Khinzal, together with the land-based mobile SSC-8 Screwdriver pose significant threats to NATO due to their duality, long-range, short warning time, and high precision. The deployment of new multilayered air and coastal defense systems improves protection of the Kola Peninsula, as well as offering the ability to assert sovereignty in the Arctic region. In sum, this interconnected system of long-range precision-guided strike and multilayered air and coastal defense orchestrated with cyber and electronic tools forms a robust Russian antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) capability from the Arctic to the Baltics and the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom (GIUK) gap that calls for reinvigorated NATO conventional deterrence and collective defense. However, in addition to nuclear and conventional military power, President Putin has a third ace up his sleeve: hybrid tools that create ambiguity and doubt. Since 2014, Western security analysts have given hybrid warfare much attention, often viewing it as a new Russian tool. It is essential to understand that for Russian decision makers the hybrid tools are integrated with all the other available instruments of national power that can be utilized from peacetime to wartime.\textsuperscript{17} In fact, there is a strong interdependence, as Russian hard power supports the elements of hybrid warfare and adds a looming threat to the equation that weakens the adversary’s decision making.

On the other hand, military history has provided numerous hard lessons that modern equipment and new concepts are just part of the equation for success. Although I am careful not to draw conclusions prematurely, the Russian political and military performance leading up to and during its invasion of Ukraine leaves much to be desired. Its underachievement will impact its deterrent effect, not least the basic need to replace its military inventory and personnel, which will likely take years. Conversely, the same dynamics of the 2022 war in Ukraine have ex-
expanded and galvanized NATO; invigorated European economic, energy, and security cooperation; and strengthened transatlantic security bonds. How this will influence Moscow’s Arctic strategy is too soon to assess, but Russia’s long-term military build-up and posture in the Arctic creates uncertainty about Russian intentions. Former US Secretary of Defense James Mattis has claimed that Russia is taking “aggressive steps” to increase its military posture in the region.  

### Aggressive Russian Military Behavior

The Russian military is operating in a more offensive manner against Norwegian and allied activity in the region. According to the Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS), there have been several examples of Russian assets targeting Norway and NATO with simulated weapon usage. In 2018, during the NATO exercise Trident Juncture in Norway, Russia demonstrated its assertiveness by deploying surface vessels and patrol aircraft to the exercise area, flying strategic sorties over the Norwegian Sea, and performing live firing off the coast of Norway. In addition, there have been several incidents of Russian jamming, resulting in lost GPS signals for civilian and allied air traffic in the northern part of Norway. Russian policy, military buildup, and belligerent behavior in the Arctic—combined with its invasion of Ukraine—signal Moscow’s will and capability to reassert its great-power status through military strength and Arctic energy. Norway must adapt to this new reality in the High North to ensure regional stability and national security and sustain its prosperity.

### Norway and the Arctic

The Arctic is Norway’s most important foreign policy priority. The region has strategic importance for Norway based on two main factors: economic potential and geopolitical location next to Russia. Norway is a global leader in Arctic petroleum production, a large exporter of oil and natural gas, and half its undiscovered hydrocarbons are estimated to be found in the Barents Sea. This becomes ever more valuable as Europe tries to free itself from Russian energy dependence. Norway is the second-largest fish exporter in the world, and this sector is the second-largest industry in the country after oil and natural gas. 

There is a remarkable military asymmetry between Norway and Russia, and defense against neighboring Russia is driving Norwegian security. Norway’s militarily inferiority to Russia represents a vulnerability that Russia might exploit. This is the main reason Norway has been a strong advocate for revitalizing NATO’s focus on collective defense and increased vigilance on the Alliance’s northern flank. According to the former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ine
Eriksen Søreide, “Norway constitutes NATO’s northern flank, and our military presence in the north is therefore a significant contribution to the security of the Alliance.”24 Thus, Norway has emphasized military presence in the High North. The number of Norwegian high-end capabilities available for credible deterrence is limited compared to Russia’s military capabilities, and the political authorities have lately allowed greater influx of allied activities on Norwegian territory. US and UK forces train and exercise more in Norway than they did just a few years ago. This has led to strong reactions from Russia, warning Norway that such actions will have negative consequences,25 and it has also sparked debate over Norwegian strategic approach among scholars and professionals in Norway.

Adding to this debate, the NATO Summit in Madrid in late June 2022 was a big leap forward for Sweden and Finland in their aspirations for joining NATO. Should Sweden and Finland join NATO (which I hope and believe they will), they too will be part of NATO’s northern flank. How Nordic cooperation within the framework of NATO will influence Norwegian security and its relation to Russia and Arctic cooperation is difficult to assess. Still, despite disagreements on strategic approach in the Arctic, the legal principle that law is the basis of governance is the bedrock of Norwegian policy. As a small state neighboring a mighty military power, Norway is strongly committed to the international rule of law. This is also the case in the Arctic. Norway’s vision for the High North is “a peaceful, prosperous, and environmentally sound Arctic where international cooperation and respect for the principles of international law are the norm.”26 Russia has so far supported Arctic governance based on international law, and Norway’s strategic goal for the Arctic is to make sure this continues in the future.

**Russian and Norwegian Cooperation in the Arctic**

Norwegian and Russian overlapping interests in the Arctic are based on a shared view that the region should be governed by international law in questions of sovereign rights. Both countries seek stability to pursue their economic interests. The Ilulissat Declaration,27 signed in 2008 by the Arctic Five, including Russia, demonstrated this and signaled that the Arctic is “governed according to the principles that operate anywhere in the world.”28 In line with this declaration, after nearly four decades of negotiations, Norway and Russia bilaterally agreed on their maritime delimitation line in the Barents Sea in 2010.

The rule of law is paramount for a small state, and like other Allies, Norway has suspended bilateral military cooperation with Russia since Putin’s 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea. Norway is currently an integral part of Western sanctions on Russia, following the invasion of Ukraine. However, Norway continues to search for areas to cooperate with Russia that are important for safety and predictability.
in the region, such as search and rescue, coast and border guard, the Incidents at Sea Agreement, and environmental protection in the north. The two neighboring Arctic nations also have a hotline between the Norwegian Joint Operational Headquarters and the Northern Fleet to avoid unnecessary escalation and misunderstandings. And, despite differences, there is enough “common interest to provide a favorable climate for extended future cooperation.” Nonetheless, the 2014 crises and 2022 invasion of Ukraine, plus the sanctions against Russian Arctic energy interests have complicated cooperation and increased regional tension.

**Potential for Conflict in the Arctic**

This article analyses two factors that can lead to an Arctic spillover: increased domestic unrest in Russia and an intensified great power rivalry in the region. Economic setbacks from sanctions, military setbacks, and the sense of becoming an international pariah state leading to increased isolation in the wake of a large-scale pandemic can result in domestic unrest that may drive Russia toward a more confrontational track in the Arctic. Domestic and foreign policy are intertwined in Russia, and they are centered around Putin: “Putin believes that only a Russia that is strong at home can be strong abroad, and vice versa, and that the strength of the state derives in part from its stability and unity of purpose.”

Russia’s economic growth has internally been explained as a result of Putin’s great leadership, while periods of recession have been blamed on Western malign forces. Criticizing the West, and especially the United States, has become a tool for stabilizing domestic politics in difficult times. As a result of sanctions, the public dissatisfaction over economic stagnation has grown in Russia. In line with Putin’s political philosophy, this can cause an assertive Russia to take more confrontational steps in the Arctic to secure its energy interests and indicate strength to internal audiences. In addition, Russia’s economic fragility and dependency on European markets have given substance to a growing Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic.

Globally, there is an escalating great-power rivalry between the United States and China that seems to have hardened the Arctic strategies and increased the risk for Arctic spillover. Russia is traditionally reluctant to any non-Arctic nation’s involvement in the region, but sanctions have made Moscow look to the East for Arctic investments, technology, and cooperation. As a self-proclaimed “near Arctic state,” China has a growing interest in the region based on science, energy, and Arctic sea routes as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. This cooperation seems to have strengthened after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The rising presence of China and the strengthened Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic have sparked serious concerns in Washington, and the United States has criticized both Russian and Chinese Arctic motives. Washington has disputed Moscow’s claims to sovereignty.
over the NSR because it endangers US and Allied military maneuverability, and the growing great-power rivalry seems to have revitalized American political interest in the region. In a speech given before the Arctic Council’s 2019 ministerial meeting in Finland, then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo revealed an American militarized threat assessment of the region and pointed at Russian and Chinese behaviors as illegitimate, aggressive, and destabilizing. The United States, Russia, and China seem to be hardening their Arctic strategies, and spillover from great-power rivalry is an emerging risk for the region. This creates dilemmas for European NATO-members as they find themselves in a balancing act between security and prosperity. European security is still dependent on US military protection, either bilaterally or through NATO, but most European nations also want to trade as much as possible with China. A strengthening Sino-Russian alliance, together with fear of former President Donald Trump’s and the US Republican Party’s unilateralism, protectionism, and focus on China represents a long-term danger for Europe and the liberal order since it will create opportunities for an assertive Russia that has shown its willingness to take more aggressive steps.

Against this strategic reality Oslo must balance Norway’s security policy against Russia. On one hand, Norway has a unique position for mitigating unintended escalation through established bilateral dialogue on Arctic matters with Russia. On the other hand, Norway is dependent on Allied support for credible and capable deterrence against Russian aggressive behavior. The key question is how Oslo should tailor Norway’s Arctic policy to the current security situation.

**Recommendations**

This article recommends that Oslo lean Norway’s Arctic strategy more toward deterrence to avoid exploitation by a revisionist Russia, while continuing to mitigate any potential security dilemma through active dialogue and cooperation on regional matters. These recommendations are derived from three main arguments.

First, the Arctic is existential for Russia’s great-power ambitions. Moscow’s intentions in the melting Arctic indicate Russia pursues economic development and military build-up to restore its great-power position. There is a growing instability in the international system with great-power rivalry and less confidence in the international rules-based order. Big shifts in the balance of power create opportunities for an assertive Russia that Moscow will exploit. Thus, a Russian behavioral mix of belligerence and cooperation will most likely continue in the Arctic. Therefore, Norway’s choice of strategy boils down to risk management and a flexible balance between deterrence and reassurance measures in the face of Russia’s behavior.
Second, Norwegian policy on the Arctic must be realistic, pragmatic, and aimed at ensuring hard security before softer issues to protect against Russian exploitation. The language that best restrains an assertive and revisionist Russia from coercive strategies is the language of power, and Norwegian posture and capability in the Arctic must therefore signal strength. Hence, Oslo must pursue continuous territorial presence with high-end capabilities in the High North to ensure Norway’s sovereignty and freedom to pursue national interests and enhance deterrence on the Alliance’s northern flank. NATO is the cornerstone of Norwegian deterrence, and Norway has been the most eager member in NATO for proactive Arctic defense. This strategic approach should be strengthened despite Russian complaints of encirclement. Credible deterrence can only be attained if Moscow believes that the Allies will come to Norway’s aid, and Norway must therefore ensure solid NATO coherence and cohesion on Arctic matters. A significant factor in this equation is the future level of cooperation between the Nordic nations should Sweden and Finland join NATO. With their geopolitical similarities, shared values as small liberal democracies, strong institutions, strong economies, and populations inclined to support increased Nordic cooperation, a more collective Nordic defense approach, within the framework of NATO and bilateral partners, should entail a stronger deterrent posture toward a more aggressive Russia. However, a broader and deeper NATO involvement in the region could also contribute to unintended escalation and endanger the stability that currently exists in the region. Moscow tends to respond aggressively to any NATO encirclement, and the strategic importance of the Kola Peninsula calls for caution. Thus, a stronger and enhanced regional engagement will establish a more balanced deterrence that creates space for détente.

Third, being both a NATO member and an Arctic partner with Russia, Norway has a unique position that Oslo must use for establishing tailored reassurance measures to reduce the security dilemma without sacrificing NATO cohesion. As the Alliance increases its Arctic capability and activity, Moscow will likely perceive it as a danger, and Russia will respond by increasing its own military posture. Hence, the potential for a security dilemma between NATO and Russia in the region is present. Thus, Norway’s strategic initiative for increased NATO presence in the High North must be balanced with strengthened reassurance measures to avoid escalation. Keywords for reassurance are transparency, predictability, stability, and accountability, alongside pragmatic cooperation on Arctic governance where common interests already exist. Thus, Norway should combine its military deterrence with strengthened political dialogue and cooperation on military safeguarding the economic opportunities and environmental challenges in the region. The Arctic Council has effectively been bridging Arctic gaps but does not address
security matters, and since 2015 Russia has been excluded from the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable. Even with the current international climate toward Russia after its invasion of Ukraine in mind, the long-term absence of an arena to discuss security matters for the Arctic is a vulnerability that over time should be reduced. Because defense against neighboring Russia is driving Norwegian security, it is highly recommended that Norway welcomes an Arctic security dialogue with Russia either through existing formats or new ones.

Maj Gen Rolf Folland, Royal Norwegian Air Force

Major General Folland joined the Royal Norwegian Navy in 1988 and received his wings and joined the Royal Norwegian Air Force in 1992. He spent the first half of his career operationally at numerous squadrons in Norway as a helicopter pilot. He has commanded at the flight, squadron, and air wing levels. He graduated from Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, in 2009, and the Senior Executive Course in 2012, and was a member of the Royal College of Defence Studies 2019–2020. His current assignment is Chief of the Royal Norwegian Air Force. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the official position of any government or institution.

Notes

12. Yarovoy, “Russia’s Arctic Policy.”


Forging the Arctic Warrior

Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center–Alaska

MG Brian S. Eifler, USA
Troy J. Bouffard

Abstract

As defense and security concerns increase over growing access and competitive interests in the circumpolar North, the United States continues to develop Arctic operational purpose and capabilities. The Department of Defense's (DOD) newest combat training center (CTC) in Alaska represents key infrastructure and exercise grounds for US Army forces in Alaska to pursue required military readiness certification. The Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center–Alaska (JPMRC–AK) also facilitates a range of opportunities for combined, joint, and service component forces develop and test Arctic operational capabilities unlike any other training installation in the world. As the fourth established CTC capable of handling brigade-on-brigade (plus) forces in the physical and non-physical domains, JPMRC–AK will serve as the ultimate Arctic training and testing grounds for the US Army as well as sister and allied services. The purpose of this article is to explore these developments and present insights involving the importance of developing DOD’s Arctic Warriors and the role of the Arctic CTC.

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The United States faces new and increasing security concerns as access expands to the Arctic. Although the circumpolar North has enjoyed notable cooperation for many years, growing competition threatens US interests. While soft-security problems represent much of the daily burden throughout the North, hard-security issues and threats persist. The United States has stated its objectives in the Arctic, is producing and posturing the capabilities needed to secure those objectives, and is actively engaging its partners to manage competition and preclude conflict within the Arctic. The Department of Defense (DOD) and subordinate service strategies for the Arctic illuminate the relevance and importance of the military instrument of national power to a degree not seen since the Cold War.

The need is clear: Russia continues to pursue aggressive Arctic military advancements, accelerating its head start on Arctic land force development. China’s Polar Silk Road initiative underpins Beijing’s ambitions to become a political and economic global power. Given these circumstances, US Army Arctic advancements remain essential to balance strategic competition in the region. Operational
success always requires joint and total force development emphasizing innovative doctrine, staffing, equipping, and training. But in the Arctic, effective integrated deterrence will require synchronized support from the three regional combatant commands with Arctic equities: US Northern Command (NORTHCOM), Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), and European Command (EUCOM).

The US military maintains defense readiness and superiority through an enterprise of precision-enabled combat- and combined-arms warfare capabilities. For the DOD to meet its Arctic national security, national defense, and national military strategy responsibilities, the US Army must regain Arctic dominance in the region. The operationalization of the US Army Arctic strategy will require significant contribution from all the Army’s combat enablers to develop precision-enabled combat- and combined-arms Arctic capabilities. To ensure an Arctic-ready land force, the Army recently activated an airborne division and established a regional combat training center in Alaska. Troops assigned to the new 11th Airborne Division and its enablers will undergo formal training evaluations culminating with a combat training center (CTC) exercise at the nation’s newest major training center—the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center–Alaska (JPMRC–AK).

Background

CTCs are training locations that best facilitate required military readiness testing and reporting for tactical-level ground forces (typically a brigade) during either a command cycle and/or when scheduled for a contingency (combat) deployment. Rotations through CTCs allow for optimized, controlled conditions to measure tactical performance of an assigned mission based on the commander’s upper-echelon guided mission essential tasks (MET). CTCs are capable of hosting and managing a brigade-level force-on-force test of specified METs through the various war-fighting functions, including mission command, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection. CTCs basically provide an exercise that is as close to combat as you can get. CTCs are purpose-built by the Army to deliver large-scale multi-echelon training across all war-fighting functions. Each center employs live, virtual, and constructive environments, a dynamic and capable opposing force, and a cadre of role players to simulate and test a unit. They also feature electronic sensors and expert observers to provide authoritative assessments and feedback to the training units. For combat and contingency operations, CTC certification remains the best means by which to prepare units for the complexities and difficulties of their high-risk responsibilities.

Since 1981, CTCs at Fort Irwin, California (National Training Center–NTC); Fort Polk, Louisiana (Joint Readiness Training Center–JRTC); and USAG Bavaria at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany (Joint Multinational Readiness Cen-
ter–JMRC), have provided the US Army, sister services, and international allies and partners with invaluable, realistic training to prepare for current and future conflicts. However, the introduction of JPMRC–AK in 2022 represents a new model that is optimized for the Arctic mission set in the region.

JPMRC–AK addresses a key limitation inherent in the brick-and-mortar CTC design: as fixed-base sites, their climate and geology cannot be easily modified. Because JPMRC is exportable, it affords units the opportunity to train under the environmental conditions in which they are most likely to be employed. This is particularly relevant for Arctic forces, as the extreme cold weather and mountainous conditions can be as dangerous as the enemy they may encounter. Training in those same challenging conditions is essential for Soldier and unit readiness. JPMRC–AK offers other key benefits. Training within the region avoids costly and timely shipment of equipment, integrates and assures regional partners, enhances local joint interoperability, and applies a model where more than just the priority training brigade garners readiness and proficiency. It also keeps units and their equipment in the region, ready to respond to crises as opposed to being unavailable for three to four months.

To prepare for operations in an Arctic environment, JPMRC–AK facilitates unique training in extreme cold weather as well as mountainous and high-latitude environments. JPMRC–AK can offer training executed at scale (brigade or above) because 11th Airborne Division controls exceptionally large and diverse training ranges. 11th Airborne Division manages 10 percent of the Army’s total training lands, with a multitude of unique terrain types, restricted airspace that equates to the size of Florida, and few concerns for encroachment on local communities. Outside of Alaska, exercise locations hosted at Camp Grayling, Michigan, are used for Northern Strike 22-1 and are very effective for small unit training. But Grayling’s relatively small size (147,000 acres), lack of ranges and emitters, remoteness from Arctic units, insufficient opportunities for joint forcible entry operations, limited resources, mild climate, and flat terrain limit its use for Arctic-level training. JPMRC–AK offers ample maneuver space within the 655,000 acres of the Donnelly Training Area and 257,000 acres in the Yukon Training Area (YTA). Within the largest US all-domain training venue, JPMRC–AK also offers experts in cold weather and mountain operations at the Northern Warfare Training Center (NWTC).

The Road to the Arctic Combat Training Center

In May 2022, the DOD announced that US Army Alaska would be redesignated to the 11th Airborne Division. On 06 June 2022, two ceremonies were conducted to redesignate 1–25th Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) to 1/11th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) as well as 4–25th IBCT (Airborne) to 2/11th IBCT (Airborne). With this reflagging, the 11th Airborne Division
Division is effectively enabled to develop a high-level tactical staff with a defined Arctic operational purpose. Additionally, the 11th Airborne Division headquarters has been empowered to review and contribute vertically and horizontally to all elements of its transformation. As it becomes a fully resourced and trained Arctic force, the 11th Airborne Division stands ready to address all elements of Arctic strategies and plans in its sphere of influence.

Assigned missions can include top priority plans and named operations. The 11th Airborne Division ensures trained and ready forces for its missions through seasonal training nested within the Army’s Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM) cycles. ReARMM features a two-year, three-phased readiness construct evenly divided between modernization, training, and mission phases. Modernization includes the fielding and training of new equipment and is limited to individual and lower collective training and involvement in select theater security cooperation exercises. The training phase progressively builds toward higher-level collective training, culminating in the iterative execution of cold weather and rugged mountainous certification and experimentation. The mission phase includes the highest density of exercises with partners and allies in INDOPACOM, NORTHCOM, and EUCOM; contingency employment; and rotational force deployments.

Preparing for Arctic missions must include training and confirmation of expertise in acclimating and operating in extreme cold environments. Justification is simple: a person is significantly more likely to die from cold than heat. According to research involving defined categories of extreme cold (usually specified by various temperature ranges), it can take between 2–3 weeks to physiologically adapt, which could help to inform the kind of training needed for individuals to survive and thrive in the Arctic winter environment. In addition to the physical demands, Arctic experts, such as the cadre at the NWTC, know that the cognitive aspects of Arctic survival are often more important than physical. JPMRC–AK provides the ideal conditions in which to operate and train for these challenges.

In March 2022, Alaska’s US Army forces participated in the first-ever extreme cold weather CTC rotation during exercise JPMRC 22-02. Nearly all 12,000 Soldiers of US Army Alaska were involved. JPMRC hosted the 1/25 SBCT from Ft. Wainwright, Alaska, as they faced the opposition forces (OPFOR) led by the 4/25 IBCT (Airborne) from Joint Base Elmendorf–Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, in the fictitious scenario country of Olvana. Canada, our principal Arctic ally, provided airborne and reconnaissance forces into this combat-focused exercise. Separate from the JPMRC 22-02 scenario, one infantry battalion from 1/25 SBCT executed company-level combined-arms live fire exercises in the YTA. This unprecedented training event represents the first authoritative step to define
an Arctic readiness model for generation of Arctic-ready forces available to combatant commanders for operations.⁸

**Preliminary Perspectives—The First Steps to Army Arctic Dominance**

For the participating brigades, the primary purpose was to build expertise in sustained operations in Arctic conditions. For the Army, JPMRC 22-02 did more than provide a military-readiness rating to national authorities. It was a comprehensive capstone training event in an extreme cold weather environment where temperatures dropped to -37 degrees Fahrenheit. Lessons learned during this pivotal training will inform refinement and development across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy. Some of the challenges involve optimizing equipment, gear, and weapons. Units were required to maximize tactical proficiency at the squad to company levels, including small-unit Ranger tactics and the integration of all supporting arms, to close with the enemy in complex terrain and difficult conditions. However, the principal lesson learned revolved around the importance for “Soldiers to be masters of their craft in Arctic warfare, not just to survive but to thrive in extreme cold weather and mountainous terrain.”⁹

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

JPMRC–AK was established as the regional training center to comprehensively challenge America’s Arctic Warriors and allies and partners in their operational environment. The CTC will be the premier location in the region for our allies and partners to train with US forces—to train like we will fight as a joint, multinational team. Coupled with JPMRC–Hawaii, these regional CTCs will enable unique and essential training, much like the other CTCs have proven invaluable in certifying the readiness of the US military during combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. With the 11th Airborne Division reactivated, the “Arctic Angels” must remain ready for threats across INDOPACOM and the Arctic, all while piloting, experimenting, and testing force structure and equipment to optimize the capabilities of America’s only Arctic fighting force. Effective training, equipping, and Manning are critical to success moving forward.

Total force development takes many years, and the Arctic represents the newest region of security concerns that requires preparation now before the process lags too far behind to meet even the most basic threats. JPMRC–AK and reactivating the 11th Airborne Division in Alaska are only the beginning. The Army will continue to refine force structure and equipping for the harshest environment on
the planet. Continuous efforts to engage with our Arctic partners and allies like Canada, India, Nepal, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, and Norway and reconnecting with the Alaskan Native Tribes and the Alaska Defense Force will enhance the necessary experience and structure to regain Arctic dominance.

Finally, to manage service member Arctic assignments and expectations, we must continue to develop effective programs for recruitment, retention, identification, and certification of Soldiers. It takes a special breed of Soldier to thrive in the Arctic; service members must be recruited and retained. The Army should also establish an Arctic division force structure to accommodate the unique skills required. Special skill/qualification identifiers should be emplaced for key positions throughout the ranks of the division structure that require Arctic and mountain skill sets. This will require an increase in the size and throughput of the NWTC but will significantly increase the expertise and maintain continuity of experience across the division—mandatory to regain Arctic dominance. The Army has embarked on this path and remains committed to success. It must continue to adjust and adapt to ensure the Army is ready to thrive, fight, and win in the most challenging environment on the planet.

MG Brian S. Eifler, USA

Major General Eifler assumed command of US Army Alaska on 21 July 2021 and the 11th Airborne Division on 6 June 2022. He previously served as Army Chief Legislative Liaison, Deputy Commanding General of the 10th Mountain Division (Light), CJ3 for Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq. A native of Michigan, MG Eifler graduated and commissioned as an Infantry Officer from Central Michigan University. While at Central Michigan, he graduated from Airborne and Ranger school. Major General Eifler’s education includes a bachelor’s degree in interpersonal and public communication from Central Michigan University and a master’s in strategic studies from the United States Army War College. He is also a graduate of the MIT Seminar XXI National Security Studies Program.

Troy J. Bouffard

Mr. Bouffard is the director of the Center for Arctic Security and Resilience at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). He has been a full-time faculty instructor at UAF in the Homeland Security and Emergency Management program since 2015. He is the designer and instructor for the university’s Arctic Security graduate concentration and graduate certificate in the Master of Security and Disaster Management program. He has published extensively on Arctic issues and serves as a member and leader for many Arctic-focused organizations.

Notes


9. GEN James McConville, Chief of Staff of the Army, speech for the reflagging of the 11th Airborne Division, 6 June 2022.
Landpower and Security in the European Arctic

MG Peter B. Andrysiaj, Jr., USA
Dr. Richard D. Newton

Abstract

Arctic experts talk about the circumpolar region as three Arctics—North American, European, and Russian (sometimes called Asian)—each with unique physical characteristics that heavily influence their defense and security considerations. The differences between the regions are usually expressed in terms of climate, topography, geography, populations, resources, and infrastructure. Because the Arctic is intended to be a zone of peace and cooperation, nations with Arctic interests normally focus on nonmilitary security topics such as food security, economic security, energy security, and environmental security. Less addressed are the military threats to peace and stability in the Arctic. This article will examine those emerging military threats in the European Arctic and High North that are challenging the United States, its allies, and its partners.

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From a European perspective, threats to peace and security extend beyond the European Arctic nations of Denmark (Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. In the European Arctic, the looming military threat from a belligerent and confrontational Russia also extends to the Baltic nations of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, all of which were occupied by Soviet Russia after the Second World War, have contemporary land borders with Russia, and are dealing with ongoing, albeit undeclared, hybrid attacks from Russia. Therefore, when considering security and defense issues related to the European Arctic, the European perspective necessarily includes the Baltic nations. Europe’s northern flank stretches in an arc from Greenland to Latvia to encompass the Arctic and the Baltic nations. This region is known as the European High North.

It is important to emphasize that neither the United States nor NATO pose any threat to Russian security or to the Russian Arctic. Despite aggressive rhetoric coming from the Kremlin, the United States and its NATO partners constitute a purely defensive alliance. Melting sea ice and a warming Arctic Ocean, though, have opened a back door to Russia that for centuries was held closed by bitter cold, ice, snow, and vast unpopulated expanses. The security Russia once enjoyed along its previously
inaccessible 24,000-kilometer-long northern border now presents Russia with the dilemma of needed economic opportunities juxtaposed against a perceived security vulnerability. Simplistically speaking, melting sea ice now offers Russia access to previously inaccessible critical resources and the opportunity to develop the Northern Sea Route. The dilemma is that this access simultaneously exposes a vulnerability that plays into traditional Russian paranoia over another foreign invasion.

Hearkening back to the thirteenth century, when Batu Khan’s Mongols invaded, burned Moscow to the ground, and ransacked every major city in what is now Russia, the collective Russian psyche has been influenced by fear of yet another outside invader. In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Turks invaded and burned Moscow, followed by the Swedes and the Poles in the seventeenth century. Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1812 invasion ended in a French disaster, but not before his forces also burned Moscow. In 1856, the Ottoman Turks, the British, and the French combined to defeat Tsarist Russia in the Crimean War. Sixty years later, in 1918, after the Central Powers defeated Tsarist Russia, Moscow’s former allies—Britain, France, Canada, the United States, and others—intervened in the Russian civil war. That “invasion” cemented Russian distrust of the West and fueled Soviet narratives that continue to this day.

West Germany’s accession into NATO in 1955 exacerbated Russian paranoia, particularly among elderly Russians who remember the almost 14 million Russian military and civilian casualties caused by Nazi Germany’s 1941 invasion. Given that many of Russia’s historical invaders are now—or soon to be—members of NATO, the theme of “Mother Russia under siege” remains a popular domestic narrative. This narrative complements the Kremlin’s strategic calculus specific to a warming Arctic—Russia promotes an imagined threat to its sovereignty by the West so it might reassert itself as a great power. The Kremlin propagates this message for internal consumption because the reality is that the West is not threatening Russia in the High North.

Challenges

The United States discarded most of its Arctic capability in the 1990s, after the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union. It was assumed that the threat to North America from the Arctic approaches was no longer significant. The US Army refocused and redesigned its organizations, training, exercises, and capabilities for combat in a desert environment. US Marine Corps (USMC) equipment, weapons, and ammunition stored in Norwegian underground facilities were, and continue to be, earmarked for Marine expeditionary operations worldwide, and so there are no guarantees that it will be available for defense of the European High North. Also, as the USMC reorients back to naval expeditionary warfare and the Indo-Pacific theater, it is reasonable to expect that US Marines will have less presence in the European High North than they have had in the past.
Although there are no plans to base US soldiers in Sweden or Finland, the recent reactivation of the 11th Airborne Division, the “Arctic Angels,” in Alaska equips the US Army with a rapidly deployable land force that is trained, equipped, and ready for extended operations in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. The challenge from a European perspective, however, is that the 11th Airborne Division’s primary theater of responsibility is Indo-Pacific Command. In the event of a conflict affecting multiple theaters, the Arctic Angels will likely be committed elsewhere and may not be available for operations in the European High North. This force structure reality helps explain why US Army planners are considering alternative options for re-sourcing potential land force requirements for defending the High North.

Russia, on the other hand, has been flexing its military muscles in the Arctic: upgrading air and naval facilities, especially on and near the Kola Peninsula and expanding its strategic reach into the Barents Sea and North Atlantic using a “double dual” approach. Arctic infrastructure is being built or upgraded for both civilian and military use while blurring the intent for Russian defense forces on and around the Kola Peninsula. This approach is placing European nations at risk and disrupting NATO military assets in the North Atlantic along the sea lines of communication that would be needed to reinforce NATO in the event of war. Russia is also adapting equipment and units and reopening and repurposing Cold War-era bases, as well as designing and fielding specialized equipment for Arctic operations.

Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine created new challenges to peaceful cooperation and collaboration in the Arctic. First, in response to Russia’s invasion, European nations increased their defense budgets and defensive troop commitments. Second, many Western companies suspended their investment or withdrew from oil and gas projects in the Russian Arctic. Third, the Arctic Council, the Barents-Euro Council, and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum paused activities that involved Russian participation. Fourth, the European Union ramped up economic and financial sanctions to restrict Russia’s ability to continue the war. Fifth, Finland and Sweden changed their long-standing policies on neutrality and requested to formerly join the NATO alliance.

These geopolitical and geographical changes dramatically impact the defense of the High North. Sanctions and ostracism have paused international forums for communication and collaboration intended for information sharing and cooperative engagement. Should Finland and Sweden successfully join NATO, the Arctic Council would then be comprised solely of NATO members save Russia. At that point, the Baltic Sea would be completely encircled by NATO member nations except for small areas at Kaliningrad and Saint Petersburg.
Opportunities

Under the NATO collective defense mandate, the US Army, along with its Nordic and Baltic partners and allies, will play a key role defending the 2,100-kilometer-long land border NATO shares with Russia. That border runs from the Barents Sea in the north to the Polish–Latvian border in the south. We can learn a lot from the 1940 Russo-Finnish Winter War, where outnumbered and outgunned Finns held off the Soviets for five months by effectively incorporating the terrain and the climate into their tactical and logistical schemes. The emerging High North reality and the new training and exercise opportunities will influence the Army’s training, doctrine, organizational structures, equipment, and leader development programs.12 Where the European High North was once a predominantly maritime and air domain, likely future requirements related to the Arctic land domain should significantly increase because of the presumed addition of Sweden and Finland into NATO and fears of Russia testing NATO’s resolve by also invading one of the High North nations as it has in Ukraine. With the USMC shifting its primary emphasis to the Indo-Pacific region, it is reasonable to assume that the US Army will assume a leading role as the joint force land component commander in the High North, as well as a key force provider.

Since joining NATO as an original member in 1949, Norway has not allowed foreign basing on its soil. However, Oslo has invited foreign military forces to participate in military exercises Norway hosts, an approach seen as a means of deterring Russia while also assuaging Russian fears of Western encroachment. Russian aggression in Ukraine and Crimea, though, spurred the Norwegian parliament to approve a new defense cooperation agreement in 2021, giving the United States unprecedented access to three air bases and one naval base, all in addition to the USMC’s prepositioned stocks currently stored in Norway.13

The Alliance currently has eight multinational battlegroups deployed from Estonia in the north to Bulgaria in the south, with the United States providing a sizeable contingent of land, air, and maritime forces to support these current efforts.14 The United States is increasing its Arctic and mountain warfare training by sending units to the Swedish Winter Warfare Course and is participating in Arctic exercises such as Saber Strike, Northern Viking, and Cold Response. The National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program is linking High North nations with state national guards. For example, the Maryland Army National Guard is partnered with Estonia, Michigan is partnered with Latvia, and Pennsylvania is partnered with Lithuania.15 While the Nordic nations currently are not included in the State Partnership Program, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden have established strong bilateral relationships with several states’ national guards. For example,
Minnesota has trained in Sweden and Norway and has a long-standing exchange program with Norway’s Home Guard. The Vermont and Wisconsin Air National Guards are also opening doors with the Nordic nations. And, as MG Brian S. Eifler, USA, commander US Army Alaska and 11th Airborne Division, points out elsewhere in this issue, the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center–Alaska will offer outstanding opportunities for allies and partners to train together, year-round, in all Arctic climate and terrain conditions.

**Conclusion**

This is a time of change for the US Army, but, as has been so often seen, from adversity comes innovation. The threat to US and allied interests from a resurgent and aggressive Russia is resulting in complex post–Cold War challenges, most importantly the need for land forces to defend NATO’s northern and northeastern flanks in a domain previously dominated by maritime and air defenses. Still, there is cause for optimism. Finland and Sweden, if they are accepted into NATO, will add two very reliable, capable, and interoperable partners who are ready and willing to help the US Army regain the Arctic dominance called for in the current Arctic strategy. The 11th Airborne Division is becoming the nation’s dedicated Arctic fighting force, and Army National Guard units are strengthening their ties with High North nations that are threatened by or under hybrid attack from Russia. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has spurred European allies to quickly reach the agreed-to two-percent spending levels for defense that have stymied past administrations. In concert with European allies and partners, the US Army poses a significant defensive challenge to Russian aggression in the High North—in all conditions, terrain, and climates. From a defense and deterrence perspective, the prospects for peace and security in the European Arctic remain positive.

**MG Peter B. Andrysiak, Jr., USA**

Major General Andrysiak currently serves as the director, J3, at US European Command. His previous leadership assignments include commander of US Army Alaska, commander of the US Army Corps of Engineers Pacific Division, and commander of the 2nd Engineer Brigade. While serving as the commander of US Army Alaska, he led the Army’s effort to refocus its Arctic operations, spearheading the Army’s Arctic strategy, *Regaining Arctic Dominance*. Major General Andrysiak graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point, holds a master’s of science from the University of Texas at Austin, and a master’s of science from the National War College.

**Dr. Richard D. Newton**

Dr. Newton is a retired USAF combat rescue and special operations helicopter pilot, planner, and educator. He currently serves on the faculty at the new Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies and is also an adjunct faculty member in the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and at Joint Special Operations University. Dr Newton earned a PhD in defence studies from King’s College London in 2016 and is also a graduate of the US Air Force Academy and the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies.
Notes

1. Mikhail Gorbachev, “Murmansk Initiative Speech,” 1 October 1987, in Kristian Åtland, “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic,” Cooperation and Conflict 43, no. 3 (September 2008), https://doi.org/.


Abstract

This article begins by describing how Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH), as a theater special operations command, supports US Northern Command’s (USNORTHCOM) primary mission of homeland defense. Next, it explains why deploying special operations forces (SOF) to the region signals the importance of the Arctic to US national interests, as the Arctic emerges as an arena for strategic competition. It then presents SOCNORTH’s Northern Approach and how each vector within the plan achieves the objectives of enhancing integrated deterrence and layered defense. Finally, the article explains how SOCNORTH operationalized Northern Approach during exercise Arctic Edge 2022. The article concludes with a description of lessons learned being applied, tactics, techniques, and procedures put into action, and a vision for future SOF operations in the Arctic.
Twenty minutes from the drop zone at Deadhorse, Alaska, the ramp on the US Air Force C-17 slowly opens, letting in a blast of Arctic air. The aircraft’s cargo compartment air temperature has already been deliberately dropped to a balmy 32 degrees Fahrenheit to allow the eight US Army 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) [10th SFG(A)] operators to acclimate to the frigid Arctic temperature at altitude. For the past two and half hours of the six-hour flight from Colorado Springs, Colorado, the team members have been prepping for this jump as part of Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH) support to exercise Arctic Edge. For testing purposes, each operator is wearing several layers of extreme cold-weather gear, consisting of new and old kit, all of which is meant to assist survival in the Arctic. The operators check one another’s kits, which include oil-boat compasses, heated gloves and boots, and modified snowmobile face shields in addition to their weapons, communication and navigation equipment, and military-issued parachutes. When the ramp finally opens, the loadmasters and the team stare into the white abyss of the Alaska North Slope.

When the green light illuminates, the jumpmaster gives the exit command after spotting a solitary smokestack, the sole indicator among the all-white environment below. The eight members step off the ramp and into the white. The minus 100-degree Fahrenheit wind blasts each Green Beret, tearing away their modified snowmobile face shields, leaving each operator to contemplate the finer points of frostbite and temperature at which eyeballs freeze. After 40 seconds of freefall, the team pulls their ripcords, learning even canopy openings in the Arctic take longer, requiring an extra two to three seconds for full canopy deployment. Under canopy, the temperature hovers around minus 45 degrees Fahrenheit, causing the batteries in the GPS and communications devices to fail. The oil-boat compasses, which were intended to work in the extreme temperatures, are frozen, leaving the teams’ aerial navigation up to the visual ground references without radio communication. With significant difficulty they steer their canopies, discovering in the process that their risers have frosted and their heated gloves limit dexterity and provide only minimal grip.

Despite these challenges, the team lands lightly onto the frozen North American tundra—part of a vast area that is rapidly emerging as an arena of great-power competition. This exercise has provided a list of lessons learned and informed the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) that will ensure future US operations will succeed in the Arctic.
SOCNORTH is the theater special operations command (TSOC) for US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), organized, trained, and equipped by US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). SOCNORTH’s mission is to plan, coordinate, and conduct special operations in collaboration with mission partners, to assure allies and partners, compete below the level of armed conflict, deter irregular and conventional threats, and set conditions to execute contingency operations to defend the United States and its interests. SOCNORTH is leading special operations forces (SOF) into the North American Arctic to support homeland defense through integrated deterrence with an enhanced SOF role.

SOCNORTH’s plan to support USNORTHCOM in the Arctic, entitled *Northern Approach*, employs three vectors as a framework:

1. Inform Arctic capability requirements through specific Arctic operations, activities, and investments (OAI) to ensure SOF cannot only survive but also thrive in the region;
2. Demonstrate readiness to conduct special operations core activities with little to no notice; and
3. Prepare the environment by conducting activities in Arctic operational areas to set conditions for competition, crisis, and conflict.

This article begins by describing how SOCNORTH, as a TSOC, supports USNORTHCOM’s primary mission of homeland defense. Next, it explains why deploying SOF to the region signals the importance of the Arctic to US national interests, as the Arctic emerges as an arena for strategic competition. It then presents
SOCNORTH’s *Northern Approach* and how each vector within the plan achieves the objectives of enhancing integrated deterrence and layered defense. Finally, the article explains how SOCNORTH operationalized *Northern Approach* during exercise Arctic Edge 2022. The article concludes with a description of lessons learned being applied, TTPs put into action, and a vision for future SOF operations in the Arctic.

**Special Operations Command North**

SOCNORTH directly supports USNORTHCOM by advising the commanding general on SOF employment, integrating SOF into the theater campaign plan, and command and control (C2) of SOF during competition, crisis, or conflict. SOCNORTH is under the operational control of USNORTHCOM and is located at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Each combatant command with a designated area of responsibility (AOR) is assigned a TSOC to C2 SOF, and it also serves as the combatant commander’s SOF advisor to ensure unity of effort across various SOF equities and US Special Operations Forces (US-SOF) entities operating in the AOR. The USNORTHCOM AOR includes Canada, Mexico, the northern Caribbean countries and territories, the maritime approaches, and 49 of the 50 US states. Hawaii falls under US Indo-Pacific Command’s (USINDOPACOM) AOR (fig. 2).

![Figure 2. USNORTHCOM area of responsibility outlined in red](image-url)
In support of USNORTHCOM, SOCNORTH is responsible for integrating SOF in defense of the homeland. USNORTHCOM’s primary mission is to defend the homeland by detecting, deterring, denying, and defeating threats to the United States; conducting theater security cooperation activities with allies and partners; and supporting civil authorities. To support this mission, SOCNORTH’s day-to-day campaigning consists of planning, coordinating, synchronizing, and conducting special operations in collaboration with its mission partners to compete below the level of armed conflict, deter conventional and irregular threats, and set conditions to execute contingency operations. This homeland defense role is unique to SOCNORTH and is an anomaly, as SOF are better known for working with foreign partners outside the United States. Additionally, there is no doctrine or established precedent for USSOF’s role in homeland defense. As such, SOCNORTH is charting new territory by integrating SOF into the number one Department of Defense (DOD) priority. SOCNORTH understands the strategic influence SOF employment has during peacetime, steadystate operations, and is leveraging that influence to defend and enhance the security of the United States.

SOCNORTH plans, executes, and assesses SOF campaigns to demonstrate the ability and willingness of the United States to employ SOF in the Arctic, which provides decision makers a range of additional options to confront potential threats and can expand decision space during crisis. SOF’s activities contribute to credible deterrence by enabling denial during competition, providing flexibility to deescalate in a crisis, and establishing the proficiency necessary to defeat adversaries in case of conflict. Linking these activities transregionally throughout the global SOF network and integrating SOF activities across the Joint Force, the interagency network, and with foreign partners is a textbook solution that enhances integrated deterrence and builds credible layered defense.

The Emerging Arctic and SOCNORTH’s Northern Approach

The Arctic has emerged as an arena for strategic competition among the global great powers: China, Russia, and the United States. As the climate changes and sea ice recedes, there are and will be new opportunities to extract natural resources, establish new shipping routes, and expand commercial fishing. The increased access to this resource-rich environment by state actors and commercial agencies has created a national security challenge in the North American Arctic.

The Arctic comprises the northern portion of USNORTHCOM’s AOR and is the United States’ adversaries’ closest approach to attack via air. Therefore, the region is critical to defending the homeland. Additionally, with portions of the Arctic split between US European Command (USEUCOM) and USINDOPACOM in the
Unified Command Plan (UCP), it designates USNORTHCOM as the DOD Arctic Capability Advocate. With these responsibilities, USNORTHCOM tasks SOCNORTH to “identify, request, advocate for, and experiment with SOF capability and capacity to conduct operations in the Arctic within USSOCOM authorities.” To ensure this task is met, SOCNORTH created a Northern Approach framework as a guide for planning, executing, commanding, controlling, and assessing SOF OAIIs in the North American Arctic.

To ensure USSOF are ready and able to defend along the northern flank, SOCNORTH developed an operational-level Northern Approach consisting of three vectors: (1) advance capabilities, (2) demonstrate readiness, and (3) prepare the environment. Over the past 20 years, special operations have largely focused on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, leaving SOF’s Arctic knowledge, capabilities, and readiness to atrophy following the Cold War. The three vectors are designed to overlap for maximum return on investment, ensuring SOCNORTH’s OAIIs are mutually supportive within each vector. To amplify the impact of special operations, information-related capabilities (IRC) support each vector to achieve information operations (IO) objectives. Figure 3 is a visual depiction of SOCNORTH’s Northern Approach.

Deploying SOF to the Arctic signals the importance of the region to US strategic interests. SOF differ from conventional forces as they are built upon small units of action (UA) that conduct direct and indirect military actions that focus on operational and/or strategic objectives. These SOF UAs consist of specialized personnel equipped with sophisticated communications systems and equipment and are specifically trained for a broad range of infiltration, support, and exfiltration techniques to penetrate and return from hostile, denied, or politically and diplomatically sensitive areas. That said, “SOF cannot be mass produced,” which is one of the five SOF truths. This truth is important because where the United States employs its limited SOF underscores the importance of the region to US national interests. By employing USSOF in the Arctic, the United States is highlighting to the rest of the world the strategic importance of the northern flank to the defense of the US homeland.
Figure 3. SOCNORTH's Northern Approach

**Vector #1: Advance Capabilities**
- ICW U.S. NORTHCOM: Emphasize actual capabilities and share with the Joint Force.
- SOF must operate/train in the Arctic to identify required capabilities and gaps for SOF in the region.
- Ensure SOF can not only survive but thrive in the region.

**Vector #2: Demonstrable Readiness**
- Demonstrate readiness to conduct SOF core activities.
- Identify 8Ps: People, Equipment, Organization, Training, Support, Doctrine, Intelligence, and Procedures.

**Vector #3: Prepare the Environment**
- Prepare by increasing knowledge of the environment through the building of human, physical, or cyber assets and conduct appropriate activities in lieu of potential artic operational means to set conditions for competition.

**Vector #4: Information Operations**
- Across all OAs (Space, Cyber, Electronic, and Information Operations)
- Warfare, Cyber, and Electronic, Strategic Messaging, Domain Awareness, Air Operations.

**Intersectional Assessment and Synthesis**
- Capabilities integrated
- Information Required
- Space Domains
- Warfare Agile and
- Adaptive
- Electronic
- Strategic
- Domain
- Air

**Desired Endstate**
- Integrated Deterrence & Layered Defense to the Homeland

**Northen Approach**
- Interregional threats to the homeland
- Interregional relationships in the region
- Interregional relationships
- Adversaries influence
- Desired Endstate
- Northern Approach

**Northern Approach**
- Interregional threats to the homeland
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Advance Arctic Capabilities

The Arctic represents one of the most challenging environments on the planet. In the North American Arctic, temperatures average below minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter.\(^8\) Compound this frigid temperature with *polar night*, during which the sun does not rise or daylight is limited for two months, special operators face an extremely challenging and forbidding operating environment.\(^9\) Just surviving in the Arctic requires extensive training and appropriate equipment prior to being deployed to the region.\(^10\) However, to thrive in the Arctic, defined as the ability to conduct SOF’s core activities, requires consistent immersion and operational experience in this environment. This aligns with another SOF truth, “Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.”\(^11\) To be prepared for a crisis, or conflict in the Arctic, SOF must be properly manned, organized, trained, equipped, and experienced in advance to effectively operate and succeed in this complex and dynamic environment.

To assist with this, SOCNORTH creates opportunities for SOF to experiment and advance their Arctic capabilities through OAIIs supporting homeland defense. These OAIIs enable the SOF service components (USASOC, USNSWC, AF-SOC, and MARSOC)\(^12\) to develop and test concepts and equipment in support of their U.S. Code Title 10 mandate to man, train, equip, and educate. As described in the opening paragraphs, SOCNORTH conducted an exercise at Deadhorse, Alaska, in April 2021, where Green Berets executed military freefall (MFF) parachute and combat-dive operations as part of USNORTHCOM’s exercise Vigilant Shield (fig. 4).

*Figure 4. 10th SFG(A) conduct MFF into Deadhorse, Alaska (left), and 10th SFG(A) member conducts combat-dive operation through the ice (right).*

The exercise allowed the 10th SFG(A) team to test MFF at extreme temperatures and execute dive operations through seven feet of ice. These exercise opportunities provided SOF units a venue to identify equipment and training gaps that must be corrected to ensure they are prepared for any future potential crisis
to include conflict in the Arctic. The lessons learned have been shared within the SOF community and with SOCNORTH’s joint and combined partners to enhance Arctic capabilities across the force.

**Demonstrate Readiness**

SOCNORTH develops opportunities to demonstrate SOF readiness in the Arctic while building global integrated deterrence. Building upon the first vector of advancing capabilities in the Arctic, USSOF use the second vector to demonstrate readiness and operational reach. Over the past year, SOCNORTH demonstrated its Arctic readiness in exercises Arctic Edge, Ice-X, and Vigilant Shield, in addition to Operation Spartan Sentry and Canadian Armed Forces’ (CAF) Operation Nanook. These large-scale combat force exercises and operations give SOF the opportunity to execute their core activities with the Joint Force, allies, and partners. Success within this vector displays the US focus on collective security efforts across the Arctic, which contributes to integrated deterrence.

In another example, 19th SFG(A) recently demonstrated its readiness during their participation in the CAF Operation Nanook Nunalivut. In February 2022, a team from 19th SFG(A) deployed to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, in the Canadian Arctic, where the team integrated with multinational partners during a joint and combined defense and security operation to enhance interoperability. 13th SFG(A) sent seven Green Berets to the exercise to gain experience in the Canadian Arctic, integrate with the CAF, test equipment, practice self-sustainment, and explore the Indigenous approach to extreme cold weather.

During the operation, the Special Forces team worked alongside the Canadian Rangers as they traveled 150 miles through the Yukon and serviced a Northern Warning System site. To prepare for the joint operation with the Canadian Rangers, the team conducted three months of predeployment training that included three weeks at Sweden’s Sub-Arctic Warfare Center, mountain training in the Utah Rockies, and snowmobile training in the Uinta Mountains. During the operation, the team experienced temperatures as low as minus 58 degrees Fahrenheit, whiteout conditions with less than 10 feet visibility, and the new experience of “polar bear watch” each evening. Although these seven Green Berets were adequately prepared for the operation, these valuable skills will atrophy unless they continue to train and exercise in this region/environment. Additionally, maintaining Arctic/extreme cold-weather readiness is critical, as those with this experience will be replaced due to standard unit turnover (fig. 5).
Figure 5. 19th SFG(A) and Canadian Rangers pause on their long-range movement in the Canadian Arctic

The Canadian Rangers are part of the CAF’s Reserves and are comprised largely of volunteers from the indigenous Inuit, First Nations, and Métis populations, as well as other ethnic groups from across Canada. The Rangers give Canada a light, self-sufficient, mobile force to support national security and public safety operations in the Canadian High North. This combined US–Canadian special operation demonstrated that 19th SFG(A) was able to successfully operate alongside and learn from the Canadian Rangers as they patrolled Canada’s northern flank.

Preparation of the Environment

Ultimately, the third vector involves SOCNORTH campaigning in the far north to prevent or prepare for conflict within the region. Whenever SOF deploys to the Arctic, personnel gain knowledge of this harsh operating environment. The previously discussed 10th SFG(A) and 19th SFG(A) vignettes offer examples of SOCNORTH’s objectives in the region. In addition to Arctic employment, SOCNORTH is also gaining vast knowledge of the environment by enhancing its relationships with military, civilian, government, and international partners who habitually live, work, and thrive in the Arctic. For example, the US Coast Guard (USCG) has been operating in the Arctic for more than 150 years. SOCNORTH partnered with the USCG to exchange information; share lessons learned; and integrate SOF-capable platforms, people, and units into training, exercises, and operations. Additionally, SOCNORTH has an analyst embedded with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) field office in Anchorage to help the United States develop an understanding of the operating environment and potential strategic adversary actions and threats. Other interagency examples include working in conjunction with the USCG’s Maritime Security Response Team and the National Park Service during exercise Arctic Edge 2022.

Along with its interagency partners, SOCNORTH shares knowledge and integrates with other Arctic nations’ SOF. Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and Finnish SOF have been operating in Greenland and the European Arctic for
generations, building vital experience and developing TTPs to successfully operate in the Arctic. SOCNORTH, in coordination with Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR), is developing relationships with these Arctic partners to learn from their experiences, e.g., lessons learned on personnel protective equipment, TTPs, and so forth. In addition to the Nordic partners, SOCNORTH partners with Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). CANSOFCOM, which has also been focused on counter-terrorism for the past two decades, has reoriented to the Arctic to support the region’s strategic significance in the defense of Canada. As a result of this re-prioritization, SOCNORTH and CANSOFCOM are increasingly sharing intelligence and planning future combined exercises and operations in the North American Arctic. These multinational relationships, combined with continual presence in the Arctic, are critical to SOCNORTH’s efforts in preparing the environment for potential crises and/or conflicts.

Arctic Edge 2022

SOCNORTH is investing heavily in their Northern Approach vectors, which USNORTHCOM’s most recent combined homeland defense exercise, Arctic Edge, made evident in February and March 2022. Arctic Edge is a three-week, combined USNORTHCOM and CAF biennial exercise designed to demonstrate the two nations’ abilities to rapidly deploy and successfully operate in the Arctic while defending North America and respective national interests. In the 2022 iteration, for the first time, USSOF played a significant role in this exercise, contributing more than 450 special operators from the Army, Navy, and Air Force to conduct operations along the air, land, and maritime approaches to Alaska (fig. 6). The Army’s 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) and Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) used this opportunity to test air assets in a variety of different environmental conditions to identify gaps that may require future research and development. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) teams conducted joint, integrated operations along both the northern and southern coasts of Alaska to protect critical infrastructure and report on priority intelligence requirements. To prepare the environment, 10th SFG(A) and 19th SFG(A) integrated with local law enforcement and tribal organizations to conduct a series of long-range snowmobile and dismounted snowshoe movements along the North Slope of Alaska and the Bering Strait. Furthermore, SOCNORTH integrated and synchronized IRCs into each activity to maximize their operational effects.

Subsequently, SOCNORTH efforts to command and control SOF during Arctic Edge demonstrated the command’s ability to deploy as a Joint Force
Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC). SOCNORTH exercised its homeland defense mission by deploying its staff to Joint Base Elmendorf–Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska. There, they planned, directed, and evaluated all special operations during the exercise and integrated with other USNORTHCOM components. SOCNORTH demonstrated its readiness, facilitated integrated deterrence, and integrated SOF into USNORTHCOM’s layered defense strategy.

**Capable SOF in the North American Arctic**

Nearly one year after 10th SFG(A)’s challenging MFF operation into Deadhorse, Alaska, SOCNORTH tasked a SEAL team to conduct another MFF in the Arctic as part of Ice-X and Arctic Edge. The SEAL team’s MFF operation took place 160 nautical miles off the northern coast of Alaska over the frozen Arctic Ocean. The operation consisted of the team jumping out of a US Air Force C-130 and linking up with a US Navy fast-attack submarine, the USS *Pasadena*, after the submarine breached the ice (fig. 6).

![Figure 6. SEALs MFF to link up with a submarine in the Arctic](image)

The SEALs incorporated the lessons learned from 10th SFG(A)’s previous MFF operation by procuring new equipment and changing the TTPs they typically used in warmer environments. The difference between the two MFF events offers an example of how SOCNORTH’s *Northern Approach* is helping to adapt SOF capabilities to meet the unique demands of the Arctic.

In the coming years, SOCNORTH will continue to hone and strengthen its ability to operate and thrive in the Arctic by pursuing more and increasingly challenging opportunities to work by, with, and through US partners and allies and Indigenous peoples. As SOF improves its capabilities, they will be better prepared...
to deter, disrupt, deny, and defend against conventional and irregular threats to the safety of North America.

**BG Shawn R. Satterfield, USA**

Brigadier General Satterfield assumed command of Special Operations Command-North on 10 July 2020. Prior to commanding SOCNORTH, Brigadier General Satterfield served as the commander, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne). He has served in numerous additional assignments including as an operations officer with SOCSOUTH, as the first Regional Engagement Branch Chief for the Andean Ridge countries, Joint Special Operations Task Force–Gulf Cooperation Council Deputy Commander, Special Operations Joint Task Force-Iraq Deputy Commander, and Commander, Special Operations Detachment-Central. Brigadier General Satterfield is a graduate of US Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

**Lt Col Sky B. Jensen, USAF**

When the article was written, Lieutenant Colonel Jensen was serving as the chief of policy and Arctic planner in the J5 at Special Operations Command North. He is a graduate of the US Air Force Academy and holds an MS from American Military University, an MA from the US Naval War College, and an MPhil from the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies. Throughout his career, he deployed four times in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and Inherent Resolve, flying more than 370 missions and saving 179 men, women, and children from battlefield injury. Lieutenant Colonel Jensen is currently serving as the director of operations for the 56th Rescue Squadron in Aviano, Italy.

**Notes**

2. Director of Strategy, Policy, & Plans (J5), NORAD and USNORTHCOM Strategy (U), January 2021. (SECRET//REL to USA, FVEY).
3. SOCNORTH, SOCNORTH Campaign Support Plan 2021 (U), 5 October 2021, (SECRET//REL to USA, FVEY).

Thank you, Senator Murkowski, for the very kind introduction, for inviting me and for being such a stalwart supporter of our military in good times—and especially in the tough times.

To be in the great state of Alaska is exhilarating, for who can’t come to America’s frontier without feeling born again? Plus, to be back among the troops—you were my daily inspiration, those to whom I owe a debt because by your blood, sweat, and tears you Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen, and Marines represent all the young troops who built my reputation by getting me out of every jam I got them into, you who stand firmly in defense of our Constitution in a tumultuous time.

In the spirit of the chaplain’s invocation this evening, I come here humbled and happy to be among you, and with an attitude of gratitude for what you servicemen and women represent, and for our military supporters in a state known for its embrace of our troops and their families. Perhaps it’s the frontier environment that makes for this fabulous marriage between our military and civilian communities, for on the frontier and on the battlefields for which our troops train daily, it’s ONLY by pulling together that we succeed against the odds.

It’s also a delight to be here when an old friend of many decades, a native son of Alaska, is recognized. As a fighter pilot extraordinaire, Keith Stalder and I represent the manner in which our Marine Air-Ground team lives and fights, and it’s wonderful to see Alaskans embrace this all-American Marine, recognizing his superlative leadership through thick and thin. Keith, shipmate, I salute you. Since your first teenage “bombing mission” dropping toilet paper rolls over your Fairbanks high school, you have always led by example!

To the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, thank you for continuing the legacy bequeathed by Jim and Rosemary Messer. Alaska has long experienced a key role in our national defense, from the ALCAN Highway days when Kiska and Attu
were seized by our foes, to Alaska’s swiftly increasing importance as the Arctic warms and the Pacific emerges as our priority theater of this tumultuous century.

Geography is reality, and Alaska’s reality is that it will play a key role if we’re to hang onto the promise of democracy in this world, one where autocrats make clear that we are now engaged in opposition to diametrically opposed political systems.

Now I recognize there is some jealousy about Alaska. I was in Texas recently and asked what I was doing. I mentioned I would be visiting the largest state in the Union…. Well, my host fervently tried to convince me that were all of Alaska’s snow and ice melted, Texas would be larger. I’m uncertain if he believed it; suffice that he did not convince me. As a born and bred Washingtonian, Alaska is the only state we can proudly point to as both further north and further west of the Pacific Northwest.

As Senator Murkowski noted, it’s fortuitous that we meet this week, when Army tradition and Alaska’s geography are given voice with the stand-up of the newest combat division in our nation’s fighting forces. The 11th Airborne Division and the reflagged 1st and 2nd Brigade Combat Teams send an unmistakable message about America’s awesome determination to defend ourselves and, as a Pacific power, training in Arctic warfare, assigned a most demanding mission.

Inheriting the 11th Airborne’s legacy of fighting in the Pacific, of a daring raid to free civilians held captive in a POW camp, of house-to-house fighting to free Manila . . . that division’s legacy is now in your strong hands.

To you Soldiers who must test yourselves in this often-harsh environment in Alaska, you will be strengthened knowing that nothing you face can be tougher than what faced your predecessors in World War II, when lads your age threw themselves out aircraft doors to jump on Tagaytay Ridge in the Philippines. You have what it takes to overcome every challenge, sticking together in tough times the way we Americans always have when the going gets tough. It’s always about sticking together.

A couple weeks ago, I sat down to draft my remarks to this audience. Honored to be invited to a state where both its senators are admired and respected for their independence of thought, a state whose support of our military can be relied upon even in a time of unhealthy partisanship, I searched for words to share my deep appreciation and respect to our military, to your state, and more broadly to our beloved nation. Wouldn’t you know it, it was Memorial Day weekend, an especially somber day for an officer who has written too many letters to the next of kin of our fallen.

Memorial Day is not meant to be a “day off” nor a day of celebration; it is a day of solemn contemplation of the cost of freedom. As Winston Churchill said when talking of fallen soldiers, “Never was so much owed by so many to so few.”

Those thoughts colored my message here today.
Good Lord willing, all of you active-duty troops will one day be veterans, and sometimes we can best understand our lives by looking backward, especially to *When We Were Soldiers Once, and Young*.

Of more than 42 million servicemen and women who have served in all our nation’s wars from the American Revolution to Iraq, more than 666,000 have been killed. These deaths extend far into a family and community and friends left behind, and children unborn. As we salute our serving military members, the men and women serving today and their families who carry a special burden, this reality frames our thinking, for the dignity of danger comes with every one of you who voluntarily have made this commitment.

We welcome the chance to take a moment to think of those who have given their lives for our freedom, and especially their families. There isn’t a word in the English language that is widely known, used, and accepted to describe a parent whose child has died, as we do when a person loses their spouse and becomes widowed, or they lose their parents and are known as orphans.

So, these mothers, fathers, wives . . . of our military fallen are called Gold Star families, based on the tradition of the service flag that hung in homes during the World Wars. Each blue star on the banner stood for a loved one overseas. Gold stars honored those never coming home. As General Joshua Chamberlain of the 20th Maine said when writing to a family who had lost their son during the Civil War, “We pray daily to be worthy of your sacrifice.”

In that spirit, it is important to remember that democracy is not a spectator sport, and we should all reflect daily on the values and principles of our nation, those for which those Soldiers gave their lives.

What do all of us, the living, owe our fallen and their families? Remembrance, for sure, yet we also owe a keen awareness of what they fought to defend and what you who wear our nation’s cloth sustain in that tradition: this great big experiment we call America.

The Founders—most of whom were military veterans—knew that the nation they were forming was an experiment, a test of the idea that people could live together and rule themselves, guided by the spirit of cooperation. The Constitution they devised was itself hammered out among those willing to compromise, giving birth to this experiment.

In President Abraham Lincoln’s short address dedicating a military cemetery at Gettysburg in 1863, he exhorted his listeners to resolve “that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”
Lincoln knew he had to say it out loud: This republican form of government could, in fact, perish—unless we fought for it, unless we dedicated our lives to living up to its ideals, unless we were willing to compromise with one another, while working always to improve the fairness of life for every American.

Generation after generation of patriots have given their all to keep this precious legacy alive. That is why we gather every year to pay our respects to those who went down swinging to protect and defend our Constitution and our way of life, and even why we pause this evening, gathered together paying respect to those in the service, who put themselves on the line.

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen, and Marines serve a country that, even in its most raucous times, is worth defending. As a World War II Marine put it, America didn't have to be perfect to be worth fighting for.

Our veterans have learned the hard way, having lost buddies in battle, that this nation has no ordained right to exist. America's freedoms do not stand unassailed. Dictators and authoritarians look with fear on our freedom, our experiment, our republican model—a model that has long served as an inspiration to oppressed peoples everywhere.

We are most indebted to our veterans who fell, and their families, for the survival of this experiment, and in our current moment to each of you who voluntarily serve today. None can ever be fully repaid, but we listen to our better angels by respecting one another in this land of boundless possibilities, because those who faced down danger and paid the price on our behalf deserve no less from us the living.

We enjoy America’s freedom by an accident of birth or immigration, yet we all live free in this land by our own choice. It’s our responsibility to show respect and genuine friendship to each other as fellow citizens—including those with whom we may disagree—by unifying around our radical idea of what is said in our Constitution. That is how we can meet our ultimate responsibility to our fallen: to turn over to the next generation a republic in better shape than we received it.

On our Civil War’s Antietam battlefield, we fought to overcome our country’s birth defect of slavery, a heinous practice imported from the Old World. To this time, that one day of battle stands as the bloodiest day in our nation’s history.

A couple years ago, as a reminder of our troops’ sacrifices, during a Washington DC conference of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Combatant Commanders—the less than two dozen four-stars who command our troops worldwide—the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs took us to the cemetery covering acres of ground.

Overlooking the rows of gravestones is a 44-foot-tall memorial of a private Soldier, called “Old Simon.”

- Not a general on a prancing horse
- Not an officer with drawn sword
Rather a private Soldier . . . standing at rest . . . looking out across the graves, reminding us of the coequal status of all hands who served and who fell, rank being no separator.

Carved across that monument’s base are the words: “Not for themselves, but for their country.”

This is the same spirit, the same motivation, handed down from George Washington’s revolutionary army, and in a direct bloodline that reaches straight through our Vietnam veterans when they were “Soldiers once . . . and young” to you troops serving today.

Yes, from Washington’s crossing of the Delaware, to bloody Shiloh. From Belleau Wood to Midway. From Normandy to Iwo Jima. From Pork Chop Hill to the Pleiku Highlands. From Khe Sanh and the Ia Drang Valley, to Falluja and the Hindu Kush, the echoes remain with us in the tradition of our national treasure, the US military, where our national motto—“E pluribus unum” or “Out of many, one”—is what we are, the unified military of men and women, of all races and creeds, of all political persuasions, yet united on every battlefield for the sustainment of our beautiful country, our wonderful experiment, our America.

The honor roll of veterans and their families’ devotion is why we meet this evening in safety and in freedom in the great state of Alaska, vice facing the barbarity we see in the Russian assaults on the Ukrainian people. Here we join in our tradition of nonpartisan fellowship honoring our patriots who put it all on the line for this great big experiment that we call America.

I searched for words that could adequately convey my respect for those of you committed to keeping our republic alive. Sometimes in life, though, words fail us. It’s hard to find the words, yet we sense that our country is like a bank: it’s a repository of freedom. And like any bank, if you wish to take something out, you must prove willing to put something in.

For the sake of future generations, we must try to capture and live up to the spirit of those who have gifted us this magnificent country with all its freedoms that we so often take for granted. We do recognize that no monument, no matter how grand, can fully capture or match the raw courage of

• our air combat pilots who strap into those cockpits
• our shipmates sailing into harm’s way at sea
• our infantrymen who cross into the enemy’s field of fire.

Yet we are duty bound to honor every day our military’s service to our country as well as the sacrifices of our Gold Star families, they who hold dear our fallen buddies’ memories. We must sometimes pause as we do this evening, to rekindle the love of country that will ensure that sacrifices on the altar of freedom are not
left in the dustbin of history, for if we want to inspire others to carry on this tradition of perilous service, we are duty bound to pay respect.

Jackie Robinson, that sparkling, valiant player who broke through major league baseball’s color barrier, thus making us better versions of what our country stands for, was an Army veteran himself. He wrote his own epitaph to be chiseled into his gravestone.

One chilly, windy, rainy January day in New York, when I was there for a UN meeting, I visited Cypress Hills cemetery to read the obituary on Mr Robinson’s gravestone. It says: “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”

It echoes with the inscriptions on Old Simon’s monument at Antietam: “Not for themselves, but for their country.”

Let me close with a short story. I have often learned much about our country and what it represents from foreigners. I have even learned from our enemies.

As a young man I joined the Marines at age 18 in the face of the draft. I served many years because once in the military, I simply fell in love with my Sailors and Marines—those selfless, rambunctious, and valiant young infantrymen.

Very young men: infantry, infant soldier, young soldier, how they got their name, most not old enough to buy a beer in Alaska . . . America, in a dangerous world, needs the CIA and the military to defend us, fundamental source of power.

But there is another, even stronger fundamental source of our power: that being the power of America’s inspiration.

Let us remember what all of us stand for, in the words of our founding documents. Let us sustain respect for each other, concern for each other, friendliness towards each other, and, yes, love for each other, as we cooperate and compromise on our quest to together make America the best version of our Founding Fathers’ vision. What better place to demonstrate that than here on our frontier?

Thank you for inviting me this evening. For you in the military, keep the faith, hold the line, take care of each other, and stick together as America comes home to its roots, and comes home to respect for all who are devoted to finding a path forward to a more perfect union.

Thank you and Godspeed to our troops wherever they are tonight.

Gen James N. Mattis, USMC, Retired

General Mattis served as the Secretary of Defense under President Donald Trump. Mattis was commissioned into the Marine Corps after graduating from Central Washington University. He has commanded Marines at the company, battalion, regiment, brigade, division, and Marine Expeditionary Force levels. He also command the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, US Central Command, and US Joint Forces Command, where he was dual-hatted as the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation. He retired from active service in March 2013.
The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Freezes Moscow’s Arctic Ambitions

Dr. Elizabeth Wishnick
Dr. Cameron Carlson

Abstract

This article explores how the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has upended and reshaped Arctic security, institutions, and partnerships. With Arctic governance institutions that include Russia, such as the Arctic Council, on pause and scientific collaboration with Russia interrupted, the military dimension has overshadowed Arctic cooperation—while highlighting the traditional security risks of dependence on fossil fuels and distracting attention from other key Arctic issues such as climate change and the socioeconomic development of Indigenous communities. Russia’s ambitions for agency as Arctic Council chair have been thwarted, and Moscow’s plans for economic development of the Russian Arctic and Northern Sea Route are in doubt. Although some regional cooperation continues through multilateral agreements, the path forward for dialogue on traditional and nontraditional security in the Arctic remains uncertain.

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Just one year ago, after their 21 June 2021 meeting in Geneva, US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke of the Arctic as a region where the two countries might cooperate, despite their profound differences elsewhere.¹ One year later, Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has turned what his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, had hoped would be a zone of peace into a new front in the confrontation between Russia and NATO.² This article will explore how the Russian invasion of Ukraine has upended and reshaped Arctic security, institutions, and partnerships.

Unlike Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and subsequent annexation of Crimea, which had a more limited impact—restricting Russia’s participation in many organizations involved with Arctic affairs and reducing Russian access to Western investment and technology for Arctic development due to sanctions—Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine has had a profound and almost insurmountable securitizing impact on the Arctic. Potentially all permanent Arctic Council states, with the exception of Russia, could soon be NATO members, as Russia’s
The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Freezes Moscow’s Arctic Ambitions

willingness to ignore norms of territorial integrity and sovereignty led to widespread alarm in Nordic countries.

Efforts to isolate Russia’s Arctic goals from its other security aims are now impossible, and revisionist aspects of Moscow’s Arctic messaging are more likely to gain attention. The Arctic Council itself opted, by majority consensus, to pause its operations during Russia’s chairmanship, which expires in May 2023, and other Arctic organizations followed the council’s lead. In the short term, calls to reduce dependence on Russian energy are disrupting energy and climate goals for the Arctic, as states scramble to find alternative fuels, though in the long run those states that have been most dependent on Russian fossil fuels may be prodded to explore renewable energy and other alternatives.

Background

One year ago, on 20 May 2021, as Russia assumed its tenure as chair of the Arctic Council, there was reason for skepticism about the prospects for regional cooperation under its lead. Russia was under international sanctions due to its 2014 annexation of Crimea. There was growing international concern about the modernization of Russia’s military bases in the Arctic, and Moscow’s positions on territorial claims and the regulation of the Northern Sea Route were at odds with those of other Arctic states. The Russian government had a questionable record on Indigenous rights in the Arctic, having suspended in 2012–13 the operations of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), a permanent participant of the Arctic Council, and replaced that organization with what human rights activist and former advisor to RAIPON Pavel Sulyandziga terms a puppet of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor to the Soviet-era KGB. Some even questioned Russia’s economic relevance to the Arctic Council, given its overall economic weakness and skeptical attitude toward policies to address the climate-change crisis.

Despite these reasons for skepticism, Russian Arctic scholar Alexander Sergunin argued in 2021, prior to the invasion of Ukraine, that Russia was a rather good Arctic Council citizen, contributing to the council’s budget regularly and to discussions on major issues of concern to the organization. Marisol Maddox, Senior Arctic Analyst at the Polar Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, similarly contended that previously Moscow’s interest in developing Russia’s Arctic territories was “a huge incentive for Russia to engage” with other states in the region. As Russia began its chairmanship of the Arctic Council, its priorities were development, improving the life of Arctic inhabitants and Indigenous peoples, environmental protection and climate change, and strengthening the Arctic Council. In preparation for its term at the helm of the council, the Russian government released a key policy document in March 2020,
“The Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic through 2035.” The Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic submitted a draft implementation strategy for the government’s consideration in May 2020 and, in October 2021, outlined the mechanisms to implement the state’s Arctic policy and development strategy.⁷

Cooperative moves were just one feature of Russia’s Arctic policy, however. Pavel Baev, a research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and a senior nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, contends that Russia has always had multiple conflicting interests in the Arctic—some promoted cooperation, while others contributed to the region’s militarization. To compound the confusion over the nature and direction of Russia’s Arctic policy, Baev argues that some of Moscow’s interests promoted the status quo, while others were revisionist and sought to expand Russia’s power and standing at the expense of Western positions.⁸ Writing in 2018, Baev saw signs that revisionist approaches were ascendant, involving strengthening Russian military capabilities in the Arctic, expanding economic cooperation with China instead of seeking to resume collaboration with Western partners, enforcing greater Russian control over the Northern Sea Route, militarizing the Russian Arctic coastline, and abandoning arms control.⁹

One year before the invasion of Ukraine, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Troy Bouffard, and Ryan Dean underscored the common denominator in Russia’s seemingly conflicting Arctic goals: Moscow’s quest to legitimize its centrality to Arctic affairs and use its international legitimacy to justify its national priorities.¹⁰ After the 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it became clear to Western Arctic experts that Russia would seek to use its chairmanship to promote “business as usual,” which would mean that other Arctic states would be put in a position of accepting Russian territorial gains in Ukraine as a fait accompli as well as facing pressure to end Western sanctions, supposedly in the name of Arctic regional cooperation.¹¹

**Impact of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Arctic Institutions**

By deciding on 3 March 2022 to pause its operations indefinitely,¹² the Arctic Council managed to avoid the sorry spectacle that took place in the United Nations Security Council when the Russian government presided over the meeting regarding its own violation of another member state’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. James DeHart, US Coordinator for the Arctic Region, in the US Department of State, explained that

… the words ‘pause temporarily’ were chosen deliberately. This was not a withdrawal from the Arctic Council, it’s not an announcement that we’re trying to reconstitute the Arctic Council—the membership. It’s simply a pause in light of the horrific
events and Russia’s egregious, unprovoked, completely unnecessary, war of choice against Ukraine. We don’t know how long the pause will last. I think part of the logic here for simply pausing is that we are in a situation that is extremely fluid.\textsuperscript{13}

If meetings of the Arctic Council were to proceed as scheduled, this would require member delegates traveling to Moscow for meetings, giving the impression that they were willing to engage with Russia diplomatically despite its invasion of Ukraine. This has proven untenable for the permanent Arctic states at a time when most democracies seek to impose economic and political costs on the Putin government. As Elana Wilson Rowe of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs explained, organizations like the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) did not want to be used for messaging that business was going on as usual.\textsuperscript{14}

One month after the Arctic Council paused operations, the BEAC (which includes Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the European Union, as well as Russia) followed suit, suspending all activities involving Russia due to its “blatant violation of international law, breach of rules-based multilateralism and the principles and objectives.” While Russian Arctic officials issued a fairly moderate response to the suspension of the Arctic Council, calling it “regrettable” and likely to increase regional risks,\textsuperscript{15} by April 2022 Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova was calling out Russia’s so-called partners in the BEAC for their “unfriendly steps” and “unsubstantiated accusations,” which she claimed ran counter to the organization’s goals.\textsuperscript{16}

Both the Arctic Council and the BEAC were designed to steer clear of geopolitics and focus on other aspects of Arctic governance. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the insufficiency of existing Arctic institutions to manage the reality of armed conflict involving one of its members, as well as threats of future incursions against fellow members. In a few short months, the military dimension has overshadowed other aspects of Arctic cooperation, while highlighting the traditional security risks of continued dependence on fossil fuel and distracting attention from other key Arctic issues such as climate change and the socioeconomic development of Indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{17} Former diplomat Ingrid Burke Friedman notes that the suspension of cooperation in Arctic regional cooperation shows the major governance gaps for nonmilitary issues that might be temporarily addressed via bilateral or multilateral agreements.\textsuperscript{18}

In the past, others have pointed to the problem of confining Arctic security discussions to NATO bodies, which necessarily exclude Russia, leaving the region without a forum for discussing key security issues.\textsuperscript{19} As Rowe notes, current Arctic dynamics are more anchored in the military dimension, as discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, even if a forum to discuss Arctic security issues
with Russia existed, members would likely feel equally reluctant to engage with it at this juncture on hard security issues. In the case of Russia, it is challenging to distinguish between military and nonmilitary activities in the Arctic, as the Russian military participates in search and rescue (SAR) and the Russian Coast Guard, represented in the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, is subordinate to the FSB.\(^{20}\)

The interruption of planned Arctic activities will have far-reaching consequences. As Lawson Brigham points out, Arctic states are losing the opportunity to observe SAR along the Northern Sea Route, which will become a domestic passageway, not the internationalized shipping corridor Russian officials imagined. In Brigham’s view, while liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Russian Arctic can still be shipped to China, there are real questions about the ability of global shipping companies, upon which Russia mostly relies, to participate in this trade given international sanctions. Despite the numerous obstacles, US Arctic experts argue that some areas of Arctic cooperation remain necessary—SAR operations took place with Russia during the Cold War, as did scientific cooperation. Although such cooperation continued after 2014,\(^{21}\) in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, many joint scientific projects have been suspended.\(^{22}\) Rowe contends that, despite Russia’s absence from collaborative activities, “like-minded Arctic states will continue to meet and be engaged” and that a greater emphasis on subregional cooperation may offer a temporary solution.\(^{23}\)

### Consequences for International Security in the Arctic

The concept of international security in the Arctic has historically been intertwined and bound to its regional dynamics and the greater global landscape. When considering its historical significance during the Cold War, the region was ripe for conflict as both the Soviet Union (USSR) and US/NATO had significant presences within the Arctic Circle, both in infrastructure and activity. For the USSR, the establishment of bases to provide early warning and to thwart potential infiltration was commonplace. The Soviet Navy made extensive use of the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom (GIUK) gap as a naval chokepoint for transiting the submarines of the USSR’s Northern Fleet from its Arctic base to the North Atlantic, where they could deploy ballistic missile and attack submarines globally. The United States and Canada correspondingly established the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, later replaced by the North Warning System, across the entirety of the North American Arctic (Alaska, Canada, and Greenland) to track and intercept Soviet aircraft and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) targeting US and NATO allies. The Cold War period provided what some have described as a period of relative strategic stability.\(^{24}\) This stability came about, as former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and
Americas’ Security Affairs Paul Stockton notes, with neither side—US/NATO nor the USSR—wanting to provoke or directly attack the other’s industry, population, or strategic forces.25

The actions by the United States and NATO to provide stability during the Cold War and to maintain vigilance in the Arctic began to fade with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The new Russian Federation emerged as a significantly economically weakened state that no longer posed the same kind of threat to the Arctic. Many of the measures previously undertaken by the United States to maintain parity with the Soviet Union were dismantled as they were no longer considered to be necessary or economically prudent. In the 1990s and 2000s, Washington refocused US attention to Afghanistan and Iraq.26

Col Robert Berls, USAF, retired, a nuclear expert and former US military attaché in Moscow, noted that, in the post–Cold War period of the 1990s, Moscow began to redefine and rediscover Russia’s place in the new world order, focusing on a path to boost its stature to a point where it would once again be viewed as a global superpower.27 As Russia slowly began to reemerge as a great-power competitor with newfound military and economic capabilities to assert its influence, Moscow also became more assertive in its foreign policy and military actions. This included investment in its military infrastructure in the Arctic.28 In 2014, Russia’s seizure of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine signaled a fundamental change of Russian international intentions—the United States and other NATO members now clearly saw that Russia was willing to invade a neighboring peaceful and sovereign country.

Nevertheless, in the years following the 2014 occupation of parts of eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, Russia continued to remain engaged in Arctic affairs, including the Arctic Council. Michael Byers of the University of British Columbia suggested that after 2014, while Arctic military cooperation among Russia, NATO, and the United States was suspended—with some economic sanctions having been put in place—other activities such as SAR operations, fisheries quota negotiations, and scientific cooperation continued to occur.29 In fact, he contends that much of the cooperation seen before the invasion continued well afterward, while Moscow persisted in building up Russia’s presence and capabilities in the Arctic.

In the wake of the 2022 invasion, far more significant measures have been taken to penalize Russia and erode its economic, political, and military capabilities. While its chairmanship of the Arctic Council has been put on pause, it has also been excluded from all NATO and US military-centric meetings and related activities. In fact, military-to-military (mil-to-mil) dialogues such as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and the Arctic Chief of Defence Staff
CHODS) have excluded Russian participation since the 2014 invasion. The ASFR, a mil-to-mil event for flag and general officers, works to foster regional understanding and multilateral security cooperation in the Arctic. For the first time since its creation in 2010, the ASFR was conducted in the United States, in Alaska, from 3–5 May 2022, and hosted by US Northern Command (US-NORTHCOM) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Against the background of tensions between NATO and Russia, Gen Glen VanHerck, USAF, the commander of NORAD and USNORTHCOM, told the ASFR, “Together, through our coordinated actions, we strengthen our collective deterrence capabilities. Each of the nations represented here are Arctic stakeholders who are essential to ensuring the Arctic is governed by a rules-based international order.”

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former prime minister of Denmark and ex-secretary general of NATO, noted in an essay that Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine may have led to unintended consequences, as his actions served to push Finland and Sweden further toward NATO membership. Within three months of the Russian invasion, both Sweden and Finland submitted their formal application to join the alliance. Those applications are now going through NATO’s ratification process and as of mid-August, 23 of 30 NATO member nations had voted to approve Sweden’s and Finland’s applications.

NATO enlargement was an outcome Russia had long sought to avoid and a stated rationale for Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine, which he feared would join the bloc. NATO enlargement will enhance the security of Nordic states, but its future impact on the Arctic Council remains unclear. Canadian Arctic scholar Rob Huebert argues, “The moment Finland and Sweden join NATO, I just don’t ever see the Russians coming back to the Arctic Council.” Should this be the case, the inclusion of Sweden and Finland as NATO members may possibly lead to the demise of the Arctic Council itself. Even if the Arctic Council continues to operate, the dynamics within the organization would be significantly altered, as seven of eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States) will also be NATO members. At this writing Russia’s top Arctic official, Nikolai Korchunov, cryptically suggested that NATO membership for Sweden and Finland would lead to unspecified “adjustments in the development of high altitude cooperation.”

**Fallout for Russia’s Economic Partnerships in the Arctic**

Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine potentially will have a profound impact on the development of the Russian Arctic infrastructure and Arctic shipping along the NSR. With Western companies heading for the exits and countersanctions
threatening those firms that continue their investments, Russia’s Arctic development plans will face major challenges. Nevertheless, on 13 April 2022, Putin chaired a meeting on the development of the Russian Arctic, where he proclaimed that “Russia is open for cooperation with all interested partners” and especially flagged the opportunities to engage with “extra-regional states and associations,” presumably China and India. While recognizing the logistical obstacles in moving forward with planned projects, Putin called for expediting them and developing plans for import substitution and localization of manufacturing to produce needed equipment.

After 2014, Putin proved relatively successful in retaining many investors in Russia’s Arctic energy projects and attracting new investments. One year before, in 2013, China had gained a foothold in the Yamal Peninsula in the Russian Arctic when China’s National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) acquired a 20-percent stake in the first Yamal LNG project, one of China’s first major upstream energy investments in Russia. In 2016, China’s Silk Road Fund then bought a 9.9-percent stake and provided a USD 813 million loan. The Export-Import Bank of China and China Development Bank also provided Russia with another USD 11 billion in loans. In April 2019, CNPC and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) each bought a 10-percent stake in the Yamal Arctic LNG 2 project. For China, the sanctions placed on Russia provided an opportunity for Chinese firms to supply equipment for the LNG projects. With Western technology difficult to access under the sanctions regime, several Chinese firms are among the subcontractors providing equipment for Arctic LNG 2.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry urged Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOE) to be circumspect about investing in Russia, but Chinese energy firms are looking for bargains in the Russian Arctic. Chinese SOEs are considering purchasing a stake in Sakhalin-2 from Shell US. However, CNPC, CNOOC, and Sinopec are exploring purchasing the stake Shell is vacating—its 27.5-percent stake in the Sakhalin-2 LNG project, which is 50-percent owned by the Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom. The company is not under sanction, though sanctions prevent the Russian firm from accessing new financing. Nevertheless, in May 2022, five Chinese companies were instructed to stop providing modules for the Yamal LNG 2 project due to the threat of sanctions as well as uncertainties regarding transporting the units to Russia.

Although China has been the focus of attention in terms of countries that might capitalize on the exit of Western firms from the Arctic in 2022, other countries have become involved in Russian Arctic projects since 2014. India became a major investor in the Vankorneft project in 2016, when a consortium of state-owned Indian companies acquired a 49.9-percent stake. Major South Ko-
orean shipbuilding companies, Samsung Heavy Industries and Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering, have been collaborating with Russia in building LNG carrier ships for the Northern Sea Route.\(^{46}\)

The United Arab Emirates, which, along with India and China, abstained in the February 2022 UN Security Council vote condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has concluded several Arctic deals with Russia. Dubai-based DP World has agreed to develop and operate cargo services with Rosatom, Russia’s state operator, along the Northern Sea Route. DP World will also participate in the construction of ice-class container ships for the route and in the development of trans-shipment ports in Murmansk and Vladivostok.\(^{47}\)

Although Japan and South Korea have imposed sanctions on Russia, it remains to be seen whether Tokyo and Seoul will withdraw from their Arctic investments. For Japan, energy security is at stake—the island nation is highly dependent on energy imports and seeks to avoid a situation where China is a major investor in Russian energy investments. For this reason, Tokyo has been reluctant to abandon its investment in the Sakhalin-1 LNG project, from which Japan now receives 60-percent of the LNG produced.\(^{48}\) Meanwhile, the Indian government appears eager to take advantage of “distress sales” of Russian energy assets such as ExxonMobil’s stake in Sakhalin-1 to reduce its dependence on Middle East imports. India imports 85-percent of the energy it requires.\(^{49}\)

Russian experts note that their country still hopes to avoid excessive dependence on China in the Arctic, though this may be hard to prevent. According to China expert Alexander Gabuev, formerly a senior fellow at the Moscow Carnegie Center, China “will fill the void and find a way to be even more present, and Russia will not be able to push back.”\(^{50}\) Ivan Zuenko, a Vladivostok-based analyst and senior research fellow at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), argues that China may succeed in acquiring a few more high-profile investments, in Yamal LNG, for example, but may not get the concessions it seeks. Zuenko contends that China was disappointed after 2014 and felt Beijing gave more to Russia than it received. He further points out that Chinese companies have more lucrative opportunities and better conditions in countries other than Russia.\(^{51}\)

Russian experts also see their country adopting a pivot to Asia by necessity and hope to engage with a variety of states, including traditional partners such as India and Vietnam.\(^{52}\) Only Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are cooperating with the sanctions regime; so, Russia may have an opening due to the draw of low energy prices and the desire by many countries—even those that imposed sanctions—to avoid greater Chinese control over regional energy assets and shipping.

Nevertheless, sanctions will affect all Arctic investments, even those of countries that specifically implement them. The independent Russian gas producer
Novatek already is having difficulties financing Yamal LNG 2. Brigham notes that most Russian LNG shipments from the Arctic travel on international flag vessels that may be reluctant to take on Russian cargo given uncertainties about their ability to dock with it. Chinese shipyards have had to cease producing modules for Yamal LNG 2 due to the threat of countersanctions and potential shipping difficulties.\(^5^3\)

**Nontraditional Security in the Arctic**

The current hiatus of the Arctic Council has had numerous repercussions within the Arctic, well beyond traditional national security concerns. Environmental security issues affecting Arctic Indigenous peoples such as climate change, fishing, and pollution are now on hold, and scientific cooperation has been adversely impacted, as demonstrated by the Arctic Wildland Fire Ecology Mapping and Monitoring Project and the Circumpolar Wildland Fire Project.\(^5^4\) These projects, with uncertain futures due to the Arctic Council pause, have supported research about the increasing numbers of wildfires within the Arctic and responses to such disasters. This research demonstrates that wildfires have impacts beyond the burning of forests, including on the climate.\(^5^5\) These fires affect permafrost melt and contribute to carbon release into the atmosphere in ways not previously understood.\(^5^6\) The Gwich’in Council International (GCI), a prominent Indigenous community that serves as a permanent participant of the Arctic Council, manages both projects.\(^5^7\)

Alaska-based Tim Lydon provides a grim outlook on the continuation of Arctic research and enumerates examples of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine adversely impacting scientific research and information sharing. Maribeth Murray from the University of Calgary notes that the exclusion of Russian scientists from research events diminishes information sharing. She points specifically to lost opportunities such as the Arctic Observing Summit and the Arctic Science Summit Week where the contributions and recommendations of Russian scientists have served to assist numerous organizations within the Arctic.\(^5^8\) Lydon provides examples of other collaborative research efforts on pollution that have been adversely affected, including ongoing studies of the presence of microplastics and the impacts of heavy fuels in the Arctic. He highlights the disruption to the International Year of the Salmon (IYS), when US researchers were barred from joining Russia-based research studies that focus on harmful algal blooms in the Chukchi Sea, detrimental to marine mammals and humans alike.\(^5^9\)

The current pause in Arctic cooperation has also impacted climate-change research affecting Arctic Indigenous peoples. For Arctic Indigenous peoples, climate change has become an overriding concern, as their remote communities are
becoming increasingly more impacted by the effects of erosion, flooding, displacement, and pollution. As these changes have accelerated, Arctic Indigenous leaders have taken a more active role in advocating for increased awareness and action on climate-change issues. Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough, the International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), has stressed that issues such as climate-related research cannot be put on hold. ICC Canada President Monica El-Kanayuk has indicated that the ICC remains in contact with its counterpart ICC Chukotka populations in Russia and is committed to continued cooperation.

Conclusions: Policy Implications

Vladimir Putin has undone much of what his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, had set out to achieve as part of the Murmansk Initiative of 1987. Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine has served to further ostracize a nation with significant interests in the Arctic, well beyond the condemnation and sanctioning that it had experienced in the wake of its 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine. In response to Russia’s brutal war of choice that has trampled on international norms of sovereignty and human rights, Arctic states imposed a swath of political and economic sanctions. Given that context, business as usual in Arctic governance and collaborative activities were not options, and the Arctic could not be a “zone of exception” in response to violations of the international legal order.

Evan Bloom, a former US diplomat who helped to establish the Arctic Council as a “safe space” for the conduct of Arctic issues, contends that in the wake of Russian activities cooperation in the normal mode is no longer possible. Russian officials have bridled at their isolation, terming it irrational to exclude their country, which has 60-percent of the Arctic coastline and half the region’s population.

The consequences for engagement in the Arctic will indeed be profound as diplomatic, economic, environmental, and security discourse remain fractured and the trajectory of future Arctic security dialogue remains uncertain. The impending accession of Finland and Sweden as NATO members will serve to consolidate all Arctic Council nations apart from Russia under the NATO umbrella. Once it becomes possible to resume the activities of the Arctic Council, it is unclear if Russia would want a seat at a NATO-dominant table, even if the organization lacks a mandate to discuss security issues. Moreover, Russia has been excluded from existing Arctic security dialogues since 2014, and the Arctic region now lacks a formal mechanism to address security issues involving Russia.

Despite the pause in Arctic governance institutions, there are multilateral agreements (involving Russia) that continue on issues such as central Arctic Ocean fishing, oil spill response, and SAR operations. On 8 June 2022, the Arctic 7—all the Arctic Council members with the exception of Russia—agreed
to continue working on issues that do not involve Russian participation. Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov retorted that any decisions taken by the organization in Russia’s absence would lack legitimacy. Nevertheless, regional experts are discussing a range of mechanisms to maintain cooperation in the Arctic without Russian participation. Proposals have included creating a new Arctic governance organization or continuing the activities of the Arctic Council working groups, most of which Russia does not chair. Some experts have urged Russia to voluntarily sideline itself to allow important business to proceed, while others argue that Russia’s participation is needed for effective responses to regional problems.

At this writing, the Russian military invasion seems a long way off from conclusion, and Western countries and their allies, Arctic states included, are maintaining their economic and political pressure on Putin. For Russia in the Arctic Council, this has been a lost chairmanship opportunity. Despite the current high level of tension between Russia and NATO, Norway, which will assume the chair in May 2023, has expressed confidence in the durability of the institution. At the May 2022 Arctic Frontiers conference, Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt noted, “The challenges in the Arctic will not disappear, they must also be dealt with in the future. . . . That requires multilateral cooperation.”

Dr. Elizabeth Wishnick
Elizabeth Wishnick is a senior research scientist in the China and Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Division at the Center for Naval Analyses. Dr. Wishnick also is a senior research scholar at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, and an affiliate researcher at the Center for Arctic Resilience in the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Dr. Wishnick has dual regional expertise on China and Russia and is an expert on Chinese foreign policy, Sino-Russian relations, Asian security (including Taiwan and Russia), and Arctic geopolitics.

Dr. Cameron Carlson
Cameron “Cam” Carlson serves as the Dean for the College of Business and Security Management at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He is the founding director for both the Homeland Security and Emergency Management undergraduate and graduate programs as well as the founding director of the Center for Arctic Security and Resilience, where he now serves as the assistant director. He was the project lead/principal investigator for the Arctic Defense Security Orientation, a shared initiative between US Northern Command and Alaska Command. Dr. Carlson has authored and co-authored numerous articles on the Arctic region, specific to defense and human security-related issues, as well as homeland security and emergency management education. He retired from active duty in the US Army as a lieutenant colonel in 2006.

Notes
2. “Mikhail Gorbachev’s Speech in Murmansk at the Ceremonial Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star to the City of Murmansk” (speech, Murmansk, 1 October 1987), https://www.barentsinfo.fi/.


11. Lackenbauer, Bouffard, and Dean, “Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” 3.


13. Woodrow Wilson Center, “Ukraine and the Arctic.”


20. Woodrow Wilson Center, “Ukraine and the Arctic,” 1:06:00.

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23. Woodrow Wilson Center, “Ukraine and the Arctic,” 1:06:00.


36. Irfan, “Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine Is Fracturing the Delicate Peace.”


56. Harvey, “Russia’s War in Ukraine Sends Tremors.”
57. Harvey, “Russia’s War in Ukraine Sends Tremors.”
59. Lydon, “With Russia's Invasion of Ukraine.”

67. Overfield, “Suspending Participating in the Arctic Council is Tragic.”


73. Buchanan, “The Ukraine War and the Future of the Arctic.”

Securing a Blue Arctic Century
Assessing Multilateral Institutions in Great-Power Competition
Dr. Walter Berbrick

Abstract

This article explores the roles, relevance, and limitations of existing international institutions and mechanisms to address the underlying conditions that could lead to misperceptions and instability in the Arctic region. It offers a framework for policy makers to reinforce, restore, and scale current multilateral mechanisms and assess new ones to increase security dialogue and prevent misperceptions in the Arctic region. This framework calls for an inclusive, tailored approach to address the unique circumstances within and across Arctic subregions and to elevate the voices of non-Arctic states to jointly seek practical solutions to prevent conflict between military forces operating in and through the region. The United States must take a long-term view, working closely with the other seven Arctic states and with like-minded non-Arctic states. Modernizing US military capabilities and pursuing a strategy of deterrence and forward defense in the Arctic region must be balanced with persistent and practical dialogue and diplomacy. Pursuant to this approach, the US Department of Defense must actively lead in international institutions in areas where enhanced military force postures and hybrid operations threaten US and partner strategic interests in the Arctic region.¹

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Today, US defense policy makers face a critical inflection point on the future of the Arctic region. Do the United States and its allies and partners pursue a strategy that further isolates Russia from international institutions for the Arctic region, or do they gradually and deliberately include Moscow to tackle shared regional security challenges and prevent instability. Pursuing the former exacerbates an Arctic security dilemma characterized by enhanced regional security policies and postures of Russia and the West and a lack of regional forums for security dialogue and coordination among these actors. Integrating Russia back into regional forums provides Russia and the West an opportunity to build shared awareness and confidence to address underlying conditions that might lead to instability and conflict in the Arctic. Chief among these conditions and concerns is the prevention of misperceptions.
between naval forces that could lead to friction and conflict. In this article, the term *misperceptions* includes inaccurate inferences, miscalculation of consequences, and misjudgments of how others will react to one’s naval policies and force posture in the Arctic region.²

In January 2021, the US Navy published a new Arctic strategy, *Blue Arctic: A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic*. This pivotal document reframes the Arctic region for the Department of the Navy and by extension the Department of Defense (DOD)—stretching from the North Pacific to the North Atlantic—as an emerging theater of strategic competition and potential conflict where rapidly melting sea ice and increasingly navigable Arctic waters create new challenges and opportunities for Arctic and non-Arctic states. In this new Arctic, “peace and prosperity” are expected to be “increasingly challenged by Russia and China, whose interests and values differ dramatically” from the West.³ In the opening years of the twentieth century, Alfred Thayer Mahan and Halford Mackinder laid the groundwork for the most enduring perspectives on the century of conflict yet to come: land power versus sea power.⁴ Yet neither Mahan nor Mackinder considered a Blue Arctic.⁵ In light of this new maritime Arctic, the *Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic* calls for expanded regional consultative mechanisms and collaborative planning to “reduce the potential for misperceptions, accidents, and unintended conflict among forces operating in the Arctic.”⁶

**Catalysts to Instability**

Current and future world economies, supported by advances in telecommunications and improvements in international commercial logistics, will increasingly rely on the maritime Arctic. A stable maritime Arctic region in the decades ahead contributes to global safety and security. A variety of state and nonstate actors will likely increasingly challenge the stability of the Arctic maritime domain in many ways, as will natural disasters, environmental destruction, and illegal seaborne migration. While environmental and human security will likely remain the priorities for the Arctic region in the next decade and beyond, increased military activity and hybrid operations are potential sources or catalysts of instability. This includes different types of coercive and subversive activities beyond information manipulation and cyberattacks to gain access and influence in the region. These activities serve as a catalyst for other actions and aim to exploit current vulnerabilities and a lack of adequate measures to address them. Political instability, limited resources, and lack of enforcement mechanisms internal to Arctic states and subnational territories also provide fertile grounds for hybrid operations. By mid-century, climate change, shipping, fish and fuel, and
political-military developments will drive likely sources of regional instability, requiring enhanced dialogue among senior defense leaders.

**Climate Change and Shipping**

In the century ahead, a Blue Arctic envisions a scenario where the Arctic has warmed three times the average rate of the rest of the world. As a result, sea levels will have increased 11 inches globally. New technologies and improvements in logistical efficiency will reduce freight-related CO2 emissions by 60 percent. Improvements in ship technology, structure, and materials will lead to even bigger megaships (20,000 TEU containers). Global maritime trade volumes will triple, with an annual growth rate of 3.6 percent. The Arctic via the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and Transpolar Sea Route (TSR) will account for 15 percent of world trade, with 3,000 vessels transiting the Arctic by 2050, for a total of 150 million tons of cargo. By 2040, Russia will have completed its ambitious Northern Sea Transport Corridor project, with hubs and transport-logistic centers built in Murmansk and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. New commercial deep-water ports in Nome (Alaska), Longyearbyen (Svalbard), and Finnafjord (Iceland) will serve as major Arctic hubs. China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) will be the world’s leading container shipping company, with one-third of its fleet, approximately 400 ice-class container ships ranging from 5,000–20,000 TEU, sailing between ports in Europe and Asia via the Arctic. Permafrost will continue to decrease, disrupting the foundations of all civilian and military infrastructure throughout the region—most notably in Canada, Alaska, Siberia, and Greenland.

**Fish and Fuel**

Persistent growing global demand for seafood will have led many non-Arctic countries with distant water fleets—most notably China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Spain—to trawling in newly opened fishing grounds. The Arctic region—stretching from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific—will account for 55 percent of global fishing, with 41 new fish species in the North Pacific, 44 new species in the North Atlantic, and 25 new species above 66 degrees North. Global energy demand will have increased almost 50 percent, driven by population and economic growth, particularly in developing Asian countries. Asia will be the largest importer of natural gas and crude oil, with liquid fuel making up 28 percent of global energy demand in 2050, compared with renewables at 27 percent. Russia, connected to Europe by pipelines and liquified natural gas (LNG) trade, will have more than doubled its net exports from...
2020–2050, and these exports will account for 40 percent of Russia’s gross domestic product.\textsuperscript{19}

**Political-Military Developments**

By 2050, Denmark could establish a Compact of Free Association with Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Their governments will consult with Copenhagen on foreign affairs issues. Copenhagen will also have “full authority and responsibility for security and defense matters” in return for Danish government services, the opportunity for Greenlanders to work in Denmark, and annual grants. China and Russia will continue to shun formal alliances with each other and most other countries in favor of transactional relationships that allow Beijing and Moscow to exert influence and selectively employ various forms of national power while avoiding mutual security entanglements.\textsuperscript{20} The Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) surface and subsurface deployments to the Arctic will become routine, and modernized nuclear missile forces, including sea-based weapons, will enhance the viability of China’s strategic deterrent by providing a second-strike capability and a way to overcome missile defenses.\textsuperscript{21} Russia will have modernized its bastion defense and strategic nuclear forces, including new road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles, new ballistic missile submarines, upgraded heavy bombers, and new bombers carrying hypersonic weapons.\textsuperscript{22}

With this future scenario in mind, several major challenges or flash points could give rise to instability and conflict in a Blue Arctic. The first and most likely of these deals with miscalculations among increased military activities of Arctic and non-Arctic states. These activities fall within several categories: exercises and training, deployments, missile tests, naval incidents, overflights, air-defense operations, and air policing.\textsuperscript{23} While still less military activity in the region than at the height of the Cold War, there will be increasing military activity not only from Russian, but also from British, French, Canadian, American, and other NATO units exercising in the High North and the Arctic. Lack of dialogue on regional security and defense matters, driven primarily by the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and 2022 invasion of Ukraine, will exacerbate the situation. A natural fault line exists between Arctic NATO nations, which will likely soon include Finland and Sweden, and Russia, but the buildup will extend beyond Arctic states, particularly if coast guard and other law enforcement entities are included. Such increases will yield concerns for an Arctic security dilemma, especially if states find themselves without robust mechanisms for dialogue and transparency.
Existing Mechanisms

Arctic Council

The Arctic Council has seen its fair share of acclaim and criticism since its founding through the Ottawa Declaration in 1996. The Council fosters dialogue, cooperation, and coordination among the eight Arctic states and six Indigenous permanent participants. While the chief focus of the Council’s work and progress has focused on environmental protection and sustainable development issues, its success facilitating agreements related to “soft-security” issues—search and rescue, oil spill prevention and response, scientific cooperation—not only helps mitigate drivers of instability but also acts as confidence-building measures on their own. The issues surrounding these agreements, however, stem from lack of implementation or a forcing function for cooperative enforcement efforts. Responsibility for cooperative enforcement has been taken up in large part by the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), which brings together Arctic coast guards and coast guard–like agencies to discuss practical opportunities to strengthen cooperation.

Much of the day-to-day work of the Arctic Council is spearheaded by its six institutionalized working groups, which have no formal relationship with the ACGF. In addition to the eight members and six permanent participants, there are a large and growing number of observer states. Observer contributions, however, and influence over the work and decisions of the Council are quite limited and remain a major concern among observers, especially China.

Despite its progress, the Arctic Council’s mandate to exclude security and defense matters poses an immediate problem for a region facing increased military activity and challenges to the rules-based order. Many argue that taking on these matters will reduce much needed progress and cooperation in its core mission. But it is clear that rising geopolitical competition in the Arctic can no longer be ignored and isolated from the Arctic region. Taking on such matters would change the character and charter of the Arctic Council, but not doing so risks China or Russia creating an alternative forum to fill this gap. Taking security issues on in the Council also risks non-Arctic states exerting their influence over what historically has been the purview and core policy preferences of just Arctic states. For these reasons, at least for the time being, there does not appear to be an appetite to modify the Council’s mandate nor is it recommended that the Council do so.

Despite disagreements among member states—including over the Iraq War in 2003, Russo-Georgian War in 2008, and Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014—the Arctic Council has remained one of the few forums where Russia can still engage with the West. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, however, abruptly
ended the Council’s isolation from global geopolitical events. Less than two months after the Arctic Council was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, seven member states took an unprecedented step in declaring they would be “pausing participation in all meetings of the [Arctic] Council and its subsidiary bodies” based on the belief that Russia violated the core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity underpinning the Arctic Council, which Russia currently chairs. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council and ACGF also took similar steps, suspending activities involving Russia. Soon after, the Arctic Council, however, decided to resume its work in projects that do not involve the participation of the Russian Federation. The fallout of the Arctic Council’s decisions to pause and restart its work without Russia could be long-lasting and create space for Nordic countries to create an alternative forum without Russia. Doing so, however, would not only forfeit the institutional legitimacy and progress that the Arctic Council has fostered but also sow deeper mistrust between Russia and the West.

As a result, a more significant long-term impact of this decision could result in deeper Sino-Russian cooperation and a more welcoming stance to Chinese investments by Arctic states. Cooperation in the Arctic Council, especially in the sensitive Barents region, only became possible at the end of the Cold War because Arctic states had the political will and policies to build trust and confidence between policy makers and operators alike. Changing the Council’s mandate to include security and defense matters will only make it more difficult to build back the trust, confidence, and progress lost by the Council’s decision to pause and continue some of its work without Russia. This idea was reinforced by Russia’s senior Arctic official, Nikolay Korchunov, suggesting that “the Arctic should remain as a territory of peace . . . and thus, this unique format should not be subject to the spillover effect of any extra-regional events. For us, there is no alternative to uninterrupted sustainable development of our Arctic territories.”

**NATO**

NATO’s fundamental security tasks are underpinned in the Washington Treaty (the Alliance’s founding treaty, also known as the North Atlantic Treaty). Russia’s aggressive and unprovoked war on Ukraine has recentered NATO’s core mission on collective defense and the protection of its members from potential threats emanating from the Russian Federation. In this spirit, NATO produced its 2021 strategic foresight report on the Arctic, acknowledging climate change as being a “threat multiplier” able to “influence drivers for future conflict” in the circumpolar region.

Today, NATO exercises in the Arctic—such as Cold Response and Trident Juncture—respect the transparency obligations under the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Vienna Document, which governs the rules for
military exercises in the Euro-Atlantic area. Under these obligations, Norway invited all OSCE member states to send observers to both exercises. In terms of notification requirements, the Chief of the Norwegian Joint Headquarters informed the Commander of the Russian Northern Fleet about Cold Response 2022. Most recently, the impending addition of Sweden and Finland into NATO will bring two relatively small nations with advanced militaries into the Alliance, adding significant military capabilities and improving the Alliance’s ability to deter additional Russian aggression. Contrary to arguments by opponents of NATO enlargement, Sweden and Finland would likely strengthen transatlantic security and decrease the probability of Russian aggression against the Alliance. Conversely, their addition also makes Russia the only non-NATO nation in the Arctic, further deepening the divide and mistrust between Russia and NATO.

The addition of Sweden and Finland will significantly reduce the prospects of leveraging the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). In April 2014, following Russia’s illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, the Alliance suspended all practical cooperation between NATO and Russia. However, the Alliance agreed to keep channels of communication open in the NRC and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council at the ambassadorial level and above to allow the exchange of views, first and foremost on the crisis in Ukraine. Despite Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, NATO allies remain willing to keep channels of communication open with Moscow to manage and mitigate risks, prevent escalation, and increase transparency.

NATO’s long history in the Arctic argues for a greater role in regional security, yet increased tensions between NATO and Russia call into question the nature of that role. During the Cold War, the Arctic was an important strategic part of NATO’s northern flank and critical for the Soviet Union to project power, defend allied territory, and control critical sea lines of communication. Although NATO’s Arctic focus diminished after the Cold War, the navies of Russia and NATO allies have maintained an enduring presence through the deployment of submarines as a deterrent and nuclear second-strike capability.

Advocating for NATO to facilitate Arctic security dialogue would likely introduce non-Arctic NATO nations into regional security discussions. Moscow would likely not fully support this approach and could further use information warfare to sow divisions between it and allied nations’ populaces. For these reasons, NATO is not the right venue for leading dialogue and cooperation on Arctic security. The Alliance does, however—through the NRC—remain a valuable, legitimate Arctic actor that can contribute to mitigating the likelihood of dangerous miscalculations of intent between NATO and Russian forces in the Arctic. Practically, this increases the need for the NRC to coordinate with Joint Forces Command–Norfolk (JFC–NF), which has operational responsibility of protect-
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ing sea lanes between Europe and North America in the Atlantic and High North.\textsuperscript{36} Whether facilitated through the OSCE or NRC, the need has never been higher for NATO and Russia to develop a military code of conduct for the Arctic to decrease the “risk of miscalculation . . . regulate irresponsible behavior, brinkmanship-prone activities and dangerous military activities.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe}

Lessons learned and inspired by the OSCE also provides an avenue to prevent conflict among naval forces in the Arctic. OSCE member states, which include all eight Arctic states, convene periodically to set priorities and the political orientation of the organization. The OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security is closely tied to early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management. Practically, this forum facilitates negotiation, mediation, and other conflict prevention and resolution efforts and supports regional cooperation initiatives. This includes tackling the transnational security implications of climate change in the Arctic. For example, OSCE activities that support maritime and inland waterways security and environmental concerns can also be applied in the Arctic maritime environment.\textsuperscript{38} To this end, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly established a Special Representative on Arctic Issues in August 2021. This first step aims to raise awareness and promote cooperation on security issues and concerns among OSCE members. The most relevant aspects of the OSCE’s work that can be applied to preventing naval conflict in the Arctic is rooted in the 1990 Vienna Document. This politically binding agreement requires nations to exchange and verify information about armed forces and military activities.\textsuperscript{39} The most relevant aspects of the Vienna Document that could be applied and facilitated by the OSCE or another regional organization include:

- information exchange among Arctic and non-Arctic nations conducting naval operations in and through the Arctic, including manpower and major conventional weapons and equipment systems, as well as deployment plans and budgets;
- provision of prior notification of time about major military activities and exercises;
- invitation of other states to observe certain activities; and
- consultation and cooperation in instances of unusual military activity or increasing tensions.\textsuperscript{40}

Like NATO, the OSCE does not have a dedicated Arctic strategy or collective approach to address security issues. And like NATO and the Arctic Council, the
main reasons for the lack of an Arctic strategy stems from Arctic states’ desire to keep security and defense matters to the business of Arctic states only. Opening security dialogue and coordination to third parties could strain the long-lasting history of regional cooperation among Arctic naval forces. Despite these concerns, the OSCE does provide a forum where Russia and the West can meet and discuss their concerns. The original aim of such meetings—to build trust—now seems naïve, but simply informing one another of one’s position and rationale can help avoid misunderstandings that could lead to friction and potential conflict. And, like NATO and the Arctic Council, the OSCE faces a critical decision of maintaining diplomatic relations with Russia. Taking decisions without Russia, and thus effectively suspending Russia from the OSCE, could very well lead to a future without the organization. As a result, Russia’s allies and partners could follow suit. At this point in time, the OSCE does not seem like a viable option to lead the development and implementation of confidence-building measures in the Arctic.

Although the OSCE’s mandate covers the Arctic region, the organization has not managed to perform monitoring of increased naval activity in international waters and the territorial waters of Arctic coastal states, where provocations are increasingly expected to happen. Creating an enduring mechanism, like the Special Monitoring Mission, would enable all 57 OSCE participating states to observe and report in an impartial and objective way on the increased naval activity in sensitive maritime areas in the Arctic and to facilitate dialogue among all parties involved. While this approach aligns with the OSCE’s founding principles outlined in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the OSCE does not currently have the proper technical equipment to monitor activities at sea and the corresponding focus of specific restrictions on freedom of navigation along the NSR. Moreover, considering NATO’s enhanced maritime policies and posture in the Arctic and in the event the NRC remains dormant, it is worth the OSCE studying the Alliance’s baseline naval mission requirements to determine where the organization can help facilitate dialogue and deconfliction among naval forces in the region. Despite NATO–OSCE cooperation on a range of functional and geographical issues, the Arctic region does not appear well-suited for such collaboration between the two organizations.

The European Union and Beyond

Unlike NATO and the OSCE, the European Union (EU) has emerged as an unfamiliar and unlikely voice on Arctic security issues. The EU’s 2021 Arctic strategy recognizes the region as a strategic domain for European security in an era of growing geopolitical competition. The strategic importance of the Arctic region and the EU’s approach to Arctic security was recently codified in the organization’s Strategic Compass. The EU’s unprecedented sanctions on Russia detracts
from the forum’s potential role to facilitate dialogue and coordination on Arctic security issues. Moreover, the only two existing security cooperation mechanisms, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and the Arctic Chiefs of Defense (ACHOD) Staff meetings, were called off or held without Russia since the latter’s 2014 annexation of Crimea. Both forums provide senior military leaders an opportunity to voice their concerns and identify practical ways to coordinate and reduce misunderstandings between the military forces of Russia and the West.

Creating a mechanism through the United Nations to manage the geopolitical ramifications of an opening Arctic also seems less likely, given Russia’s seat in the United Nations Security Council and desire to keep Arctic security and defense issues under the control and influence of Arctic states. Finally, the nonbinding “Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea,” spearheaded by the Western Pacific Naval Symposium, also serves as an example of Arctic and non-Arctic nations adopting measures to reduce the chances of an incident at sea or an unintentional escalation.

This idea was underscored by ADM James Foggo, USN, former Commander Naval Forces Europe: “As ships encounter one another in the Northern Sea Route, in the Polar Route, in the Northwest Passage, there’s a need to communicate. There should be a copy of some kind of a scripted manner in which you communicate, a common language . . . there should be those capabilities on any ship operating in international waters.”

Recommendations

As long as Russia pursues an expansionist policy and continues to act as a revisionist power, deterrence and defense are expected responses. The Cold War taught the West that dialogue on mutual interests, such as preventing avoidable friction and conflict, is a vital complement to deterrence and defense. Considering the projected Arctic security environment and current state of regional security mechanisms, policy makers should reinforce, restore, and scale current multilateral frameworks. Though the Arctic Council faces challenges, the current mandate has yielded great progress and has been an avenue for dialogue and cooperation among political leaders of Arctic states. Changing the organization’s mandate to include security and defense issues risks stifling future progress. However, opportunities to mandate and empower actors to enforce current agreements should be considered. Moreover, the Council’s leadership should consider restarting its work with Russia, providing Moscow and the West a step toward slowly rebuilding cooperative efforts and trust. Similarly, the ACHOD and ASFR forums should include Russia again. Doing so could further enable improved integration through military exercises, combined operations, communication, information sharing, transparency measures, and other cooperative mechanisms. Moreover,
the ACGF should maintain its core mission as an operationally driven organization focused on soft security and invite Russia to return.

Despite revisions to current frameworks, gaps still exist among senior naval leaders and high-level political-military leaders of Arctic and non-Arctic states. The evolving strategic landscape warrants the implementation of new multilateral frameworks. First, Arctic nations should consider creating an Arctic Ocean Maritime Symposium to foster dialogue and coordination of maritime security and defense activity and concerns among international naval leaders. Such an endeavor could be modeled upon the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and used to spearhead an Arctic Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea with the goal of reducing the chances of an incident at sea or an unintentional escalation. While the eight Arctic nations would lead and manage such a forum, similar to the ACGF model, all nations would be invited to attend. Finally, Arctic governments should consider creating a new high-level political-military forum for the Arctic. In the spirit of the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, such a forum could focus on commonalities to address regional challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities that an opening Arctic poses to the security and defense of Arctic nations.43

Conclusion

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Arctic has been viewed as an area of “high north, low tension.” Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev’s infamous Murmansk speech in 1987 called for peace-building measures to reduce strategic tensions in the Arctic. And in 1996, the then newly created Arctic Council decided to omit security affairs from its agenda and from the organization’s founding document. Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, and most recently, its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Arctic region has become vulnerable to conflict and confrontation between Russia and Western powers. Current trends, triggers, and threats to stability, exacerbated by the absence of a regional institution devoted to security issues, highlight the importance of adopting confidence- and security-building measures among Arctic and non-Arctic states to prevent future instability and conflict. Such measures can be promoted within existing fora, but limitations remain. Governments with interests and military deployments to the Arctic should prioritize reinforcing, restoring, and scaling current multilateral frameworks. High-level forums for naval leaders and heads of state should also be considered. These recommendations outline a new framework for the US response to Arctic instability. It elevates prevention, addresses the political-military drivers of miscalculation and instability, and supports inclusive solutions driven by all Arctic states. Ultimately, this framework depends on the will and forward thinking of US policy makers and a comprehensive whole-of-government top-to-bottom policy review and approach.
Securing a Blue Arctic Century

Dr. Walter Berbrick

Dr. Berbrick is as an associate professor in the War Gaming Department of the US Naval War College, founding director of the Arctic Studies Group, and co-lead scholar of the Newport Arctic Scholars Initiative. He has authored many reports and publications on defense and foreign policy issues and is the co-author of the forthcoming book *Newport Manual on Arctic Security*. Most recently, he served as the senior Arctic policy advisor to the Secretary of the Navy and special representative for the Arctic region at the US State Department. He is an international affairs fellow and member with the Council on Foreign Relations, holds a doctorate from Northeastern University, and has served 10 years in the US Navy. The views expressed in this article are his own and do not represent the official policies or position of Department of the Navy or the Department of Defense.

Notes


8. W.V. Sweet, et al., *Global and Regional Sea Level Rise Scenarios for the United States*, NOAA Technical Report No. 01 (Silver Springs, MD: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Ocean Service, February 2022), https://aambpublicoceanservice.blob.core.windows.net/. For the purposes of this game, the results from this report have been extrapolated to global average sea-level rise.


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18. Projections assume current policy, regulatory and technology trends, a compound annual GDP growth rate of 2.8 percent, and 2050 oil prices of USD 95/barrel.
highlights the significance of observers in international organizations as well as the importance of clubs' logics of exclusivity to their ability to adapt to international power shifts.


**Why China Is Not a Peer Competitor in the Arctic**

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer**
**Dr. Adam Lajeunesse**
**Ryan Dean**

**Abstract**

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) asserts that it is a “near-Arctic state” and an “important stakeholder in Arctic affairs” with the right to a greater role in Arctic governance. China’s interests in and future designs for the region have become a staple of the burgeoning literature on Arctic security and governance, seemingly legitimizing China’s claim to be a core actor in the circumpolar North. This article questions such narratives, which tend to echo Beijing’s own narrative about the importance and significance of China’s Arctic presence. We contend that, although the Arctic fits within Beijing’s broader global agenda of shaping the international system, China is not a peer or even near-peer of the Arctic states in an Arctic context. In overemphasizing the importance of China as a regional actor, commentators have often overstated the scale of Chinese investment and other forms of engagement in the Arctic. China’s push into the Arctic has met far more resistance, and its presence remains far more tenuous, than Beijing advertises.

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The rise of China and the shift toward a multipolar world has dominated international relations discourse over the past 20 years, prompting various regional narratives that seek to frame and understand specific Chinese intentions and capabilities. One of the most dramatic of these has been polar narratives of China’s rising interests as a “near-Arctic state” and Beijing’s future designs for the region, which have become a staple of the burgeoning literature on Arctic security and governance over the past decade. Many of these Arctic narratives are defined by suspicion and even fatalism stemming from assumptions that an increasingly powerful China seeks to undermine the sovereignty of Arctic states and co-opt regional governance mechanisms to facilitate Beijing’s access to resources to fuel and new sea routes to connect China’s growing, informal, global empire.

For years, People’s Republic of China (PRC) official statements and state-run media have asserted that China is a near-Arctic state (近北极国家, \( \text{jin beiji guojia} \)) and an “important stakeholder in Arctic affairs” (北极利益攸关者, \( \text{beiji} \))
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with the right to a greater role in Arctic governance, defining the region as a global commons (全球公域, quanqiu gongyu) rather than a strictly regional space. Lacking a geographical connection to the Arctic, China legitimizes this status through extensive scientific research, investment, and economic development in the North. In an illustrative article for the Guanming Daily in April 2021, Dong Yongzai, a research associate at the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Science, echoes a common theme in Chinese political, academic, and media commentary: namely that China “should play a constructive role in improving the rules of polar governance, promoting peace and stability in the polar regions, and safeguarding the common interests of all countries and the international community.” In so doing, Beijing advances the “community of human destiny” in the polar regions. This phrase is an increasingly dominant frame in Chinese messaging, which encompass the idea that China must be more active in shaping global affairs as it seeks to realize the “Chinese dream” of what Xi Jinping refers to as the “great rejuvenation”—essentially, China’s return to the center of world civilization.

The Arctic thus fits within Beijing’s broader global agenda, which seeks to advance economic growth, assert regional and global leadership in evolving economic and security architectures, and legitimize China’s role in “contributing our share to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind,” to quote Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng. China self-identifies as a “polar power” (极地大国, jidi daguo) that aspires to become a “polar great power” (极地强国, jidi qiangguo) by 2030, hence Beijing’s perceived need to be “dominant in the polar regions.” Chinese concepts and frames that describe what the Arctic is to the world include global commons, a “shared heritage of mankind” (人类共同遗产, renlei gongtong yichan), a “window for observing global warming” (全球变暖的窗口, quanqiu bian nuan de chuangkou), and a “treasure trove of resources” (资源的宝库, ziyuan de baoku). As Danish analyst Patrik Andersson astutely observes, though, “most of these concepts or ideas did not originate in China, nor is China the only country that promotes them,” but they form part of a Chinese discursive strategy as it argues for the rights of a “non-Arctic state” to participate in Arctic affairs. Through Beijing’s regional strategy, China hopes to secure competitive advantage and access without derailing other strategic objectives (particularly economic ones) and relationships with Arctic states. Behind this messaging, however, China’s push into the Arctic has met far more resistance, and its presence remains far more tenuous than Beijing advertises. Ironically, this fact is commonly overlooked in the West, which tends to echo Beijing’s own narrative about China’s Arctic presence. In mischaracterizing China as a peer or near-peer competitor in the Arctic, however, Western commentators run the risk of advancing China’s “three war-
“三战” (sān zhàn) strategy aimed at “undermining international institutions, changing borders, and subverting global media, all without firing a shot.”

**Threat = Capability + Intent and Opportunity**

Beijing’s overarching approach to the Arctic region is framed by China’s 2018 *Arctic White Paper*, a document which harmonized years of political statements into a coherent (albeit general) set of regional ambitions. This policy focuses on four key areas: shipping, resource development, regional governance, and science. Underlying these specific priorities is an ever-present and overarching theme of respect and participation: respect for China’s interests in the Arctic and for the involvement of non-Arctic states in the region. It asserts that China is an important actor with a say in regional development and governance, as well as a responsible and reliable partner for Arctic states.

Chinese strategic messaging with respect to the Arctic promotes an image of China as a peaceful and friendly world power seeking “win-win” economic cooperation. This narrative is common to Chinese messaging around the world. Beijing’s purpose is to blunt foreign criticism while facilitating investment, scientific collaboration, and the entrenchment of Chinese facilities and programs in foreign states. This supposed win-win approach toward the Arctic is designed to facilitate access to shipping routes, Chinese direct foreign investment in energy and mining projects, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure projects, and (potentially dual-purpose) scientific research. The Arctic still holds the promise of resources and shipping routes that could one day be important as part of a global BRI as a Polar Silk Road (PSR). Many of these resources are still not economically viable, however, and polar ice continues to obstruct potential shipping lanes and present uncertainty for shipping interests. As such, China’s short-term Arctic interests are more modest than many Western commentators suggest.

China’s interests and activities in the Arctic are not inherently illegitimate. Academics, strategic analysts, journalists, and pundits continue to debate the underlying motives and long-term desires behind China’s growing Arctic investments. In its 2018 *Arctic White Paper*, Beijing articulated its entirely reasonable interest in polar research and science (particularly relating to climate change), as well as vested interests in natural resources and prospective Arctic shipping routes (which are to be expected from a resource-hungry country dependent upon maritime commerce). Furthermore, Beijing’s participation in regional governance fora benefit a rising global power aspiring to enhance its status and influence in international affairs. Western commentators’ tendency toward outrage or alarm at China’s interests in Arctic resources and shipping routes is understandable given Beijing’s broader challenge to the rules-based international order, but many of these warn-
ings imply that China should not act out of rational state self-interest. These Western assertions—that China should simply stay out of the region—also fail to acknowledge that country’s legitimate—versus undesirable—interests in Arctic affairs, and by extension those of other non-Arctic states. When Western commentators highlight the primacy of upholding the rules-based order, they must also extend rights within that order to competitors like China.

Optimistic views of China’s potential contribution to the Arctic emphasize the value of foreign investment to advance resource-development projects, scientific cooperation, inclusive governance, and opportunities to draw Asian states into Arctic “ways of thinking.” Positive relations with Arctic states are inherently predicated on China respecting Arctic state sovereignty in the terrestrial and maritime domains, as well as coastal state sovereign rights to exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and extended continental shelves. This is consistent with international law, which China promises to respect in its 2018 Arctic White Paper. China’s growing interest in polar scientific research can contribute to enhanced international understandings of Arctic dynamics, particularly in the natural sciences. Heightened but appropriate Chinese involvement in Arctic governance, with due respect for Arctic states, can bolster regional stability provided China behaves according to established norms, as it has done to date in the Arctic.

While Beijing’s positive Arctic narratives and potential value to the Arctic states secured China a degree of regional acceptance in the 2010s, its recent shift to a more aggressive form of wolf warrior diplomacy, coupled with significant human rights violations, have led to a discernible shift in how Arctic states perceive China and its presence. Chinese soft power across the democratic Arctic has fallen precipitously in recent years, while recent American strategic documents have elevated China to the status of a primary threat to the Arctic. This messaging is informed by the framework established in the United States’ 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy, both of which identify strategic competition with China and Russia as “the principal challenge to long-term U.S. security and prosperity.” The US Department of Defense’s (DOD) Arctic Strategy (2019) declares that “in different ways, Russia and China are challenging the rules-based order in the Arctic.” The report asserts that “China is attempting to gain a role in the Arctic in ways that may undermine international rules and norms, and there is a risk that its predatory economic behavior globally may be repeated in the Arctic [emphasis added].” Identifying China’s Arctic interests as “primarily focused on access to natural resources and the opportunities offered by the Arctic sea routes for Chinese shipping,” the Arctic Strategy notes that China is “increasing its presence through economic outreach, investments in Arctic states’ strategic sectors, and scientific activities.”

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Why China Is Not a Peer Competitor in the Arctic
Expressions of concern by Western commentators usually cite unofficial statements from Chinese commentators, who describe the existing Arctic governance system as insufficient or unfair and call for fundamental revision—a direct contradiction of the messaging in China’s official policy. One dominant Western school of thought asserts that China is adopting a clandestine “bait and switch” strategy designed to secure entrance into Arctic state markets as an investor but with the real goal of securing political influence. Commentator Roger W. Robinson, Jr., posits that China’s Arctic strategy is “based on a term used in the confidence racket—the ‘long con,’” with significant Chinese soft-power investment in climate research and multilateral fora designed to disarm other Arctic actors before Beijing turns “the dial to its hard strategy” to secure Arctic energy and fishing resources and shape “the rules and political arrangements governing the use of strategic waterways now gradually opening due to melting ice” for its benefit. Such narratives reflect deep-seated mistrust of the communist political system and of Beijing’s geopolitical ambitions.

In a recent reflection on why Arctic states continue to express concerns about China’s intentions in the Arctic, international legal scholar Nengye Liu notes that the rationale is deeper than a mistrust of the Chinese regime: “Most suspicions about China’s role in the Arctic stem from the concern that China may break the rules,” such as claiming areas of the Arctic under national jurisdiction and violating international law as it has done in the South China Sea. Instead, Liu suggests, the root of anxieties from Arctic states regarding China’s rise, which they may or may not be conscious of, is not about rules at all, but order. The existing rules-based order in the Arctic, underpinned by UNCLOS [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea], has a hidden power structure. Within this power structure, the Arctic states take the drivers’ seat or “stewardship” role in governing the region, which should of course be the case. A rising China, a major power from outside the region, will inevitably shake the existing power structure. A shifting order may then be legitimized by the future development of international law. In this sense, China is not a peer competitor in terms of its actual Arctic capabilities but instead a rising global power that may wield its international influence to revise the regional power structure.

The Middle Kingdom and the Arctic

In a nuanced study on foreign policy hierarchies in China, Andersson differentiates between the Chinese classification of the Arctic as a “strategic new frontier” and as an “important maritime interest,” with each label assigning the region a different degree of importance. Systematic surveys of Chinese academic and
media commentary confirm that northern shipping routes (and the Northern Sea Route [NSR], north of Russia in particular) are—by a wide margin—the most discussed elements of China’s Arctic interests. Of note, Chinese-language academic research and media commentary consistently assert China’s rights of passage through these Arctic waters. Still, these rights are asserted as part of China’s global access to the world’s oceans, not as a particular Arctic right. Likewise, Beijing has not mounted any claim to sovereignty or sovereign rights over Arctic resources based on China’s self-declared near-Arctic state status. Rather, China assumes access based on bilateral investment cooperation or otherwise in line with recognized international law.

Arctic states rebuffed what Western commentators saw as an initial Chinese push to internationalize the circumpolar North in the late 2000s. Accordingly, Beijing recalibrated China’s approach in the early 2010s, furnishing the Arctic states with messaging that they wanted to hear about respect for sovereignty and sustainable development and amplifying climate change science as the key issue on which China could build its influence. While the Chinese impulse to internationalize the Arctic is still there, it is less overt and central to Beijing’s current approach. After all, pushing for regional change beyond the tolerances of the Arctic states would risk major trading relationships. Furthermore, rhetoric questioning the sovereignty or sovereign rights of Arctic states over maritime jurisdictions runs contrary to Chinese efforts to nationalize the East and South China Seas. Accordingly, China has little to gain from upsetting the Arctic status quo—a region of limited consequence to it compared to other parts of the world—and arguably much to lose. Furthermore, China is an accredited observer to the Arctic Council, which, although a much lower status than the Arctic states, provides Beijing a modest place in regional governance and dialogue. So too does China’s signature on the Central Arctic Ocean fisheries agreement reached in 2018.

Over the past decade, the rise of Chinese wolf warrior and hostage diplomacy illustrates Beijing’s willingness to play by international rules only until those rules no longer serve China’s interests. Beijing’s diplomatic practices in the Arctic states now cover a spectrum of behavior from positive reinforcement to coercive tactics, with differing levels of aggression dependent upon the overall tenor of the bilateral relationships and the diplomatic personalities involved, rather than Arctic-specific dynamics or drivers. Nevertheless, we note a discernable increase in Chinese assertiveness in its diplomatic messaging over the past five years. In Sweden, for instance, a formerly constructive relationship based on investment and trade took a sharp turn in 2019 following Swedish criticism of China’s extrajudicial arrest of a Swedish bookseller named Gui Minhai. In an interview with Swedish radio, Chinese Ambassador Gui Congyou warned that,
“for our friends, we have fine wine. For our enemies, we have shotguns” (朋友来了有好酒，坏人来了有猎枪，péngyǒu láile yǒu băojiǔ, huàirén láile yǒu lièqiāng). Similar clashes—at varying levels of vitriol—have taken place following Arctic state criticism of China in Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Canada.

With cynicism about Beijing’s respect for the rule of law or the existing international system, it is difficult to believe that China’s actions in the Arctic will be completely benign if it perceives that Beijing can secure an advantage by breaking the rules—and can get away with it. The significant decline in Western Arctic state public opinion with respect to China in recent years suggests that China’s more aggressive tact is not having the intended effect of shaming or coercing the Arctic states to bow to Beijing’s whims. Instead, this wolf-warrior approach has undermined the win-win narrative that the Chinese sought to foster, while eroding popular support for China in all the Arctic states except Russia as a preferred partner for development. It has also eroded the credibility of the notion that China is an Arctic peer rather than an external actor with a circumscribed set of rights in the region that can only be exercised within the sovereign jurisdictions of the Arctic states with their consent.

An Economic Peer Competitor?

Arctic commentators have spilled a remarkable amount of ink on China’s Arctic economic aspirations when compared to actual Chinese investments in the region. The main argument has been that Chinese investment is a trojan horse to secure access to the Arctic, which the PRC can then exploit for its strategic objectives. This relates to the complex relationship between the Chinese central state’s foreign policy and industrial development priorities and decisions. Academic debate continues about the extent to which Chinese companies follow their own agendas as they advance government policies and how closely aligned (or fragmented) the Chinese commercial and government actors are with respect to the Arctic. Nevertheless, securing access to strategic and critical resources, controlling strategic infrastructure, and asserting influence over states or local populations through economic tools all serve China’s strategic interests—in the Arctic as elsewhere.

That stated, commentators have a strong propensity to focus on potential Chinese investments. Sober analysis, however, reveals that the Arctic states have not blindly or naively accepted Chinese investments, and recent trends suggest a strong sentiment against attempts by Chinese actors to acquire land or strategic infrastructure in the Arctic. A telling example is Chinese real estate tycoon Huang Nubo’s failed 2014 attempt to buy a 218 km² parcel of land near Longyearbyen on Svalbard, ostensibly to build a resort for Chinese tourists. Likewise, Chinese state-owned company General Nice Group’s attempt to purchase a for-
mer naval base in Greenland failed three years later. In 2020, state-owned Shan- 
dong Gold Mining announced a deal to buy TMAC Resources and the Hope Bay 
mining project in Nunavut, Canada. A Canadian review deemed it a national se-
curity risk, culminating in a formal rejection in December 2020. These examples 
are illustrative of a wider trend of growing caution among Arctic states and rec-
ognition of the security risks posed by Chinese investment in resource develop-
ment projects and infrastructure. However, displeased with these outcomes, Bei-
jing has been unable to force China's way in.

As the circumpolar North steadily pushes away from China's win-win narrative, 
Russia remains the one Arctic state still willing to embrace it. Until 2014, Russia 
was wary of Beijing’s self-described Arctic role, particularly China's desired place in 
regional governance structures.35 In the wake of Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine 
and the subsequent imposition of Western sanctions, Moscow turned to China for 
the investment and markets needed to advance Russia’s vital Arctic resource proj-
ects. Moscow has had some success, most clearly the Yamal LNG project, which is 
partially owned by China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) (20 percent) and the 
Silk Road Fund (9.9 percent). Moscow has also highlighted Russia’s growing access 
to Chinese markets and capital to counter the perception that Western sanctions 
have been successful in damaging or isolating the Russian economy.

While China's role in Russia's Arctic economy has certainly grown since 2014, 
this is not representative of a broader or systemic Chinese integration into the 
region. Chinese multinational oil companies are loath to run afoul of Western 
sanctions, and China’s embrace of Russia has not stopped those firms from dis-
creetly pulling back from new projects. Despite Beijing’s official position in op-
position to sanctions, the Chinese government seems to recognize the difficulties 
that it can cause multinational companies. In March, the Chinese Ministry of 
Foreign Affairs reportedly summoned officials from the three major energy com-
panies (Sinopec, CNPC, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation 
[CNOOC]) to review their business ties with Russia and “urged them not to 
make any rash moves buying Russian assets.”36

Relying on Chinese companies for Arctic development presents other prob-
lems for Russia. While Chinese companies are still engaged in many of these 
projects, those state-owned enterprises do not bring the same capabilities as 
Western partners. From a technological point of view, Russia cannot reliably sub-
stitute that lost cooperation with Chinese equivalents. Russian experts have 
pointed to the partially Chinese-owned Arctic LNG 2 (CNOOC 10 percent / 
Polar Silk Road 10 percent) project as the most affected by the loss of Western 
engineering and technological support. Professor Natalia Zubarevich of Moscow
State University made it clear that Russia should not count on China providing these critical technologies.  

A transactional need to avoid conflict and advance resource projects (for Russia) and shipping (for China) has driven Russia and China’s cooperative approach to Arctic investment and development. More broadly, the Arctic is an area where the two powers can demonstrate a degree of solidarity as part of their continuing economic and strategic conflict with the United States and the West more broadly. Nevertheless, deep differences remain—and are likely to become harder to disguise as Chinese activity in the region increasingly intrudes in traditional Russian spheres of interest. After all, China does not—and cannot—accept Russian sovereignty and control over much of the maritime space that Russia claims as internal waters. Connected to this are questions of China’s near-Arctic identity, its economic development, and its shipping activity in the region, which challenge Russian sovereignty and can be perceived as usurping Russia’s role in the Arctic as Moscow becomes increasingly tied to, and dependent upon, China. Russia will tolerate China as a partner, but not a peer, in Arctic development. The latter would erode Moscow’s strident attempts to legitimize Russia’s perceived position as the primary Arctic power.  

While Beijing’s Arctic messaging highlights China’s role as a leading investor and partner in Arctic development, the reality has been somewhat different for Russia. Despite targeted Chinese investments in projects highlighted as politically important by both leaderships, there remains more rhetoric than actual money. Many joint projects have been announced, but few have moved forward, with substantive cooperation generally held back by red tape, poor infrastructure or economics, and corruption. Some of the most promising infrastructure projects have also stalled, including China’s Poly Group’s proposal to invest USD 5.5 billion in the port of Archangelsk. In short, Chinese capital is clearly not as anxious to rush into Russian projects as Russian state media makes it seem. As Yun Sun, the co-director of the Stimson Center’s East Asia Program, astutely notes, much of the enthusiastic rhetoric since 2017 about Sino-Russian cooperation with respect to the NSR does not match reality: “Concrete, substantive joint projects are lacking, especially in key areas such as infrastructure development,” she notes, owing to “divergent interests, conflicting calculations and vastly different cost-benefit analyses.” From a Chinese viewpoint, Russia has touted joint development of the NSR based on strategic and political rationales rather than “practical economic ones,” the latter of which remain dubious. Diverging ideas about “what constitutes mutually beneficial compromises . . . will be the biggest obstacle to future progress” between the two countries, Yun anticipates, and “expectations and assessments of the impact of Sino-Russian cooperation specifically
on the Northern Sea Route should be focused on moderate, concrete plans rather than glorified rhetoric.”

The Kremlin views the Arctic, including the NSR, as being firmly within Russia’s sphere of influence; the region is central to Moscow’s core national security concerns and an important pillar of Russia’s economy and future development. Given these views, Russia will react strongly to any influenced perceived to threaten that position. To date, many Russian experts claim that their government does not accept the Polar Silk Road moniker, which uncomfortably subsumes the NSR into a China-sponsored initiative. Moscow has adopted a cooperative position, given Russia’s need for Chinese investment in the region, but it refuses to consider China a peer.

China as Military Peer Competitor in the Arctic?

The Arctic is not as central or important to China as the writings of many Western Arctic commentators might suggest. Beijing’s main preoccupations are still closer to home. Taiwan still represents the PLA’s main strategic direction, with other clear priorities including the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and China’s borders with India and North Korea. The PLA’s priorities, as expressed by its shipbuilding and force design, certainly demonstrate this focus on China’s near abroad (Taiwan and taking full control of the disputed waters of the South China Sea in particular). In short, the closer a region is to China, the more important it is to Beijing, with Chinese strategists viewing the world as a series of concentric circles of decreasing priority. Beyond Asia, Chinese attention is given to Africa, Europe, and then the Americas. While this means China will risk undertaking provocative actions closer to home, such as military exercises near Taiwan or the PLA’s construction and fortification of artificial islands in the South China Sea, it does not mean China will do so in the comparatively distant Arctic.

Given the small Chinese footprint in the Arctic and hypothetical military threat in or through the Arctic, what accounts for the vigor with which many political and academic commentators insist that the United States and its Arctic state allies must mount a military response to China in the region? Narratives tend to conflate the more hypothetical risk that China poses as an international actor in the Arctic with the real risk that Beijing already poses as a regional actor in the Pacific. The danger is that over-inflated or misplaced fears about China’s military threat to and in the Arctic may prove to be a strategic distraction, diverting Arctic states’ attention and defense resources from elsewhere. In this sense, prematurely elevating China to military peer or near-peer competitor status in the Arctic can divert attention from parts of the world where the PRC’s capabilities and interests actually warrant such status.
Within the Chinese bureaucracy, the polar regions are formally categorized as maritime affairs. Accordingly, Beijing’s emerging Arctic strategy is part of China’s maritime strategy, and policy documents show that China’s growing Arctic interests reflect the growing importance that Beijing attaches to maritime affairs.\textsuperscript{48} China’s rapid economic rise has fueled its military modernization, but sober analysis shows that very little of this effort has been applied to the Arctic.\textsuperscript{49} China began commissioning a series of ice-capable patrol boats in 2016, though these were not designed for polar ice conditions. China also has two icebreakers that can work through up to 1.5 meters of ice. These, however, are unarmed.\textsuperscript{50} The so-called icebreaker gap between China and the United States is more the result of commentators attempting to shame US decision makers into recapitalizing America’s own fleet than about Chinese scientific vessels posing threat. China has few aircraft that could reach the Arctic, and the People’s Liberation Army Navy’s (PLAN) nuclear submarine fleet is small and ill-equipped for under-ice operations.\textsuperscript{51} Ultimately, we see China’s ability to project military power into the Arctic as minimal—a fact unlikely to change in the foreseeable future because of the limited strategic gains to be had in the region compared to commensurate energies invested in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{52}

A rational calculus of the threat that the Chinese military might pose to Arctic states yields modest risks in even the worst-case scenario. In 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo decried China’s “pattern of aggressive behavior” around the world and raised the prospective of PLAN submarines operating under the ice-cap.\textsuperscript{53} However, as Adam Lajeunesse and Tim Choi have argued, the use of North American waters by Chinese submarines for regular operations is unlikely given the lack of attractive targets in the region, the danger of moving ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) through the Bering Strait, the geographical constraints on Chinese sea control or denial of the region, and the limitations of the Northwest Passage as a route to move joint forces to Asian theaters.\textsuperscript{54}

A preoccupation with Chinese icebreakers or even submarines as capabilities designed to challenge Arctic sovereignty or launch attacks against the Arctic states may miss the larger picture. Growing strategic competition between China and the United States affects all the Arctic states, but the epicenter of their competition remains the Indo-Pacific region. The danger in overestimating China’s Arctic military capability is that such a narrow fixation draws resources away from the real center of gravity in Sino-Western competition. Along these lines, Beijing may anticipate that any display of Chinese military interest or capability in the region will draw a disproportionate response from the Arctic states. Accordingly, the Arctic may present an enticing opportunity for China to feign strategic interest and bait Arctic states to over-invest in or over-commit capabilities to that region rather than
Why China Is Not a Peer Competitor in the Arctic

elsewhere in the world. In short, the Arctic offers potential advantage as a diversionary theater. In contrast to other commentators’ representation of the Arctic as a theater of primary and particular interest for the Chinese, we suggest that Chinese strategy and behavior in the Arctic are best appreciated as a part of a global expansion of soft power with specific interests centered around economic and long-term governance objectives.

Conclusions

China is a strategic competitor both globally and regionally, but Beijing is not a peer or even near peer in an Arctic context. To suggest that China enjoys such status plays into Beijing’s desired narrative about its place as a near-Arctic state with rights and interests throughout the region. Rather than casting China as this regional peer competitor and fixating on China as a direct military threat to Arctic state sovereignty or security, analysts should focus on how Beijing’s Arctic strategy reflects its global objectives. China does not have unlimited resources, and the level of Beijing’s direct investment in the Arctic has been overstated—particularly when it comes to northern infrastructure development. Although few Chinese projects have actually materialized, Western media and experts have inadvertently played into the narrative that China is a key (and even essential) economic player across the Arctic, relying on superficial information and media releases to reinforce China’s claims to relevance. Furthermore, China is certainly not a peer to the United States or any other Arctic coastal state in the maritime domain. Its scientific research icebreakers do not have the same presence, impact, and capabilities as the Arctic state fleets, and its knowledge of the region naturally lags those states’ considerably—even though China has effectively leveraged its reputation and limited activities to “normalize” its regional presence.

The one part of the Arctic where China may emerge as a peer competitor is in Russia—a scenario borne of Moscow’s increasing dependency on Beijing. Across the democratic Arctic there have been multiple instances of Chinese investments derailed by grassroots activism and public opposition. This is less likely to be effective in Russia where state-owned or -controlled businesses and interests are less responsive to popular opinion, and where impressions of China are already very positive. China’s influence in Russia is also unique in the sense that Moscow enjoys few alternatives to further cooperation. The decline in Chinese soft-power influence and economic engagement in recent years across the rest of the circum-polar North has been due, in part, to the importance of popular sentiment but also the fact that these states were not reliant on China for political and economic support. That is not true of Russia.
With the latest US National Security Strategy naming China as the primary threat to the international system, both the United States and its allies face considerable challenges and opportunities in confronting China as a near-peer competitor around the globe. US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) will play the lead defense-related role for the DOD, with support from US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and US European Command (USEUCOM), while the US Department of State continues to provide the primary national direction. Under these circumstances, the democratic Arctic must remain cognizant that China is not a near-peer in the Arctic. Advancing assumptions that it is only helps to advance Chinese influence internationally at the expense of the other Arctic states, including Russia. Acknowledging this reality helps check Chinese influence in the region—particularly over a Russia increasingly reliant on the Middle Kingdom.

While the Arctic continues to represent a strategic space from which to threaten North American security (as the Russians have demonstrated for decades), the region’s value for China in the short to medium term may be to divert Arctic state attention and thus open space for Chinese freedom of maneuver elsewhere. In short, rather than framing the Chinese threat as a regional Arctic one, we suggest that the primary lens for strategic foresight analysis should remain on China’s international aspirations of which the Arctic forms a modest and still marginal component. The Arctic states are the peers in the Arctic strategic equation, and however much China desires to become a polar great power, Beijing remains firmly in the second tier of Arctic stakeholders—and competitors.

Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer
Dr. Lackenbauer is Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in the Study of the Canadian North and a professor in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University. He also leads the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN). He is (co-)author and (co-)editor of more than 50 books, many of which deal with Arctic defence, security, sovereignty, and governance issues.

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse
Dr. Lajeunesse is an associate professor teaching in the Public Policy and Governance program at St. Francis Xavier University. He is the author of the award-winning book Lock, Stock, and Icebergs (2016), a political history of the Northwest Passage; as well as co-author of the 2017 monograph China’s Arctic Ambitions and What They Mean for Canada; and co-editor of Canadian Arctic Operations, 1941–2015: Lessons Learned, Lost, and Relearned (2017).

Ryan Dean
Mr. Dean is a PhD candidate at the University of Calgary and serves as the policy and research coordinator in the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN). His recent co-edited volumes include Shielding North America: Canada’s Role in All-Domain Continental Defence Modernization (2021) and Canada and the Origins of the Arctic Council (2021).
Notes


5. Sometimes translated to “community with a shared future for mankind” [人类命运共同体].


18. For the most detailed elaboration of this argument, see, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Adam Lajeunesse, James Manicom, and Frédéric Lasserre, China’s Arctic Ambitions and What They Mean for Canada (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2018). See also, Nong Hong, China’s Role in the Arctic: Observing and Being Observed (London: Routledge, 2020).


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27. See, for example, Timo Koivurova and Sanna Kopra, eds., Chinese Policy and Presence in the Arctic (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2020); Nong Hong, China’s Role in the Arctic; and Ping Su and Henry P. Huntington, “Using Critical Geopolitical Discourse to Examine China’s Engagement in Arctic Affairs,” Territory, Politics, Governance (2021): 1–18.


35. Historically, Russia has shown an aversion to a Chinese presence on this route. In 2012, Russia blocked Chinese vessels from operating in the NSR, causing Beijing to suspend its research activities during China’s fifth Arctic expedition. Ling Guo and Steven Lloyd Wilson, “China, Russia, and Arctic Geopolitics,” The Diplomat, 29 March 2020.


38. While the precise nature of that sovereignty remains somewhat ambiguous, Moscow claims full sovereignty over key straits along the NSR (as historic waters), while its published maps appear to extend its jurisdiction to the limits of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which Russia claims to manage in the same manner as internal waters. Ian Anthony, Ekaterina Klimenko, and Fei Su, “A Strategic Triangle in The Arctic? Implications Of China–Russia–United States Power Dynamics for Regional Security,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 3 (March 2021), 11.


40. In 2014 and 2015, Moscow created 20 special economic zones to attract foreign investment to Russia’s Far East. Only six have actually secured any Chinese investment, which totaled a mere USD 38 million between 2015 and 2018. Mikhail Krutikhin, “Power of Siberia or power of China?” Al Jazeera, 19 December 2019.


42. Yun Sun, “The Northern Sea Route.”


46. Lackenbauer, et al., China’s Arctic Ambitions, 29, 37.

47. The most probable crisis flashpoint between China and the United States is the Indo-Pacifc, which requires modern warships that can deploy across the Pacific and deter revisionist behavior in that region. Ryan Dean and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “China’s Arctic Gambit? Contemplating Possible Strategies,” NAADSN Policy Brief (April 2020), https://www.naadsn.ca/.


50. OSD, Annual Report to Congress, 2 May 2019, iii.


52. Lackenbauer, et al., China’s Arctic Ambitions.


54. Lajeunesse and Choi, “Here There Be Dragons?”

55. Dean and Lackenbauer, “China’s Arctic Gambit?”
56. See, for example, Brady, *China as a Polar Great Power*; and David Wright, *The Dragon and Great Power Rivalry at the Top of the World: China's Hawkish, Revisionist Voices Within Mainstream Discourse on Arctic Affairs* (Ottawa: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2018), https://www.cgai.ca/.

57. Millard and Lackenbauer, “Trojan Dragons?”

58. Sergei Ivanov, Klára Dubravčíková, Richard Q. Turcsányi, et al., “Russian Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19: A Suspicious Ally” (Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2021), https://ceias.eu/. While Russian perceptions are broadly supportive of this relationship, it is not a straightforward embrace of China. Russians approve of Chinese investment and the BRI; however, that support is not overwhelming. This lukewarm support indicates Moscow views China’s money and markets as a necessity but also as a risk. If Chinese investment increases in the Russian Arctic in the wake of the broad Western pull-out, this may either cement China’s position as Russia’s investor of choice or exacerbate existing fears of overreliance on China. Much will depend on the conditions of China’s future investment and whether Russians perceive themselves as being taken advantage of.
Melting a Chinese Iceberg
CAPT TUAN N. PHAM, USN, RETIRED

Abstract

For the Chinese Communist Party, the twenty-first century marks the inevitable return of the Middle Kingdom to its “rightful place” as the preeminent power in the world. The Arctic fits into this expansive and ambitious Chinese Dream to supplant the United States as the preeminent global power by 2050. China views the Arctic to be one of the world’s new strategic frontiers, disposed for competition and resource exploitation. China privately seeks to become a polar great power while publicly moderating its strategic goal until it gains unstoppable momentum.

Beijing consequently pursues a classic Chinese strategy, first proposed by Sun Tzu, to “win without fighting” in the Arctic by setting the stage, seizing the initiative, and consolidating wins. To counter this asymmetric strategy, Washington should also heed Sun Tzu and pursue an enduring cumulative strategy of integrated deterrence and gray-zone campaigning to undercut China’s Arctic strategy, weaken the developing Sino-Russian Arctic alliance, curb Beijing’s aspiring Arctic Council ambition, and undermine China’s developing Arctic partnerships by holistically, asymmetrically, and continuously imposing costs, encouraging restraints, denying the benefits or objectives, and winning the narratives.

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Climate scientists project the Arctic Ocean will become ice-free by 2040. Political scientists likewise forecast China may become a polar great power, capable of exercising maritime superiority (sea denial transitioning to sea control) over the disputed and contested Arctic Ocean much like the more headline-grabbing South China Sea (SCS). If so, a dominating and persistent Chinese maritime presence in the Arctic will be normal and routine in the future. Consider the following scenario:

A Chinese nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine patrols near the North Pole. A Chinese surface action group operates in the Chukchi Sea. Chinese naval combatants and patrol aircraft exercise freedom of navigation operations in the Arctic seas of Beaufort, Chukchi, East Siberian, Laptev, Kara, Barents, Greenland, and Lincoln. Chinese air and naval forces conduct joint maritime exercises in the polar region. Chinese commercial shipping transits the opened Arctic shipping lanes. Chinese fishing fleets, accompanied by Chinese maritime militias (“little blue men”), roam the ice-free Arctic waters in search of migrating fish
stocks. Chinese oil and gas corporations explore and exploit the estimated 90 billion barrels of oil reserves (13 percent of the world’s total undiscovered oil) and 1,670 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves (30 percent of the world’s total undiscovered natural gas) under the Arctic Ocean.\(^3\) And last, but certainly not least, Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessels, already the world’s largest coast guard and rapidly growing, sail throughout the Arctic safeguarding Chinese national interests in shipping, fishing, and energy extraction and exercising de facto jurisdictional authority over the strategic waterway.\(^4\)

While conjectural now, this dystopian future could become a stark reality if the extant geopolitical trends persist. Beijing is on track to reset the liberal international order in China’s favor, creating new global norms with Chinese characteristics. China could dominate the key interconnected domains across the instruments of national power and eventually realize the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) ambitious and expansive Chinese Dream to supplant the United States as the preeminent global power by 2050.\(^5\) Therefore, the strategic risk to the current global rules-based order is too high to defer action or to do nothing to alter this strategic arc. The time to act is today. It is much easier to slow or stop a small iceberg now than it is to wait for it to grow in size and momentum later. Inaction, or worse yet, retrenchment, further emboldens Beijing’s strategic ambitions and reinforces the ingrained belief that China is an unstoppable rising power and America is an irreversibly waning power. For the CCP, the twenty-first century marks the inevitable return of the Middle Kingdom to its “rightful place” as the preeminent power in the world.

**China’s Arctic Approach**

Like in other disputed and contested maritime zones, China tailors its hybrid strategy for the Arctic to the local geopolitical conditions. Unlike the relatively ungoverned SCS, the Arctic is what researcher Elizabeth Buchanan called, a “complex zone of functional governance structures and adherence to agreed international laws” in which Beijing brazenly injects itself to exploit the region’s vast resources.\(^6\) China seeks to indirectly and incrementally undermine the longstanding Arctic order through “cooperative state-to-state, multilateral, and environmental narratives to disguise aggressive and assertive ambitions and operate beneath the threshold of overt strategic challenge.”\(^7\) Beijing obfuscates its strategic intent with disingenuous noble activities, including efforts to redefine the Arctic as a “global common for all of mankind.” The self-serving initiative is diametrically opposed to Beijing’s strategic diplomatic and legal positions on the SCS, which China hypocritically considers territorial vice international waters. As such,
the CCP believes it has the inherent right to dictate who can occupy territories, exploit resources, and conduct commercial and military activities in the SCS.

With the Northern Sea Route (NSR), Russia mirrors China's jurisdictional exceptionalism in the SCS. Moscow argues that the NSR constitutes “straits used for internal navigation,” and is not subject to all United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) rights, such as innocent passage. While China steadfastly defends its jurisdictional exceptionalism in the SCS, Beijing contradictorily rejects Russia's application of the same jurisdictional exceptionalism along the NSR. Moscow interestingly remains neutral of Beijing's positions and actions in the SCS; challenges, but not assertively, Beijing's contrarian positions and actions in the Arctic; and even seeks to expand Sino-Russian economic integration and development in the Arctic—a form of commercial realpolitik.

While double standards and political expediency are nothing new in international politics, the ways in which Beijing selectively interprets international laws to support China's national interests is a common practice for the CCP. Beijing conveniently disregards the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague's 2016 landmark ruling that dismissed China's excessive claims to much of the SCS, while it also opportunistically manipulates international laws and politics to assert China's own claims to Arctic rights.

Beijing pursues a classic Chinese strategy, first proposed by Sun Tzu, to “win without fighting” in the Arctic by setting the stage, seizing the initiative, and consolidating wins. First, China uses legal warfare (lawfare) to create legal concepts, supporting domestic laws and policies, and citing facts on the ground to advance its strategic interests and complementary strategic narratives. Second, Beijing exercises China's instruments of national power—diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME)—to exploit vulnerable national seams by cajoling or, when necessary, coercing international legal and political acquiescence and then influencing international laws and politics in its favor. Third, Beijing uses its economic and financial power to integrate itself into standing and emerging international governing bodies and fora to solidify and protect China's gains, extract the benefits, and reshape the international structures to nullify any possibility of strategic reversal.

Setting the Stage (Yesterday): Near-Arctic State

Three years ago, this author forewarned of Chinese growing presence and activities in the Arctic and outlined developing Chinese Arctic policies. In January 2018, Beijing issued its first and only white paper on the Arctic, its pseudo Arctic strategy. There, Beijing boldly proclaimed China's strategic intent to partake in the vague and broad activities of its self-proclaimed status as a “near-Arctic
state”—developing Arctic shipping routes; seeking and extracting oil, gas, mineral, and other material resources; using and conserving fisheries; promoting Arctic tourism; and so on.\textsuperscript{15} There is, unsurprisingly, no legal or international definition of a \textit{near-Arctic state}. China conveniently invented the concept and coined the term to inject itself into the Arctic dialogue, empower its observer status on the Arctic Council, advance its goal of full membership in that exclusive Arctic club, and lay the foundation for future Arctic claims.

Beijing justifies its broad political, economic, and legal stance by saying “the natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China’s climate system and ecological environment, and, in turn, on its economic interests.”\textsuperscript{16} In other words, China staks its tenuous and flimsy Arctic claims on geographic proximity, effects of global climate change on the country, expanding cross-regional diplomacy with extant Nordic states, and the broad legal position that although non-Arctic countries are not in a position to claim “territorial sovereignty,” they do have the right to engage in scientific research, navigation, and economic activities.\textsuperscript{17} And while vaguely underscoring that China will respect and comply with international laws like UNCLOS in a “lawful and rational matter,” a deliberately ambiguous interpretation, Beijing was nevertheless quite explicit and emphatic in the white paper that China will use Arctic resources to “pursue its own national interests” much like it does in the SCS.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, China is ready and willing to compete in this new contested domain—“with the increase of the Arctic’s strategic value, international political and economic forces are falling into complex conflicts and fierce competitions for interests in the Arctic . . . the multipolarization trend of the Greater Arctic region is becoming increasingly evident.”\textsuperscript{19}

Beijing reinforced the political and diplomatic rhetoric with “hard” military, scientific, and economic activities to establish an Arctic foothold.\textsuperscript{20} It also conducted soft, gray-zone activities (below the level of armed conflict) to gain access in and influence over Arctic nations and their citizens through investments in infrastructures and resources, which may serve military or security as well as commercial purposes but often make poor or little economic sense, as well as scientific research that advances military and commercial interests.\textsuperscript{21} In the Arctic, where working capital is much needed to fund basic infrastructures, there are many opportunities for Chinese investment campaigns. So, while the Arctic remains peaceful for now, Chinese influence and coercion are quickly growing, and dual-purpose capabilities are rapidly increasing opportunities for future Chinese expansion and competition.
Seizing the Initiative (Today): Sino-Russian Arctic Alliance

Beijing opportunistically leveraged Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to expand its strategic collaboration with Moscow; extend its presence, influence, and partnership in the Arctic; and advance its strategic goals to realize its Chinese Dream. On 4 February, on the sideline of the Beijing Olympics and ahead of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a joint statement on international relations entering a new era. They confidently declared a shift in the global order, one in which the United States does not lead. Multipolarity, the redistribution of world power, is the new global order where the “United Nations play a greater role in international affairs vice a hegemon [United States] that asserts its own biased democratic standards on other countries” and poses “serious threats to global and regional peace and stability and undermines the stability of the world order.”

The most noteworthy aspect of their bold declaration is a refinement of the Sino-Russian strategic relationship. Beijing and Moscow previously defined their relationship as the “three do’s and three don’ts”—do be good neighbors, good partners, and good friends; don’t enter an alliance, oppose each other, or act against a third party. The February joint statement redefined the relationship in terms of the “three no’s” (no end lines, no forbidden areas, and no upper limits) that portend a maturing strategic alliance of convenience. In substance, the joint statement identifies collaborative areas in which China and Russia will cooperate, including development, technology, transportation, climate change, health, terrorism, arms control, artificial intelligence, and finally, the Arctic. Putin promised Xi cooperation on future joint Arctic development projects and trade in return for the de facto diplomatic and economic support of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The scope, nature, and extent of previously mentioned Arctic cooperation remains publicly undefined to date.

The durability and sustainability of such a promise is tenuous. Xi and Putin do not play by established diplomatic rules or social norms. They often make empty promises to achieve their short-term objectives and buy time and space to set the conditions to realize their long-term goals. They accordingly honor agreements to the extent that such serve their ends. They have no qualms about breaking their ends of bargains after the other party has fulfilled its obligations. For Xi, the Russian promise lays the groundwork for future Arctic endeavors and provides a steppingstone toward becoming a polar great power that will undoubtedly come in conflict with Russian Arctic interests and ambitions. Hence, it is likely that Xi will opportunistically exploit the economic sanctions, political condemnation, and diplomatic isolation placed on Putin for his Ukraine incursion to push for greater
concessions on Arctic cooperation and enhance China’s strategic positions for future Arctic competition.

**Consolidating Wins (Tomorrow): Arctic Council**

The still evolving Sino-Russian Arctic alliance is mostly driven by political and business interests and is therefore transitory in nature. The tipping point will be when the political costs outweigh the economic benefits. The critical question moving forward is whether Beijing can exploit the current strategic window of opportunity to garner enough gains and translate them into enduring wins. More importantly, though, will be how soon China can start reaping the economic benefits of the relationship. If China can assert itself and gain an advantage over Russia, we can expect Beijing will renew its efforts to become a full member of the Arctic Council, after which it will then recast the international structures to consolidate and preserve China’s gains by blocking or nullifying future international actions to reverse the new reality.

The developing Sino-Russian Arctic alliance and Beijing’s enduring aspiration to become an Arctic Council member are consistent with China’s current understanding of how the Arctic fits into the Chinese Dream. Last year, the Brookings Institution published a comprehensive report examining China’s internal discourse on the Arctic, as well as Beijing’s activities and ambitions across the region. The report underscores the CCP’s propensity to speak with two voices when it comes to the Arctic—a guarded external voice aimed at foreign audiences and an unguarded internal one highlighting competition and Beijing’s Arctic ambitions. The report goes on to summarize the ongoing Chinese campaign of influence and coercion and provides geopolitical context to how Washington can alter the extant strategic arc and shape the future Arctic environment in the United States’ favor. Key findings include:

- China privately seeking to become a polar great power but publicly moderating its strategic goal, in accordance with Deng Xiaoping’s dictum of “observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, hide our capacities and bide our time, be good at maintaining a low profile, and never claim leadership.”

- China claiming the Arctic to be one of the world’s “new strategic frontiers,” disposed for competition and resource exploitation. Beijing mistakenly views the Arctic as ungoverned or undergoverned spaces in which China must prepare for competition over the region’s vast resources. CCP officials have also unrealistically suggested that China’s share of these resources should be commensurate to its share of the global population: about 20 percent.
Chinese military thinking considers the Arctic as a domain for future military competition. Military texts note that the great powers will increasingly focus on the struggle over and control of global public spaces and argue that China cannot rule out the possibility of using force in this coming scramble for new strategic spaces.

Chinese policy makers and policies propose state investments in Arctic science to strengthen China’s strategic position and influence in the Arctic. They intend Arctic science to cultivate China’s identity as an Arctic state and thus secure resources and access.

Beijing publicly supports Arctic governance but privately expresses concern that China will be excluded from the region’s vast resources. Beijing advocates for alternative Chinese governance concepts—in some cases to supplement and in other cases to operate outside of the Arctic Council to include the controversial Polar Silk Road.

Acquiescing to and accommodating China’s Arctic ambitions seldom engender enduring goodwill. Norway was the first country to allow China to build an Arctic science station (on Svalbard), and Sweden likewise was the first country to allow China to build its own satellite facility in the region. Both goodwill and good faith gestures did not insulate either country from later economic and diplomatic coercion for state actions that Beijing perceived contrary to its national interests.

Arctic dependence on trade with China is minimal for now. For the five smallest Arctic economies—Sweden, Norway, Denmark (Greenland), Finland, and Iceland—China only accounts for 4 percent of their exports.

China heavily invests in Arctic diplomacy to boost its regional influence. Beijing aggressively lobbied to become an Arctic Council observer, actively participated in regional fora, and established its own diplomatic and regional initiatives to deepen relations with Arctic governments, industries, and nongovernmental organizations.

China’s military posture in the Arctic has steadily and subtly increased, and its growing scientific activities provide complementary strategic advantage. China deployed naval vessels to the Arctic, including to Alaska and later to Denmark, Sweden, and Finland for goodwill visits. China has built its first indigenously produced icebreaker, the Xuelong 2, plans for more conventional heavy icebreakers, and is considering investments in nuclear-powered icebreakers that can also serve as mobile power stations.
China’s scientific activities in the Arctic provide greater operational access and experience. China sent 10 scientific expeditions into the polar region; established science and satellite facilities in Norway, Iceland, and Sweden, while pursuing additional facilities in Canada and Greenland; and used the Arctic as a testing ground for new dual-use capabilities.

China’s infrastructure investments in the Arctic are oftentimes dual-use, raising suspicions and apprehensions about Beijing’s strategic intent.

China’s commodity investments in the Arctic have mixed outcomes. Despite some initial commercial successes, many Chinese investments have failed, and China unilaterally abandoned the joint ventures to the detriment of their partners.

Retaking the Initiative and Thwarting Wins

The supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy, next best is to disrupt his alliances, next best is to attack his army, the worst policy is to attack his cities.

—Sun Tzu

Although the United States has significantly increased its presence and activities in the Arctic, like the latest Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center exercise, this renewed strategic focus will not curb China’s Arctic ambitions unless the activities are deliberately expanded, enhanced, synchronized, and most importantly, sustained. To do that, the United States should heed Sun Tzu and pursue an enduring cumulative strategy of integrated deterrence and gray-zone campaigning—a series of connected actions that, when taken together, asymmetrically undercuts China’s Arctic strategy, weakens the developing Sino-Russian Arctic alliance, curbs Beijing’s aspiring Arctic Council ambition, and undermines China’s developing Arctic partnerships by holistically, asymmetrically, and continuously imposing costs, encouraging restraints, denying the benefits or objectives, and winning the narratives across the DIME and across the interconnected and contested domains. Altogether, it makes more strategic sense to operate and compete in the gray zone and more advantageous and less costly to take risks and deter a conflict now than to pay the price of actually fighting one later. Otherwise, Washington cedes the strategic initiative to Beijing in the Arctic Ocean and further emboldens China to unilaterally act in the same manner as it does in the SCS (flashpoint) and ultimately dictate who can occupy territories, exploit resources, and conduct commercial and military activities in the disputed and contested waters.
Impose Costs

Be mindful of China’s Polar Silk Road ambitions and the potential geopolitical ramifications thereof. As part of the greater Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing seeks an Arctic link between China and Western Europe. Beyond giving China access to strategic infrastructures and resources in the Arctic, the real danger lies in the accumulated economic leverage that could and would be used for political leverage. To blunt the danger, Washington should consider establishing an exclusive Arctic trading bloc and making the United States the partner of choice for economic integration and development. Compete with Beijing for every economic contract and make China work hard for any future business deals. At best, outbid them for the contracts. At least, raise the costs of the contracts for Beijing by reminding prospective Arctic partners of China’s poor economic and environmental records, corporate unreliability, and political propensity to lash out at countries Beijing perceives as acting contrary to China’s national interests.

To further blunt the danger, Washington should also consider strengthening the Arctic Council and maintaining the status quo in its membership. Work with the other Arctic states (Russia, Canada, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland) to exercise shared polar governance over the strategic high ground. Support the extant Arctic Council framework for observers, but make clear that the council does not recognize the term near-Arctic state and its expansive political, economic, and legal assertions. And last, but not least, reach a consensus on climate change to deny Beijing an opening to put a wedge between the United States and the other Arctic Council members. President Biden recent announcement to establish a new ambassador-at-large position to safeguard the United States’ Arctic interests and counter climate change and geopolitical threats is a step in the right direction.27

Encourage Restraints

To disrupt the Sino-Russian Arctic alliance and put a wedge between the strategic competitors, Washington should consider exploiting the historical distrust (and at times animosity) between Beijing and Moscow and sowing personal mistrust between Xi and Putin. For Moscow, highlight China’s quiet buildup of military capabilities and capacities and subtle increase of military presence and operations in the NSR; underscore the dual-use nature of China’s infrastructure investments and projects in the Arctic to mitigate Chinese obfuscation of its strategic objectives; and point out the potential for China to incrementally exercise maritime superiority over the strategic waterway, unilaterally extract Arctic resources without any constraints or restraints, and eventually impose its national
Melting a Chinese Iceberg

will in the Arctic. For Beijing, highlight the Russian buildup of its military capabilities and capacities, increase in military basing along the NSR, and posturing to exert effective control and jurisdictional authority over the air and water spaces of the Arctic; underscore the reality that China and Russia have contrasting strategic objectives and their national interests will conflict; and point out the collaborative alliance of convenience will eventually become competitive as political interests outweigh economic interests. In essence, expand the continuum of strategic competition by encouraging Beijing and Moscow to restrain each other, not just in the Arctic but also in other parts of the globe and in other domains (space, cyberspace, and so forth).

Deny Benefits or Objectives

Do not let China change the facts on the ground in the Arctic as it did in the SCS. Do not let another Scarborough Shoal incident happen, where, in 2012, the United States largely did nothing when China illegally seized the shoal and brazenly embarked on its campaign to exert effective control and jurisdictional authority of the strategic waterway. To do that, Washington must maintain a robust and enduring presence in the strategic waterway. Presence and activity matters. Otherwise, non-presence and inactivity (or minimal presence and activity) yield the strategic high ground and initiative to Beijing. Consider the following initiatives:

• Establish more joint bases along the Northwest Passage now to prepare for the eventual opening of the Transpolar Route later in collaboration with Canadian allies and partners. The new route will change global trade flows, and the United States must be ready and postured to adjust to the coming economic reality. America can ill-afford to let others exert effective control of the strategic waterway in the coming years.

• Increase US presence in the Arctic in terms of permanent basing, persistent maritime presence, sustained naval operations, and scientific research. Invest more in Arctic science to better understand the harsh operating environment to operate more effectively and efficiently in the future therein. Invest more in Arctic (and Antarctic) capabilities and infrastructure, such as icebreakers to enable increased and enhanced US operations across the board to preserve enduring US national interests in the Arctic.

• Build up the US Coast Guard, the lead federal maritime law enforcement presence in the Arctic maritime zone. As more Arctic waters become navigable—NSR, Northwest Passage, and Transpolar Route—increased Coast Guard capabilities and capacities will be needed to enforce domestic and
international laws and regulations, safeguard US maritime interests, and uphold the rule of law and global norms.

**Win Narratives**

Do not let Beijing have the strategic communications advantage in the Arctic. Link China’s Arctic policies and strategies to its ambitious and expansive Chinese Dream. Push back on the new world order championed by Xi and Putin in their February 2022 joint statement on international relations entering a new era.

Publicly and privately challenge China’s claim to be a near-Arctic state when it comes to resource exploration and extraction. Call out China’s legal and policy inconsistencies in the Arctic and the distinct “say-do” mismatch. Question the disparate legal and diplomatic logic of Chinese inconsistencies between jurisdictional exceptionalism in the SCS vis-à-vis the Arctic. Cite China’s Arctic approach as another example of Beijing egregiously interpreting international laws and creating questionable legal concepts to advance its strategic interests.

**What If**

For contingency planning purposes, let us consider a future scenario wherein the United States averts the dystopian future described at the beginning of this article but finds itself in a contested operating environment similar to what it faces in the SCS today. In that case, how best might America operationally counter Chinese gray-zone activities in the contested Arctic? The current situation offers some key operational considerations for future Arctic operations. The United States and its allies should make it known that the Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militias are legitimate military targets should they engage in acts of war. The goal is to strip away their masks of legal ambiguity that afford the PLA Navy operational and tactical advantages.

Posture US forces, particularly the US Coast Guard, to asymmetrically deal with the Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militias in terms of training, tactics, and equipment. Train US forces more and better in sustained Arctic and counter gray-zone operations. Develop appropriate law enforcement procedures and rules of engagement for interaction with the Chinese paramilitaries across the continuum of conflict. Equip US forces with more nonkinetic capabilities to better counter gray-zone operations and better recording equipment to document more gray-zone activities for the courts of international law and public opinion.

Advance shared situational awareness of Arctic activities to promote transparency, enable collective response, and strengthen deterrence against Chinese activities below the threshold of armed conflict. Persistent maritime domain aware-
ness gives pause to Beijing if it knows that it is being monitored and that its actions are attributable. Put simply, countries cannot act collectively without first knowing what, how, where, and when to act.

**Must Act Now**

At the end of the day, it is quite clear that the status quo or retrenchment in the Arctic will have grave consequences for the United States, its allies and partners, and the region. It is also equally clear that Washington must act now to turn the tides in the Arctic and avert a dystopian future where Beijing exercises either overt or tacit maritime superiority over the Arctic’s strategic waterways. The proposals outlined above provide a wide range of options but must be initiated now to increase the likelihood of success. Otherwise, the Arctic Ocean may become a future colder version of the SCS, with China dictating who may transit, extract resources, and conduct commercial and military activities in the Arctic environs.28

**CAPT Tuan N. Pham, USN, Retired**

Tuan Pham is a retired Navy captain, maritime strategist, strategic planner, naval researcher, and China Hand (Master-level) with more than 20 years of experience in the Indo-Pacific. The views expressed here are personal and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the US government or US Navy.

**Notes**


20. Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang, “Northern Expedition.”


24. Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang, “Northern Expedition.”

25. Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang, “Northern Expedition.”


Above the Arctic

Increased Security in the Arctic through Cooperation in Space

LT COL KJEITIL BJØRKUM, ROYAL NORWEGIAN AIR FORCE

Abstract

Due to the Arctic’s harsh environment and weather conditions, the region’s settlements and infrastructure are limited. Space will play a unique role in providing the necessary means to control and secure operations in the Arctic for commercial, civil, and military activity for all stakeholders. Cooperation between nations with a common interest in the Arctic will increase security and forge closer bonds among allies. A strategy of cooperation, sharing of knowledge, and combined use of dual-use assets will increase the stakeholders’ security while defraying costs.

This article will first look at how the use of space will provide increased security in the Arctic. It will then use the US and Norway’s space and Arctic strategies as examples of coinciding topics of interest and illustrate how cooperation in these areas may be of benefit to both nations. Finally, using the United States and Norway as examples, the article will suggest three lines of effort in a combined space strategy among allies in the Arctic.

All Arctic nations—including Norway, the United States, and Russia—are interested in the region due to its resources and strategic locations. Non-Arctic countries like China also see the potential in the Arctic region and are, therefore, declaring themselves as “near Arctic” states.¹ The increased potential for economic gain and military-strategic advantage has made the Arctic an arena for great-power competition and has led to increased military, civil, and commercial presence from many nations. In particular, Russia has “gradually reintroduced army, navy and air force elements into the region,” expanding its military footprint in the Arctic.² Increased activity in the area will increase the chances of conflict.³

The corresponding threats to the area are significant. In a fragile area like the Arctic, an accident from oil drilling or shipping would have dire consequences. Continued environmental change might also have considerable consequences on the wildlife and fisheries in the area, and further research and surveillance are of the utmost importance. A conflict in the area leading to the use of arms may have the similar detrimental consequences. The vast amounts of international waters and disputed rights to resources may lead to conflicts among Arctic nations and
other stakeholders claiming their rights to exploit the region. Increased activity has “fueled a demand for communication, navigation, and surveillance infrastructures.”

In the National Strategy for the Arctic Region from 2013, then-President Barack Obama recognized the Arctic as “an amazing place” and that the climate changes in the Arctic represent emerging opportunities, as well as “very real challenges.” These challenges are multifaceted, and many of them fall under the Department of Defense’s (DOD) responsibility.

**Space as the Solution**

One obvious solution to the unique infrastructure challenges in the Arctic is space. The fragile and harsh environment makes all human activity in the region challenging, and space capabilities reduce the need to build physical infrastructure. Commercial satellite services can support the need for increased communications, surveillance, and understanding of events, all the while increasing the cooperation among nations and partners. The use of space assets and space-based infrastructure in the polar region is not without challenges. However, by “optimizing existing and future space-based infrastructure, using low Earth, geosynchronous, and highly elliptical orbits, the United States can work cooperatively with other Arctic nations to build situational awareness, enhance operations, and strengthen a common rule-based order.”

This cooperation should also extend to European allies and partners. Continued research and information sharing in a region formerly neglected due to the harsh environment should be the preferred measure to solve these issues. This calls for cooperation among allies with common, or at least overlapping interests, and necessitates increased military presence to provide security in the region.

**Topics of Cooperation**

Even though interests and strategic goals in the Arctic may differ among stakeholders in the Arctic, the efforts and activities to achieve those goals often coincide. Using the United States and Norway as examples of allies with coinciding, but not equal, interests in the Arctic, we can find coinciding lines of effort and focus areas in the two nations’ space and Arctic policies and strategies, which could serve to establish common grounds for and areas of cooperation. The following table summarizes the different strategies and policies for both space and the Arctic and provides an overview of suggested areas of cooperation.
Table 1. Strategies and policies for space and the Arctic, with suggested areas of cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Cooperation</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>NATO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International, allied, and partner cooperation within both domains</td>
<td>- US space policy</td>
<td>- The Norwegian Governments Arctic Policy</td>
<td>- NATO Strategic Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy</td>
<td>- Norway’s space strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Defense Space Strategy</td>
<td>- Norwegian Armed Forces Long Term Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Space domain awareness</td>
<td>- US space policy</td>
<td>- Norway’s space strategy</td>
<td>- NATO’s Overarching Space Policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Defense Space Strategy</td>
<td>- Norwegian Armed Forces Long Term Plan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in the Arctic</td>
<td>- Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy</td>
<td>- Norway’s Arctic Strategy ⁹</td>
<td>- NATO Strategic Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Defense Space Strategy</td>
<td>- Norwegian Armed Forces Long Term Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced positioning, navigation, and timing</td>
<td>- National Space Policy</td>
<td>- Norway’s space strategy</td>
<td>- NATO’s Overarching Space Policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy</td>
<td>- Norwegian Armed Forces Long Term Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Launch capability</td>
<td>- US space policy</td>
<td>- Norway’s space strategy</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange knowledge, education, research, development, exercises, and training</td>
<td>- US space policy</td>
<td>- Norway’s Arctic Strategy ⁹</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy</td>
<td>- Norwegian Armed Forces Long Term Plan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The primary common ground in all the described policies and strategies is cooperation, and it is the foundation for all other topics discussed in this article. In some of the outlined topics, Norway and the United States have already established a unique cooperative relationship. Nevertheless, increased cooperation and understanding of the potential advantages of joined forces may lead to even more significant gains for both nations and may set an example of new or increased cooperation between the United States and other allied nations. Not limited to just the Arctic region, space domain awareness (SDA) is one of the most critical areas where allied nations should cooperate.

**Space Domain Awareness**

SDA is a major strategic goal for the United States, Norway, and NATO. Norway’s GLOBUS radars, located in the city of Vardo in the northeastern part of Norway, have provided space situational awareness (SSA) for Norway, the United States, and NATO since 2001.¹⁰ The system will be further improved after the completion of the GLOBUS III radar, a joint project of the US Air Force Space Command and the Norwegian Intelligence Service.¹¹ The system will be operational in 2022.¹² The radar site’s primary mission is surveillance, tracking, categorizing objects in space, surveillance of Norwegian interest areas in the north, and collecting research and development information.¹³ This cooperation and joint
effort is an excellent example of how Norway, a relatively small military space nation, can contribute in the space domain to the benefit of all NATO nations. Norway’s geographic position and relatively mild climate make the operation possible within the Arctic region. With the Arctic becoming the new area of competition and congestion, Norway’s significance as an Arctic space nation has increased. As with SDA, communication is an essential field of cooperation.

**Communication**

Secure and reliable communication in the Arctic is vital for any operation, whether it is military, civilian, or commercial. Communication between units operating in the Arctic area and back to the command structure is essential for command and control. A modern military like the US and Norwegian armed forces needs both broadband network and voice capabilities. In a remote area like the Arctic, where “fiber optic infrastructure is scarce or nonexistent,” communication via satellites is the only viable solution. An increased presence from the United States and a sustained presence from Norwegian forces, all with the same communication, command, and control demands, make satellite communication a perfect example of another area of needed cooperation—both between nations and among government and civilian actors.

The existing satellite communication service in the Arctic is mostly geostationary Earth orbit (GEO) services, which all have a limited coverage above 75°–80° north. Fixed users may have broadband service up to 80° north, but the very-small-aperture terminals only cover up to 75° north. Iridium NEXT’s low Earth orbit (LEO) system is the only mobile satellite service (MSS) provider with proper coverage in the polar region. Like Kepler and Argos, a few other companies provide LEO connectivity but not near-real-time broadband service. Communications in the Arctic area need significant improvement to meet the increased requirements for allies’ and partners’ military presence there.

Planned cooperation between the United States and Norway is already underway regarding communications enhancement. It involves government and commercial companies and combines international, cross-sector, and dual-use collaboration. Inmarsat will deliver the satellites, with two satellites in highly elliptical north–south orbits (HEO). These two HEO satellites will become the world’s first mobile broadband satellites dedicated to the Arctic and will work in conjunction with Inmarsat’s 13 GEO satellites, providing continuous high-speed mobile broadband coverage above 65° north. The Norwegian Defense Department will share the cost with the US Air Force and Inmarsat. The scheduled launch is later this year. It will be made available for merchant fleets, fishing vessels, and other commercial actors and provide tactical and strategic communi-
The satellite will improve broadband coverage for US and Norwegian military forces in the area but may not deliver a satisfactory amount of data transfer in the event of a conflict.

Norway’s ambition of being independent regarding critical services for security issues, combined with Oslo’s high emphasis on international and bilateral agreements, shows the desire for government- or allied-controlled assets. Even though Inmarsat is a UK-based company, future commercial sales or changes in the company structures might threaten the Norwegian military forces’ access to the service or negate the possibility of using it for secure and classified communications. China and Russia are investing in and buying European companies; the latest example is a Russian-controlled company attempting to buy a Norwegian Rolls Royce engine maker. The Norwegian government has temporarily stopped the sale due to security issues. To depend solely on a commercial actor reduces the service’s reliability in times of crisis. Therefore, increased governmental cooperation is necessary.

There is a need for a dual, government-controlled and operated tactical, operational, and strategic initiative to cover the US and Norway’s increased demand for high-speed communications in the Arctic. The planned ViaSat Link 16–capable LEO satellite is an example of a system that could be under US and Norwegian government control. Bringing Link 16 capabilities from a line-of-sight to a beyond-line-of-sight system would improve the situational awareness (SA) for all across the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of conflict. As an Arctic nation, Norway should invest in this satellite constellation to ensure a speedy development to achieve timely and secure communications in the Arctic for all Norwegian and allied forces. Norway is well-positioned for cooperation regarding up and downlink through already established capabilities and can bring this capability into the cooperative effort. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) are other areas of cooperation that should be emphasized and increased.

**Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance**

Space plays a vital part in building any usable SA in the Arctic region through ISR operations. Due to the Arctic’s properties as large, dark, cold, remote, and known for its harsh weather, conducting ISR operations from space is the preferred and most often the only viable solution. As stated in Norway’s space strategy, environmental surveillance is a key element in the strategy. Understanding what, how, and when the Arctic environment will change will be essential to avoiding potential conflict. Dual-use assets for environmental surveillance have a military potential as well.
Norway has a long history of maritime surveillance of the sea in the Norwegian area of interest. Through NorSat-1 and -2, the Norwegian Coastal Administration has been using the automated identification system (AIS) that all ships above 300 gross tons must use since 2010. The new NorSat-3 enhances the AIS surveillance with an experimental navigation radar detector. These are in Sun-synchronous orbits (SSO) and have an additional scientific purpose as solar radiation surveillance and space weather observatories. Therefore, these satellites provide cross-sectorial (commerce and defense sectors) and dual-use (surveillance and scientific) capabilities. The technology and use of these satellites, combined with the coastal radars in Norway, are a vital surveillance resource regarding Russian military activities and testing in the Barents area. Satellites in polar LEO will be useful for tracking ships in Norway’s economic exclusive zone and can also detect and track ships operating in the Arctic region.

Norway is also developing new and exciting technological solutions that could improve ISR capabilities, environmentally and military. At the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, a student satellite containing a hyperspectral camera, an intelligent onboard processing computer, and robotics was launched earlier this year. The onboard camera can be slewed and provides images of small areas of interest. Working together with Kongsberg Satellite Services (KSAT) to download images through its ground-based system and short revisit times due to its LEO, the students’ satellite can detect algae that are dangerous for salmon farming companies. The satellite information can then be transferred to unmanned vehicles able to further investigate the areas of interest. This technology could be developed and prove helpful in detecting substances other than underwater algae, particularly submarines. Norway is in proximity to the Kola Peninsula and Kola Bay, the Russian Northern Fleet’s home base. An ISR satellite constellation combined with an unmanned aerial system deploying active sonar and confirming the satellite’s finding will increase the US, Norway’s, and NATO’s SA in the region. As well as environmental surveillance, increased weather surveillance and forecasts are needed.

One key factor for all Arctic entities is the harsh weather conditions that can affect the safety of humans and machines in the area. The US Space Force (USSF) is considering a future investment to “improve weather monitoring in the Arctic.” Climate change, not only in the Arctic, requires “more timely and more precise data.” Norway’s interest in research on environmental changes and improved weather forecasting aligns with the DOD and USSF’s need for an updated weather satellite program, especially in the Arctic. Cooperation would benefit both nations in terms of research on new technologies and actual employment of new assets in space. New and improved sensors reduce cost and improve capa-
bilities. Polar weather satellites with an up-down link every 90 minutes via SvalSat and distributed via high-speed satellite broadband would make weather data available for many users, including commercial traffic and political decision makers in the United States and Norway.

As the Arctic environment is changing, the region’s strategic significance is increasing. Understanding the magnitude and speed of the environmental changes is highly important regarding resource conservation and SA of the strategic changes and the potential therein. According to Spacenews.com, a spokesman in the USSF confirmed that the service “does not operate and is not developing capabilities specifically to monitor climate change.”

Even though continued work with NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) should be a focus area, a cooperation between the United States and Norway regarding environmental surveillance will benefit their intelligence communities, the research communities, Departments of Commerce and increase security for both nations and their allies and partners. Besides enhanced ISR, the Arctic region needs enhanced accuracy regarding positioning, navigation, and timing.

**Positioning, Navigation, and Timing**

Increased activity in the Arctic demands increased military presence, with aviation and naval assets. This increased activity must rely on fully developed and accurate navigation systems to avoid accidents, ensure accurate data for SA, and provide accurate weapons deployment when needed. Due to the high angles from a satellite in a global navigation satellite system (GNSS) such as the Global Positioning System (GPS) or Europe’s Galileo GNSS, accuracy in the Arctic is limited, especially in the vertical axis. Moreover, a satellite-based augmentation system (SBAS) has its limitations due to atmospheric and topography challenges.

One solution is to launch SBAS satellites in polar highly elliptical orbits or LEOs. Another possible solution would be to develop a medium Earth orbit constellation. A dual-use system where future communications satellites used as SBAS assets represents the third option. Accurate and secure navigation and timing will be just as significant in the Arctic region as in the more populated areas between 65° south and 65° north as the number of cruise ships, commercial carriers, fishing vessels, dynamic oil rigs, and other commercial users increases. Therefore, it is not only in the USSF’s, DOD’s, and the Norwegian Armed Forces’ interests to enhance positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) in the area but also for the US Department of Commerce and the Norwegian Department of Commerce and Fisheries, as well as both nations’ Coast Guards and their Departments of Justice. The development of new technologies to enhance the accuracy of PNT in the region is, there-
fore, one important area of future cooperation for the United States and Norway. Another important line of effort for both nations is launch capability.

**Launch Capability**

Available and credible launch capability is one of Norway’s national focus areas, and the same focus is found in the US space policy. In 2021, the Norwegian government approved the building of a new spaceport on Andøya island, as a launch site for small satellites to polar orbit. The launch capability will be up to 1.5 metric tons to polar LEO or SSO, initially using launch vehicles from Rocket Factory and Isar Aerospace. Inclination will be 87.4 to 108 degrees, and the remote area of Andøya provides for significant impact and dispersion areas in the Norwegian Sea. The Norwegian government owns a significant stake in the company, and it will be under governmental control in case of conflict. The launch capability will provide Norway with its sought-after capability and potentially provide allies, both bilateral and in NATO, with launch capability in the Arctic region. The Andøya spaceport will supplement existing launch capabilities available to the US government. As well as upstream space operations in the form of launch capabilities, Norway can also provide downstream capabilities worldwide.

With Norway’s geographic placement and relatively mild climate compared to other nations at this latitude, building and operating ground radars for SDA in the polar region is easier and friendlier to human existence than in Alaska, Canada, or Greenland. The world’s largest ground station is SvalSat, operated by the Norwegian company KSAT. The ground station is located on Svalbard, an island to the north of the Norwegian mainland, and “is ideally situated at a high enough latitude to see every polar-orbiting satellite from all 14 daily transits.” The Norwegian government owns 50 percent of KSAT through Space Norway; therefore, the company represents a reliable asset in times of conflict. KSAT also has a total of 25 ground stations on the Norwegian mainland and many other countries. Its global network, combined with high focus on cybersecurity, makes global downloading of payload and uploading software for satellite management possible from the company’s offices in Tromsø, a city in northern Norway. Stronger military cooperation with the civilian side of the operation, as described in the Norwegian government’s space strategy, will further improve data and cybersecurity to a military-grade system.

**Education, Research, and Development**

Norway has a long history as a space nation. Kristian Birkeland, a Norwegian scientist, completed his famous Terrella-experiment in 1896, where he made arti-
Official Northern Lights, known as the Aurora Borealis. That was the beginning of modern space operations in Norway. The Andøya Rocket Range launched its first scientific rocket in 1962 and has launched more than a thousand rockets since then. Norway has several institutions for space-related education, from satellite technology to space physics. The Norwegian Military Research Institute (Forsvarets Forsknings Institutt, FFI), has, in cooperation with the University in Oslo (UiO), developed the Rimfax radar, currently operating on the Mars rover, Perseverance. Norway is a member of the European Space Agency, and the Norwegian space industry consists of around 40 companies. Several Norwegian companies have further developed and adapted technology used to support offshore oil extraction and in medical science to space application, and Norwegian technology and knowledge of space and space operations are world-class. Space is also an area of heightened interest in the Norwegian National Strategy.

Suggested Combined Arctic Space Strategy

A combined Arctic space strategy aiming to increase security in the Arctic should focus on three main lines of effort. The first line of effort is closing the Arctic infrastructure gap. Allied stakeholders need to recognize and understand the increased strategic significance of the Arctic region. Due to its remoteness and harsh conditions, it is vital to realize the importance of space operations to provide the needed command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C3ISR) in the Arctic to achieve security for both nation’s interests. According to the US Chief of Space Operations, Gen John Raymond, USSF, the Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy is “an important strategy for space.” In an interview in SpaceNews, General Raymond confirmed that the Arctic was key terrain for the United States. As we have seen in most US and Norwegian strategy documents, and as several space and military experts keep arguing, there is a need for cooperation among Arctic partners to increase vigilance in this increasingly vital region. Therefore, an Arctic space strategy must continue on this track. Cooperation among allied armed forces should increase to ensure cost-sharing and shared benefits from education, research, development, and geographic position to close the gap in necessary infrastructure in the region.

Dual-use assets reduce government spending, and profitable commercial companies increase the economic power of the nation. Commercial companies like SpaceX conduct technological developments to make space operations less expensive, better quality, and more readily available. The drawback of the commercial space industry is the lack of governmental control during a conflict. Therefore, allied governments need to deal exclusively with companies from the involved nations and insist on transparent contracts and ownership control. The many case
studies that show the malign influence of China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Russian corporations’ predatory buy-ups of European companies emphasize this point. Space capabilities controlled by companies from an adversary nation are no good in case of conflict.

Norway’s geographic position in the Arctic—with less harsh conditions than Canada, Alaska, or Greenland—makes the nation the clear choice for allied cooperation. The geographic position also makes Norway very dependent on the Arctic region and, therefore, equally interested in Arctic security as the great powers engage in strategic competition. As a small nation with limited resources available for a considerable and credible conventional force, Norway should continue its strategy of allied contributions. C3ISR space assets are a sought-after capacity for NATO, especially in the Arctic area, where Russia and China are increasing their presence. Therefore, Norway must continue to focus on technological development within space, cyber, and artificial intelligence. Continued closing of the infrastructure gap can, and should, be done in cooperation and conjunction with Norway’s allies and partners.

The second line of effort is improved SDA in the polar area. Space as the solution for the US and Norwegian Arctic challenges is not exclusive to these nations. China and Russia have shown military and commercial interest in the region, and both nations have increased their space capabilities in polar orbits. Increased SDA is therefore equally important. Since Chinese and Russian intentions in the Arctic are unknown, their intentions in space in the polar region are an area of concern for the United States, Norway, and NATO allies. Therefore, a robust and dependable SDA system in the polar region must be another critical area of cooperation. The nations’ strategy documents regarding the domain and the region should emphasize this. Nevertheless, the most important field of cooperation does not lie in the technical solutions and assets but instead with the exchange and increase of knowledge and shared usage of existing and future capabilities.

Thus, the third line of effort is education and liaisons. A strong, valuable, and lasting cooperation among nations rests on a shared understanding of the necessity, gains, and importance of the topics in question. Since most US and Norwegian policy and strategy documents recognize the importance of space and the Arctic, cooperation between the two nations is, as the documents already declare, wanted and necessary. This cooperation must start with a shared understanding of the necessary knowledge to operate in the region and in the domain. Being an Arctic nation, Norway brings Arctic expertise, while the United States, being the most prominent space nation, brings space-related knowledge to the partnership. Therefore, the most significant cooperation between the nations should be sharing knowledge through education, liaisons, research, and development.
Conclusion

The Arctic is an unforgiving area to operate for humans. Building infrastructure and settlements to increase security using conventional forces and assets is cost and resource prohibitive. Despite the costs, the increasing strategic significance of the Arctic calls for increased efforts by Norway, the United States, and their allies to bolster security in the High North. Allied cooperation and cost-sharing in the space domain is an obvious solution. Nations with similar interests in the region share many of the same areas of concern—communication, navigation, surveillance, and reliable launch capacity—thus, cooperation is already taking place. Nevertheless, increased cooperation among allied nations is necessary, and a combined Arctic space strategy will increase the security outcomes of such collaboration.

A combined Arctic space strategy should focus on three main lines of effort. The first is to close the Arctic infrastructure gap. Cooperation regarding the increased need for C3ISR, improved PNT, and environmental surveillance are crucial for decision making. Military intelligence and commercial surveillance will increase security and improve communications possibilities for emergency communication and coordination of emergency and disaster management. The second effort is to improve SDA in the polar region. Understanding and tracking how China and Russia are using space through polar orbits and SSO is essential for the security of allied space capabilities and our understanding of Beijing’s and Moscow’s intentions in the region. The third effort, and the most important, is education and liaisons among partners. The exchange of knowledge regarding the Arctic and space requires minimal economic investment and will increase allied and partnered nations’ understanding. A higher focus on knowledge exchange and strategy development is a very low-cost enhancement of allied nations’ cooperation and is essential to building further collaboration based on a steady foundation.

Lt Col Kjetil Bjørkum, Royal Norwegian Air Force

Lieutenant Colonel Bjørkum is the commander of the 337th Squadron, Royal Norwegian Air Force. He received his aviator wings at the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program, Sheppard AFB, Texas. He is a graduate of Air War College at Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, and attended the Schriever Space Scholars program at Air University.
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The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security
Increasing Domain Awareness through the US Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach

MAJ W. BARRETT MARTIN, USA
MAJ MICHAEL K. TOVO, USA
MAJ DEVIN KIRKWOOD, USA

Abstract

This article explores various requirements needed for the Department of Defense to be competitive in the Arctic region. In particular, the role of US Army Arctic Special Operations Forces should be developed and leveraged as part of competitive operational solutions. While capability definitions and gaps remain a persistent doctrinal challenge in development and implementation, history, culture, exercises, and allies could greatly contribute to Arctic ARSOF progress. Furthermore, Indigenous knowledge must be acknowledged and leveraged to ensure the greatest chance for enduring Arctic operational success. Only then will all the specialized gear and training lead to genuine competitive advantages needed to deter adversaries and secure the homeland.

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It is no secret that the Arctic is heating up in the wake of climate change—figuratively and literally. Despite a history characterized more by cooperation than competition, the shrinking ice shelves and rising temperatures are fueling a race to secure economic benefits.¹ The Russian Federation is pursuing monetizing a commercially viable Northern Sea Route and has also voiced extensive claims to the vast deposits of oil and natural gas as well as base, precious, and rare earth metals. Paranoid about the deleterious security effects threatening Russia’s economic future posed by the opening of the Arctic, Moscow has invested billions into refurbishing Soviet-era infrastructure and maintaining large Arctic-capable formations and capabilities, though its Arctic capabilities are likely being degraded to some extent by Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine.² Equally alarming, Beijing has forced the People’s Republic of China’s way into the Arctic through legal frameworks (Arctic Council and international treaties such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) and aggressive investment projects under China’s Polar Silk Road campaign.³
Over the past few years, the Department of Defense (DOD) has recognized the threat posed by US strategic competitors in this region and crafted Arctic strategies to address US current shortfalls. Yet, in an era defined by increased fiscal constraints and potentially emerging crises with Russia and China, the question for US leaders has become: What level of investment is necessary to effectively compete in the Arctic? Further, what are the specific requirements of each of the services in what is primarily a maritime domain, characterized by remote communities and scant infrastructure? The services’ published strategies are not widely inclusive of special operations forces (SOF) despite the challenges of the Arctic being ripe for SOF’s unique traits and increased return on investment in austere environments. The Army SOF (ARSOF) enterprise provides unique capabilities to the joint force to buy down risk by leveraging Indigenous populations to provide domain awareness, strengthen relationships, and build logistical networks. This value proposition is especially relevant in a theater of operations that will always be peripheral to US strategy, strains logistical systems, and has a high barrier to entry in terms of specialized supplies, equipment, and training.

Vignette

The year is 2025, and the Arctic remains an arena of increasing strategic competition over economic and territorial gains. Along the western slope of Alaska, a small Indigenous tribe is located in the remote village of Teller, which is less than 50 miles from the Russian coastline and is home to approximately 250 residents. Not far from Teller, a Chinese-funded drilling company has agreed to help develop Alaska’s liquefied natural gas sector through a private deal with an Alaskan Native corporation. Over the years, the village infrastructure has slowly deteriorated due to global warming and the lack of government funding to correct the many problems caused by thawing permafrost and soil erosion. The attitude of the population toward the US government is neutral due to their limited engagement with state and federal entities over the past few years and their increasing feeling of isolation. The continued effects of climate change in degrading their already inadequate infrastructure have exacerbated such ambivalence.

Last week, the Chinese drilling company sent a small delegation to the village to build a relationship and ensure the company’s work would not negatively affect the village. During the meeting with the village elders, an agreement was made to allow some Chinese employees to live among the population of Teller. In return, the company would provide funding to upgrade the village infrastructure. The deal is a 10-year contract that will allow the Chinese-backed company to maintain and expand Chinese influence throughout the region. While it may seem benign, this relationship could be the beginning of a malign actor presence that
will fester throughout Alaska and further isolate the many Indigenous villages in the region from the US government if left unchecked. Although this story is fictional, it could become a reality if the DOD does not start engaging more effectively with the many vulnerable Indigenous populations throughout the Alaskan coastline before our adversaries do. Countering malign influence would benefit from reexamining and leveraging a crucial piece of American history—the DOD’s use and reliance on the Indigenous approach. In the Arctic, this was done with the Alaskan Scouts during the World War II. The Alaskan Scouts were a volunteer military organization that employed more than 6,000 Native Alaskans to conduct surveillance-and-support activities along the remote coastlines. There are a multitude of opportunities in Alaska that would not only increase US national security posture but also allow ARSOF soldiers to refine their Arctic tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP). These refined skills would also help build ARSOF credibility and capability for combat operations in Europe while training and exercising in the High North.

**Defining Arctic Capability**

One of the underlying issues of the Arctic problem set is the lack of understanding of the environment and the capabilities required to survive, thrive, and operate in harsh Arctic conditions. If you ask five military leaders what Arctic capable means, you will likely get five different answers. In the Army’s 2021 Arctic strategy, *Regaining Arctic Dominance*, the term Arctic in Arctic-capable/ready was defined as five distinct environments: Arctic (all-season), subarctic, extreme cold weather (ECW), high altitude, and mountainous. While some similarities exist between these harsh environments, they are not analogous. It is vital to understand the differences between these five environments and their requirements. Combining these environments under one term and expecting soldiers and units to achieve or maintain a state of readiness at each echelon is unfeasible.

It is too much to ask of one unit to maintain a validation pathway that includes all five of these environments. For example, in Army Special Forces (SF), each SF company has a team designated as a “mountain team” and is required to maintain a “level-1 qualification” for military mountaineering. Even the most qualified mountain team in the Special Forces Regiment would not be considered Arctic-capable. Becoming Arctic-capable requires immersion in the actual conditions throughout the entire training and validation pathway, as our Scandinavian partners do. This requirement has severe implications for the length of time a unit can maintain a required state of readiness, particularly if that unit is not stationed in an environment that allows for constant immersion.
Furthermore, when most military leaders hear the term Arctic, they usually think of the words: cold, frozen, and winter. However, the Arctic is an all-season environment, where summer and winter present equally complex, but distinct, operational challenges. Additionally, the Arctic region includes different types of terrain depending on the area of operations—Alaska, European High North, and so forth. Being Arctic-capable in one region does not mean a unit is fully prepared for others. For example, units that train in the High North of Scandinavia will need to adapt their TTPs for operations in northern Alaska or Canada due to vast differences in the environment and conditions, even during the same seasons. When examining the training opportunities for units in an Arctic environment, nearly all training venues are below the Arctic Circle and, therefore, are considered subarctic. In other words, most Arctic training does not occur in an Arctic environment. This includes the Northern Warfare Training Center in Alaska and the Subarctic Warfare Center in Arvidsjaur, Sweden. Furthermore, most US units only train at these subarctic venues in the winter, when mobility is much easier and conditions are more favorable in many ways.

ARSOF requires more training, equipping, and Arctic experience than existing courses currently provide. The Winter Warfare Detachment at 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) implements a Winter Warfare Course to expand team-level winter operational capabilities. The course trains individuals on how to shoot, move, communicate, and survive in a winter operating environment and is used as a training and validation exercise for SF teams deploying to the High North or Arctic regions. Yet, while winter warfare and Arctic warfare have some similarities, they are not analogous. The skills required to survive in the Arctic cannot be truly trained or exercised in Colorado or Montana. For Naval Special Warfare, SEAL Qualification Training students are sent to the Special Operations Forces Cold Weather Maritime Detachment at Kodiak, Alaska, to learn how to operate in moderately cold maritime environments. None of these training locations are in the Arctic, and they only provide minimal Arctic proficiency to units.

One of the hurdles to changing our Arctic training posture is the misperception that cold weather and the Arctic are the same. The Arctic as an environment is not confined to the extreme cold and snow, which the collective consciousness defaults to, but is characterized by extremes—near-constant darkness and cold in the winter juxtaposed with near-constant light and impassable terrain in the summer months. Leaders must understand that to have a functional capability in the Arctic, operators must be prepared for year-round operations and will find that in certain aspects, especially from a mobility standpoint, the summer may be more challenging than the winter.
Senior leaders must consider the difficulties inherent in requiring a unit to maintain proficiency in multiple related yet distinctly different capabilities. Furthermore, distinct, Arctic-capable/Arctic-ready definitions must be understood across the joint force. Each service should have a standardized validation pathway for units expected to be Arctic-capable. This standard should include Arctic-specific tasks at individual and unit (collective) levels and eventually be institutionalized in doctrine and recognized by partner nations to qualify US units for participation in joint exercises in other Arctic nations. Currently, most US units must attend a Nordic nation’s Arctic/winter warfare course as a prerequisite to any Arctic joint exercises in the High North. As an Arctic nation, the United States can leverage Alaska’s strategic location not only as a power-projection location but also as a world-class training ground to prepare for expeditionary deployments.

**Capability Gaps**

Over the past few years, US policy makers and military leaders have released Arctic-specific strategies to address the unique environmental challenges in the strategic nexus between three geographic combatant commands: US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), and US European Command (USEUCOM). Yet, there is still a massive gap between the US military’s current capabilities and its aspirations to compete in the Arctic. This is equally true across conventional and special-operations formations, as the past 20 years of focus on the Global War on Terrorism led to nearly complete atrophy in the military’s ability to operate in the Arctic. Many of the skills and lessons learned during the Cold War have been lost; for example, the regular use of Nordic-style skis for winter training by the 10th Special Forces Group and the consistent practice of high-frequency waveform communications by most ground force units.

Despite increasingly high-profile rhetoric about the region’s strategic importance, the military’s recent execution of training and operations—such as Arctic Edge, Vigilant Shield, and Arctic Warrior—in the Arctic might best be classified as *Arctic tourism*. Military units deploy for a few weeks to train but do not really build true Arctic capabilities. In an environment with as many demands and challenges in the summer as in there are in the winter, military Arctic tourism does little to build the capabilities needed for military forces to survive, thrive, and effectively operate in the harsh Arctic environment, especially for prolonged durations. The increased mentions of Arctic security issues, challenges, and opportunities in the various defense policy, planning, and strategy documents have yielded some progress; for example, the 10th Special Forces Group in Colorado now has a winter warfare training course, the 11th Airborne Division has been reactivated...
in Alaska, and the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies is standing up in Anchorage.\textsuperscript{14} Yet, there is still more effort needed to develop a true operational capability in the Arctic.

To effectively compete in the Arctic, leaders, and units across the conventional forces and ARSOF must prioritize manning, training, and equipping their Arctic-focused formations to achieve true, all-season Arctic capability. As the United States is one of eight Arctic nations, this current capability gap represents a gap in the country’s ability to properly support the 2022 \textit{National Defense Strategy}’s (NDS) top priority: defense of the homeland, particularly for Alaska. Furthermore, the Arctic capability gap must be bridged to fully comply with all four NDS priorities.\textsuperscript{15}

It is also worth noting that these priorities apply not only to the homeland and the Alaskan Arctic but also to the Canadian Arctic and High North of our Nordic partners, from whom we can learn a great deal. Our partners enjoy a benefit that most of our military does not: their service members grew up in an Arctic or subarctic environment and have lived there for most of their lives. They possess an inherent capability that perhaps only our Alaskan Natives have in the United States. Many partner-nation units consciously designed their manning, training, and equipping structures to meet the needs of the environments in which they operate. Their lifestyles reinforce baseline skills essential to operating in that environment. To illustrate the different mind-sets, it is helpful to note the difference between the United States and our Arctic partners. When it snows six inches in Ft. Carson, Colorado, the commanding general will close the post to mitigate safety risks, and Soldiers stay home and enjoy family time. When it snows two feet on bases in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the soldiers ski to the ranges and ride snowmobiles to training events. The Arctic conditions are simply part of their training, not a barrier to it.

Although most other Arctic nations have a much higher baseline for Arctic capabilities in their conventional and special operations forces, they also have designated units that are mission-aligned to the Arctic and subarctic environments and specifically manned, trained, and equipped to operate there and provide domain awareness. The Canadian Rangers and Danish Sirius Patrol are examples of Arctic-focused small military units for which the US DOD simply does not have an equivalent. However, the operational utility of these units is well known and illuminates a potential gap in the current US force structure. Although vastly different, the two example units are focused on conducting surveillance and sovereignty patrols in the most remote parts of their Arctic territories and serve as their nations’ eyes and ears in sparsely inhabited lands.\textsuperscript{16} Additionally, European High North countries work closely with their Home Guard units to facilitate
domain awareness and readiness in remote regions and have numerous units that maintain a high level of Arctic capabilities year-round.\textsuperscript{17}

The current deficit of capabilities between US forces and those of our Arctic partners is not only a detriment to our credibility and rapport, but also to the numerous opportunities for training and building domain awareness through bilateral and multilateral training events in the High North. Although the European High North is very different from the North American Arctic, many parallels still make our partners’ understanding of the environment relevant to the USNORTHCOM and USEUCOM areas of responsibility. Uniquely, the US Army can train in an environment on home soil that is in many ways more challenging than what it might experience in expeditionary deployments to the European High North.

**ARSOF’s Value Proposition**

ARSOF’s first and most important value proposition is its inherently small footprint, which is ideal for operating in remote, harsh, and geopolitically sensitive areas. The Arctic has traditionally been defined more by cooperation than by competition. Avoiding the misperception of US militarization of the Arctic is essential to international credibility in the rules-based Arctic.\textsuperscript{18} SOF have traditionally been used in peripheral theaters or to support conventional operations that focus on the primary war-fighting objectives.\textsuperscript{19} Second, ARSOF has been the force of choice to address the strategic opportunities resident in the Indigenous communities and through combined operations with international partners. Engagement and integration with the Indigenous communities in Alaska and with our partners in Northern Europe not only provide significant benefits in a defensive posture, but might also be leveraged to put additional pressure on the Russian Federation as these tribal communities usually have close cross-border relationships with communities on both sides of the Bering Strait or across the High North into Russian territory.\textsuperscript{20} With a population so vulnerable to influence, Arctic Natives must see the United States as a more legitimate influence than they do its adversaries in the region. Third, the inherently expeditionary nature of ARSOF units allows for smaller logistical requirements, which can be fully supported by air movement and is therefore ideal in an environment that makes sustained logistics for large formations extremely difficult. In comparison, most conventional land forces in the Arctic are constrained to the limited road networks year-round, especially in the summer, as the Arctic terrain turns to swamp-like conditions that make land-based mobility and logistics extremely restrictive. Finally, due to the small size of ARSOF units, training and equipping these formations for Arctic operations will be inherently less expensive than for large-scale conventional forces.
While ARSOF plays a critical role across the spectrum and phases of conflict, the preconflict competition phase is essential to its utility throughout the remaining phases. It is a SOF truth that, “Competent special operations forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.” This axiom is equally applicable to the relationships and skill sets that underpin ARSOF effectiveness across the range of special warfare tasks and highlights the need to increase US readiness in the Arctic before a crisis occurs in that region. In the event of large-scale combat operations against a near-peer competitor, SOF is unlikely to be the main effort; however, the Arctic is also unlikely to feature as a primary zone of future conflict. Yet SOF can and should be used as a hedge to mitigate strategic and operational risk in the region and to achieve national security objectives in what will likely be a peripheral theater. The way to ensure success is to operate in the Arctic alongside Indigenous populations and international partner forces. This unconventional approach, however, will require different investments and shifting ARSOF priorities from the current practice of Arctic tourism into a more persistent presence by designated forces to build a true Arctic capability within US Special Operations.

**Reciprocal Opportunities**

Native Alaskans represent approximately 15 percent of the total population of Alaska, with more than 110,000 people. This population is distributed across more than 225 communities, speaking more than 20 languages, and classified into five ethnic groups. Many of these communities exist along the western and northern coasts of Alaska, along the Bering Strait and the Arctic Ocean, and comprise the largest percentage of military veterans per capita among all US demographics. Numerous Indigenous communities have poor or failing infrastructure, are isolated from the rest of the state, and are a prime target for malign actors seeking to undermine the United States. The severe lack of infrastructure represents an opportunity for adverse influence by our strategic competitors and a reciprocal opportunity for the US DOD. Investing in indigenous Alaskan communities is a chance to deny competitor influence, rebuild trust with Native Alaskan communities while establishing multiuse infrastructure with multi-domain effects, and increase our military’s Arctic readiness. As US Senator Lisa Murkowski (R–AK) recently stated,

Infrastructure is one of the foundations of modern society, impacting everything from food security, health care, education, commerce, and our ability to operate militarily. It is no different in the High North. However, in many parts of the Arctic, infrastructure is often poor or simply non-existent, which is detrimental and unfair to its residents, and should be unacceptable to us as an Arctic nation.
These communities, accessible almost exclusively by air or sea, fit squarely into Senator Murkowski’s diagnosis and are precisely the environments in which ARSOF units thrive. The US government’s force of choice for operating through or with Indigenous populations is Army Special Forces, more commonly known as Green Berets. Working with Indigenous populations is the cornerstone of Special Forces. Since their inception in 1952, Green Berets have conducted these types of missions worldwide to achieve US national security objectives.

ARSOF can engage with Alaskan Natives to leverage their ability to act as local eyes and ears in support of US national security, while simultaneously learning how to survive and operate in some of the harshest conditions in the world. This role could be the beginning of a potential redux of the Alaskan Scout program, focused on increasing domain awareness, deterring malign actors in the homeland, and strengthening the relationship between the government and these populations. This reciprocal relationship of an Indigenous approach would not only strengthen US national security and assist in rebuilding military Arctic capability but could also help address critical infrastructure issues in these communities.

At its least ambitious level, the Indigenous approach would leverage the environmental and survival knowledge that is resident in Native Alaskan communities. This basic survival knowledge would go a long way toward rebuilding the foundational skills that ARSOF operators will need to operate in an Arctic environment. Today, ARSOF forces are not manned, trained, or equipped to survive, compete, and dominate in this or similar environments. Things as simple as how to conduct route planning, types of equipment to bring, movement over terrain, and medical care in the Arctic are things that Indigenous communities have developed and mastered over centuries; yet, outside of individual efforts, that experience has not been translated into military TTPs or standard operating procedures (SOP). Nor has it been widely integrated into the Alaskan National Guard, whose footprint has been reduced to a presence mostly concentrated around Anchorage and Juneau.

An effective method would be to create training lanes prior to large-scale exercises, like Arctic Edge or Arctic Warrior, to learn the foundational skills needed for the operational environment, as opposed to the current approach of training Arctic skills in strictly alpine environments in Colorado or Montana. This could be further developed in the exercises themselves, by creating lanes in partnership with the Indigenous communities that provided the foundational training, and then adding supplemental training to reinforce those foundational skills. At Arctic Edge 2022, no SF soldier spent more than seven consecutive hours outdoors. With guidance and mentorship from communities that have thrived in this landscape for millennia, trainers can certainly increase the capabilities of our formations, while addressing commanders’ risk considerations which, while not out of
place, have degraded Arctic training opportunities in the past. The incorporation of tactical level elements with a diverse set of Indigenous communities would also increase the command’s understanding of the operational environment to better prioritize the small-scale construction funds that usually accompany large exercises. These projects could and should be dual-use to provide value within the exercise and to the Natives afterward.

In a slightly more ambitious scenario, the lanes within exercises would prepare Indigenous communities that participate to perform the domain-awareness tasks, critical infrastructure defense, and logistical and mission support activities they would be well suited to perform in a real-world confrontation with strategic competitors. This could either be an overt goal of the exercise or an inadvertent consequence of hiring Alaskan Natives as role-players within the exercise. In the most ambitious scenario, there would be continuous SF presence in Alaska, either in the form of an Arctic warfare training center run by the Special Warfare Training Center and School or by operational SF units (either active or National Guard) permanently stationed within the state.

In all these scenarios it is important to remember that relationship building, and more importantly sustainment, requires long-term investments of time, effort, and resources. It is hard to maintain effective relationships in a place as remote as Alaska in general, and its coastal communities in particular, when there is no permanent presence or habitual unit affiliation. Building these habitual relationships would help decrease the vulnerability of the Native populations and further prevent malign influence, like the example mentioned in the above vignette, from festering in the homeland.

**Strategic Standpoint**

With the recent releases of Arctic strategies and legislative initiatives from Congress, interest in the Arctic is increasing within the defense community. Senators from four states outside of Alaska have expressed interest and concern in the DOD’s military readiness in the Arctic in the past few years. Yet, during a time when the Russian invasion of Ukraine is ongoing and tensions over Chinese saber-rattling over Taiwan continue, the Arctic has seemingly taken a backseat as a genuine priority within the DOD. This is reflected in the lack of prescriptive guidance in Arctic strategy, as well as the lack of funding. As the combatant command responsible overall for the Arctic line of effort in the DOD, US-NORTHCOM recently submitted a classified Arctic capabilities assessment that highlights specific gaps and areas for development within the DOD’s capabilities in the Arctic. However, with so many competing priorities across the services, urgency supersedes importance, and the ability to prepare for future challenges
rarely gets the attention it deserves. This is not meant to disparage the efforts of
the Arctic Domain Awareness Center under the Department of Homeland Secu-
rit y or the recently established Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies.27
The Ted Stevens Center has been allocated more than USD 10 million in funding
this fiscal year based on the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act to meet
the three defense objectives outlined in the 2019 DOD Arctic Strategy: defend the
homeland, compete when necessary for the balance of power, and ensure common
domains remain free and open.28 Nevertheless, the units of action for the Arctic
remain mostly unaffected in the near term.

Aside from the importance of the Ted Stevens Center, numerous leaders among
the Joint Staff agree on two additional aspects of the military in the Arctic. First,
we must not discount a land-based force’s significance in the Arctic. Although
most domain awareness in that environment will come from the sea and the air,
the Indigenous approach can only be accomplished through the land. The center
of gravity in the Arctic remains the population and infrastructure, both of which
are vulnerable. Second, as in many cases throughout history, ARSOF leads the
way in military innovation. As demonstrated in Arctic Edge 2022, ARSOF forces
experimented with numerous specialized skills and equipment in the Arctic to
understand what works and what must be modified or changed to increase surviv-
ability and lethality.29 Yet ARSOF is doing so as Arctic tourists with limited
amounts of funding, authorities, and time spent in the environment.

Conclusion

In an environment as challenging as the Arctic, it takes years to build military
capabilities to a level that can effectively compete with and deter our adversaries.
To truly increase domain awareness, rather than just survive, the DOD must pur-
sue a policy of persistent presence by designated forces. Although the Arctic is not
a uniquely SOF problem set, strategic leaders often consider SOF the force of
choice in gray-zone competition.30 As an enterprise, SOF must be better trained
and equipped to operate in the Arctic to support national security objectives. The
importance of the Indigenous approach in building domain awareness and com-
peting with our adversaries in the rules-based Arctic requires an immediate in-
crease in ARSOF capabilities and the priorities placed upon them.

MAJ W. Barrett Martin, USA, MAJ Michael K. Tovo, USA, MAJ Devin Kirkwood, USA are
Army Special Forces officers from the 10th Special Forces Group. They were assigned to the Naval
Postgraduate School where they researched special-operations capabilities in the Arctic helping
to result in this article among other works. They have combat experience in Afghanistan and
operational experience in Europe and the Arctic, including the European High North and Alaska.
Notes

8. United States Army, “Regaining Arctic Dominance.”
11. Sections of the Eielson Air Force Base runway are unable to handle certain aircraft in the summer months due to soil conditions under the runway.
   1. Defending the homeland paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC.
   2. Deterring strategic attacks against the United States, allies, and partners.
   3. Deterring aggression while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary.
   4. Building a resilient joint force and defense ecosystem.
19. For example, 10th Special Forces Group’s operations in Northern Iraq in a supporting effort to the main axis of advance toward Baghdad.


27. “Arctic Domain Awareness Center Overview to U.S. Coast Guard D17” (presentation, University of Alaska, 15 February 2019), https://arcticdomainawarenesscenter.org/.


Special Operations Forces and Arctic Indigenous People
Partnering to Defend the North American Arctic Homeland

LTC James R. Morton, Jr., PhD, USAR
Dr. Ryan Burke

Abstract

Climate change is reshaping global geopolitics, and the Arctic is now in the crosshairs of geostrategic competition. Because of these changes, more stakeholders than ever are strategizing about the Arctic. Special operations forces (SOF) have a global mission in support of US national security objectives, and the Arctic is increasingly relevant to US national security and the security of North America. Therefore, SOF commands in Canada, the United States, and the Kingdom of Denmark must integrate the Arctic into their missions as a region of increasing relevance and necessity to defend and secure their homelands. In collaboration with Indigenous communities of the North, SOF must understand and develop its future role within the North American Arctic. To do so and intentionally shape the future Arctic, SOF must align with and learn from the Indigenous people of the High North and share the responsibility for defending the homeland.

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Vignette

Along the most northern coastline of Alaska, the frigid Arctic cold menacingly embraces a long-range radar site at a gripping 35 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. A US Army Special Forces Operational Detachment–Alpha (ODA) links up with a local Alaskan Native guide to provide support to the ODA’s reconnaissance of the radar site strategically placed in the North American Arctic. This exercise vignette during US Northern Command’s (USNORTHCOM) joint exercise, Arctic Edge 2018, reflects the increased strategic concerns Canada, the United States, and some European allies have with the security and stabilization of the complex Arctic region. As climate changes influence global politics, these rapid and colossal environmental shifts in the Arctic make for greater levels of accessibility among global players. The United States, Canada, and Denmark (via Greenland) face security concerns on their northern frontiers unlike any time in the past. Increased commercial and military activities now
motivate policy makers and strategists to renew their focus on and prioritization of homeland defense in the twenty-first century. Nations with Arctic interests have been diligent in building interoperability between their special operations forces (SOF) for the past decade and longer. A shift is now required that redirects SOF to prioritize their vital role in deterring potential threats and becoming prepared to respond to crises along the North American Arctic frontier. A critical partnership is necessary. SOF must ally with North American Indigenous peoples to learn how to thrive in the Arctic, gain further access throughout the region, and be mutually supportive of one another. Because Arctic Indigenous peoples have thrived in and been a part of the Arctic landscape for time immemorial, there is no more essential partnership than a SOF–Indigenous linkage to ensure effective Arctic operations in defense of the North American homeland.

**Background**

The confluence of multiple dynamic changes makes for conditions that have elevated the need to consider the North American Arctic as a frontline for defense. With changing environmental conditions, demands for increased recognition of sovereignty, and increased international tensions among strategic competitors, the United States, Canada, and Denmark find themselves amid a North American Arctic that necessitates a defensive imperative among regionally aligned forces. As the effects of climate change continue to mount and the Arctic ice decreases, regional security dynamics correspondingly shift. Warming oceans, melting permafrost, and altering biospherical systems are fundamentally changing the Arctic environment. Transformations in ground conditions such as permafrost thawing require costly repairs, infrastructure modifications, and even relocating military assets such as ground-based radar sites.

Receding Arctic ice has increased commercial activities and efforts to advance national interests within the region. Regional thawing encourages further exploration for oil, gas, critical minerals, and biological resources. Additionally, the effects of increased tourism and trans-Arctic shipping traffic raise the potential for environmental disasters and economic friction. Shipping on two trans-Arctic sea routes—the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage—will bring increased maritime traffic and geostrategic competition. As states seek competitive advantages in the changing Arctic, international tensions are again on the rise.

Reemerging strategic competition in the Arctic has renewed tensions between the United States, Russia, and China. Regular Russian bomber flights into Alaska’s air defense identification zone have, among other things, raised the Arctic’s profile within the homeland defense conversation. Geostrategic competition and homeland defense considerations prompted the US Department of Defense
(DOD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to devote more attention to developing Arctic strategies and include the Arctic in their planning and operations to defend American interests in the region.

These factors, among others, require greater levels of multi-domain awareness to anticipate and shape North America’s posture to deter, deny, disrupt, and respond to crises within the polar region. Given the increased tensions, activities, and changes, special operations can serve as a foreign policy instrument and a military tool that can be applied strategically and mitigate risks or conflict escalation. Additionally, the advancements Indigenous people are making to validate and reinforce their sovereignty and create more positive conditions for their respective communities strengthen their demands for legitimacy. Securing the North American homeland is a mutual interest of all who reside within its borders, including the Indigenous people of the United States, Canada, and Greenland. Just as SOF are integral to the future of homeland defense in the High North, Indigenous people are integral partners to the overall effort. Indigenous leaders, communities, and institutions can contribute to expanding SOF’s Arctic knowledge and capabilities. Therefore, the SOF-Indigenous partnership is a critical component of future North American homeland defense.

The security of the North American Arctic is a function, in large part because of the Indigenous people and other, non-Native individuals, who live in the High North. More than 80 percent of the people who live in the North American High North are Indigenous, and their presence serves to validate Canadian and US claims of sovereignty in the region. However, methods for including these Indigenous peoples remain undefined or unspecified. Issues with permissions and authorities regarding interactions between military forces and northern communities, law enforcement, and other agencies need attention. SOF are a critical and key mechanism to deter, deny, and protect the North American Arctic. A part of that effort is accomplished by building effective and long-term relationships among Indigenous communities and organizations. An enduring and sustained relationship between SOF and North America’s Arctic Indigenous people must be intentional, formative, and fostered to make North American Arctic security and safety networks effective. Canadian, American, and Danish SOF are well positioned for this task. The leaders of these three countries, the “North American Arctic tripoint,” must recognize the critical value of using SOF to forge paths fostering productive relationships between special operators and Indigenous people.

Unlike in the lower latitudes of North America, the demographics of the High North consist of widely dispersed pockets of primarily Indigenous people. The Indigenous ancestral knowledge and skills needed to survive, thrive, and operate in Arctic and near-Arctic conditions are unparalleled. Military forces operating in
the Arctic must leverage this critical knowledge base. As military planners, analysts, and strategists conceptualize defending the homeland, SOF are the ideal choice for working with Indigenous people, just as they have with other indigenous cultures around the world for more than seven decades. However, when considering the defense of North America, Indigenous people are not citizens of a foreign nation; they are legitimate citizens of North America’s homeland with sovereign rights rooted in each nation’s laws. The North American Arctic tripoint must lean forward to chart synchronized and cogent paths to integrate the different Indigenous peoples inhabiting the High North.

Building enduring relationships between each country’s Indigenous citizens and the military are complex endeavors. Historical trauma, Native sovereignty challenges, and differences in worldview produce significant obstacles to establishing trusting relationships. These are not insurmountable challenges, though. Planners and policy makers must focus on particular aspects of Indigenous–military relations to achieve lasting partnerships in an effort to secure and defend the homeland.

At this point it is helpful to explain why Greenland is included as part of the North American Arctic. Greenland sits on the North American tectonic plate and is closer to Canada and the United States than it is to Denmark. More importantly, Greenland’s population is predominately Greenlandic Inuit people. They comprise about 85 percent of the island’s total population. Coupled with the existence of the US Space Force’s base at Thule, Greenland, Canada and Greenland’s shared land and sea border, and traditional ties between the three nations, Greenland has been included as part of the North American security discussions. Further, because Greenland is a territory of the Kingdom of Denmark and falls within the Danish security umbrella, Danish SOF are logically considered among the SOF tripoints. Given these intersections, Denmark’s military has relational responsibilities with Greenland’s Native people.

When considering a strategic approach with SOF and Indigenous people, having a foundation of the historical context of SOF and the Arctic gives some background on how to begin thinking about SOF working with Indigenous communities and leaders. Next, understanding the complexities of Indigenous sovereignty better informs defense efforts to forge respectful and unifying relationships that are reciprocal, not transactional. Lastly, we offer suggestions that policy makers, strategists, and military leaders ought to consider in building an enduring and working relationship. This partnership must be inclusive and diverse and value sovereignty.

**Historical Lessons to Be Learned in the North**

In June 1942, Japan invaded Alaska’s Aleutian Island chain and occupied two small islands: Kiska and Attu. Though the motivation for Japan’s Aleutian opera-
tion was most likely to create a distraction for the eventual Battle of Midway in the Pacific, the strategic implications of adversarial occupation on United States soil were, at the time, significant and led to expanded conversation regarding the strategic value of Alaska and the Arctic as a future potential battlespace and avenue of approach. During the joint United States–Canadian air and ground campaign to reclaim the lost islands, there were more casualties caused by cold injuries than from combat. The extreme conditions of operating militarily in an Arctic climate with ill-prepared soldiers, and at the end of a long and fragile supply chain, raised awareness about the difficulty of sustained operations in such severe and austere environments in the future.

During the Cold War, the Arctic was among the most militarized regions on Earth, with a significant Soviet presence in northern and eastern Russia but also regular United States, Canadian, and European air and maritime forces based in the Arctic and sub-Arctic from Alaska to Canada and Greenland and across the North Atlantic to cover Iceland, the United Kingdom, and Norway. The Soviets and NATO regularly tested each other’s air defenses through freedom of navigation sorties by long-range aviation. Ground operations included operating and maintaining long-range radars to keep a watchful eye for Soviet long-range bombers as well as allied forces operations in Northern Europe. Whether during World War II or the Cold War, military forces operated in the Arctic and in Arctic-like conditions enough to glean lessons that should inform future strategies and logistics.

The lessons that emerge from conventional military operations in cold weather conditions can inform our approach to military planning today. The US military can operate in cold weather, but it lacks the experience of operating in the extreme cold of the Arctic. This provides opportunities for better training, informed by lessons from past operations. The challenge? Arctic campaigns have been understudied in favor of campaigns associated with more familiar ground. Still, twenty-first-century technologies have made some improvements in military capabilities and capacities to operate in extreme cold conditions. Military equipment—outer garments and sheltering systems, as examples—have improved exposure tolerance to extreme cold and enhanced troop mobility. What was impossible in the 1940s and 1950s is possible today such that the Arctic extremes are less limiting than ever before. Still, there are limits.

Issues such as force structures, developing unit regional expertise, and building competencies to conduct sustained and coordinated operations in extreme cold weather operations need to be addressed. If SOF are to succeed in future Arctic operations, conventional forces and SOF must adapt to the global and climatic conditions of the Arctic via organizational structures and command-and-control

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processes designed specifically for Arctic operations. This necessitates changes to force design and placement, as a starting point. Now and ahead are opportunities to improve US forces to conduct operations in the Arctic.

Definitions and Delimitations

Special operations forces are those military units that conduct special operations and provide precise, discrete, and scalable options that can be synchronized with activities that are a part of a government’s objectives. The discrete nature of their missions differentiates SOF from conventional forces that require larger operational footprints, longer support chains, and greater sustainment requirements. These are inherently limiting factors to conventional forces that SOF can overcome because of their smaller tactical footprint and much smaller logistical support requirements.

Some special operations are stunning direct-action raids that draw wide publicity, but often, other operations take an indirect approach and garner little or no recognition. Special operations are an effort to resolve, as economically as possible, specific problem sets that lie at the operational or strategic levels that conventional forces alone would find difficult or impossible to address.

These [special] operations are designed in a culturally attuned manner to create immediate and enduring effects to help prevent and deter conflict or prevail in war. They assess and shape foreign political and military environments unilaterally, or with host nations, multinational partners, and Indigenous populations.

Special operations warfare is replete with accounts on how military special operators rely on local people to understand the environment and lead change in a country. During World War II special operators trained anti-Japanese guerilla forces in Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Through partnerships with local leaders, the anti-Japanese campaigns in Southeast Asia served to tie up enemy forces that could have been used in other theaters of the war in the Pacific. Such activities were beyond the capabilities of conventional forces. Whether conducting unconventional warfare or foreign internal defense (FID) operations to assist host nations in combating internal security threats, SOF engage local people to gain situational awareness, employ strategic and precision military action, or build security forces as part of a campaign. The essential point here is the integrated and intimate nature of these missions enable SOF to establish deeper relationships and gain greater understanding of sensitive social, cultural, and political dynamics of the operational environment. More substantive relationships translate to greater knowledge and understanding of the context and climate of a given environment. Furthermore, SOF develop tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) appropriate to local conditions and purposes. These are precisely the types
of relationships US SOF need to establish with the Indigenous people of the High North. As the United States looks to expand its operational footprint in the Arctic and improve its capacity to operate in extreme cold, the SOF–Indigenous partnership will be critical to gaining the requisite knowledge and skills to thrive in the Arctic.

For our purposes, characterization of Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, and Native peoples are applied somewhat synonymously. That is, Native denotes people with indigenous ancestral lineage. Additionally, Alaska Native, American Indians, and First Nations are references to Indigenous people of the North American continent. There are tribes, clans, and distinctive groups of Indigenous peoples who live and thrive in the High North.

The Indigenous People of the North

For thousands of years, Indigenous people in the Arctic have learned how to thrive in extreme cold weather, traverse roadless lands, and navigate in demanding maritime conditions. Despite some degradation of the traditional ways of life among many Indigenous people over the past century, people native to the land continue to adapt to the dynamic Arctic conditions. There is an epistemology, a way of knowing, that is grounded in a place-based knowledge system—one where knowledge generation occurs within the context of a place and its natural cycles. Arctic Indigenous subsistence hunters, for example, are regional experts on animal behaviors and possess historical knowledge of the land. Examples like this form the basis of an evolving knowledge system that guides Indigenous communities on how to thrive in demanding climatic conditions.

Arctic Indigenous people have historical roots in supporting the security and safety within the Arctic. The knowledge on what looks right, understanding the unique Arctic climate, and being skilled to traverse difficult terrain in challenging conditions are relevant knowledge and skills that must be integrated into future SOF Arctic deployments. Indigenous knowledge is essential for US troop deployments aimed at securing the most northern borders of North America. More so in Alaska and Canada, many Indigenous people take exceptional pride in their respective countries’ armed services. In the United States, American Indians and Alaska Natives have been the leading minority groups to join the armed services per capita than any other demographic group. Both Alaska Natives and American Indians contribute to the volunteer force five times more than any other demographic group. There is precedent for leveraging Indigenous knowledge for homeland defense purposes. Alaska Natives and Indigenous people of Canada have a legacy of being frontline observers having a watchful eye against hostile incursions into North America since World War II.
United States

The Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG), more commonly known as the Eskimo Scouts, was formed during World War II as a military reserve force component of the US Army. Its organization in 1942 was a response to Japan’s attacks on Hawai‘i and the occupation of parts of Alaska’s Aleutian Chain. The ATG served to identify potential Japanese incursions in Alaska along the territory’s expansive coastline. There was some initial controversy in recruiting and arming Alaska Natives as at the time there was legal and social segregation by race across Alaska. The participation of Alaska Natives in the military during World War II, despite these bitter circumstances, speaks well of the patriotism and hopefulness of that generation of Alaska Natives. However, the ATG has since dissolved, and there are no subsequent similar organizations in Alaska.

Canada

Above 60 degrees North latitude, Canada is sparsely populated and possesses little infrastructure. The Canadian Rangers, a subcommand of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), live and work in remote and isolated areas, serving as forward observers, of sorts, for the Canadian Arctic. Mostly comprised of First Nation members, the Canadian Rangers provide local information on unusual activities and events that may have military interests. Additionally, local patrols contribute to domestic efforts led by the CAF, share local knowledge, and perform search-and-rescue activities in support of military operations. Further, Canadian Rangers provide mentoring and coaching to the Junior Canadian Ranger Program, which engages local youth to build skills and knowledge related to the roles the Canadian Rangers fill.

The Canadian Rangers model serves as a useful reference point when considering a formal Indigenous militarized organization with an active role in defending the homeland and supporting crisis response. Although many lessons could be learned from the Canadian Rangers integration into the CAF’s military efforts, establishing a comparable United States Indigenous force in Alaska with similar command relationships has inherent challenges. However, recruiting Alaska Native individuals to join the Alaska National Guard is one avenue, albeit different. Nonetheless, there are regulatory and structural limits that constrain the prospect in forming something that parallels the Canadian Rangers. Budgetary vulnerabilities, political dynamics, limited resources, and a lack of urgency make such an endeavor unlikely at this time, either at the state or federal levels.
Greenland/Denmark

The history of Indigenous people formally integrated into Western military forces in Greenland does not have the same legacy as found in the United States or Canada. Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Greenland relies on the Danes—and a twentieth-century US-backed treaty—for its defense and security. The Danish Special Operations Command coordinates the Sirius Dog Sled Patrols under the auspices of the Danish naval SOF that actively patrols the northern portions of Greenland six months out of the year as a means of asserting Danish sovereignty in the Arctic. This northern patrol is the only active and recurring Arctic patrol executed by a special operations unit among the United States, Canada, and Denmark. Although the Greenlandic Inuit people make up most of the island’s population, there is no formal force arrangement between Greenland’s Indigenous people and Denmark’s military.

Discussion

US special operators, leaders, and planners are uniquely skilled, organized, and trained to build and implement a cohesive strategy that integrates Native leaders, communities, and elders in support of defending our homeland. US SOF have long engaged nonstate actors and societal influencers in overseas security force assistance and foreign military training operations as an essential element of cultural assimilation efforts. The same approach can, and should, be pursued in the United States and Canada between US SOF and Indigenous peoples. Working with and through Indigenous people is what SOF do. Therefore, when considering special operations in the High North, the Arctic Indigenous people partnered with national SOF would improve northern security and offer a unique resource for safety in the remote and isolated Arctic region.

Integration of SOF and Indigenous peoples in North America will be different than it has been for overseas special operations. Unconventional and irregular warfare doctrine orients toward foreign partners, not Indigenous people who are US, Canadian, or Danish citizens. National laws influence how SOF might appropriately interact with Indigenous populations, which can affect knowledge exchange, skills development, and Indigenous community support. North American Indigenous peoples are a valuable future partner for collaboration, cooperation, and learning, but recalibrating the SOF enterprise to work with its own citizens requires intentional planning and inclusive dialogue with partners and other stakeholders.
The Way Ahead

Defending the homeland requires a unified effort. The Indigenous peoples living in the High North have a vested interest in preserving and reinforcing their sovereignty: economically, politically, and culturally. SOF is uniquely poised to build relationships with Indigenous people, prepare for operations in remoted and austere conditions, and indirectly supporting defensive lines of effort with small units. Simultaneously, though, SOF is still learning how to conduct sustained operations under North American Arctic conditions across the varied special operations mission sets. Therefore, there is a natural alignment—an operational and tactical imperative—for SOF and Indigenous communities to build and sustain enduring relationships to improve security and safety in the North American Arctic.

Native communities have contributed to securing the homeland since World War II. However, to advance the defense of the homeland in the twenty-first century, a coherent and resourced strategy must begin with advancing the relationships between SOF and Indigenous communities. Working with local law enforcement, conducting training and exercises in the High North, and learning some of the cultural ways that have sustained Native people for thousands of years are a few efforts US, Canadian, and Danish SOF could immediately pursue. By engaging in such activities, SOF units operating in the High North will forge productive relationships while developing essential knowledge and skills for enhanced Arctic operations. Making and sustaining trust relationships with Indigenous communities will allow for future opportunities to collaborate and evolve the relationships. Connecting SOF with Indigenous communities promotes formalized partnerships in time, thus opening pathways for improved doctrinal and policy development integrating SOF–Indigenous relationships. Identifying tensions, co-constructing collaborative solutions, and learning from those lessons during peacetime training, exercises, and other shared experiences will contribute to building trust and enduring relationships.

Make and Sustain Contact

With any emerging relationship, we must establish connections supporting cross communications between Indigenous communities and SOF leaders. A variety of mechanisms are available to initiate a dialogue to find common interests. Participating in Native-led roundtables, attending planning conferences, and conducting leader-to-leader engagements are some mediums where the SOF–Indigenous integration can occur. In these interactions, SOF exercises its tradition of listening, understanding, and exploring possibilities. US SOF can look to Canada’s Joint Task Force North (JTFN) as the example of such integration efforts. JTFN
is the force employer for the CAF in the High North and has made impressive gains in developing these mutually supportive relationships. JTFN planners look for economic opportunities to connect Indigenous-led businesses to military logistical requirements, as an example.  

Conducting these culture-based community engagements demands military leaders learn about their future partners, their cultures, their communities, and their way of life. Indigenous peoples can have a worldview that, at times, might be at odds with traditional Western values. In North America, Arctic and sub-Arctic Indigenous communities often practice a subsistence lifestyle. Communities make decisions according to nature’s cycles and not human-derived agendas. Therefore, making contact and developing sustainable relationships requires a more humble, respectful, and curious approach by military leaders. US SOF are trained and assessed on their abilities to engage Native leaders from this approach. It is a natural alignment that must be pursued.

As with any initiative, US planners must develop a strategic engagement plan. This strategic Native engagement plan must consider Indigenous sovereignty. This type of effort requires a collaborative and organic approach that considers Indigenous, military, civilian, and business leader interests to ensure an engagement plan that also meets legal and ethical standards.

**Address Systemic Barriers**

Engagement plans will inevitably identify barriers to collaboration and produce conflict. In particular, historical traumas exist with Indigenous people throughout North America. Future US SOF–Indigenous integration requires sensitivities to these issues and historical anecdotes. US SOF cannot expect unconditional welcoming by Indigenous peoples and must approach future engagement plans mindful of history. Structural inequalities and validation of sovereignty are likely to surface during these initial dialogues. Additionally, subsistence management is a point of contention in Alaska. Alaska Native organizations and communities look for greater authority on how to manage fisheries and mammal harvesting as a means of their survival, balancing undue advantage and Indigenous business access is already a complicated situation in Alaska. Under the US CARES Act, Alaska Native regional corporations seek access to US congressional funds where other non-Native corporations have little legal justifications. This is only one example of the many complications that will naturally surface during future SOF–Indigenous engagements and planning efforts.

Making connections and outlining a path forward creates opportunities to build meaningful relationships. SOF units are poised to support these types of engagements but will need calibration. SOF non-Native service members will
require cultural training and persistent engagements to improve awareness and familiarity to some of the views, norms, and preferences of regional Native communities. Investing in specified training for SOF–Indigenous engagements brings benefits of greater receptivity and commitment to the cause.

**Build and Enhance Working Partnerships**

There are several tangible connections to make between SOF and Indigenous communities. Creating and exercising partnership agreements between medical communities is an example of building a long-term connection. Establishing legal and ethically appropriate channels for exchanges of medicines or services bodes well when creating enduring relationships. Such engagements have happened, albeit informally. A regional Native nonprofit care provider, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, donated COVID-19 vaccines to a US air base for its Airmen, as a recent example. These kinds of positive exchanges build meaningful and trusting relationships between US military personnel and Indigenous communities. Leaders should anticipate legal dilemmas when building and exercising partnerships; however, the advantages would outweigh such difficulties.

SOF and Indigenous community leaders can leverage existing opportunities for collaboration. Both countries’ militaries have requirements to support defense activities that can align with Indigenous communities’ interests. SOF exercise planners can look to Indigenous-led companies and community leaders for servicing contracts prior to and during exercises. A contractual agreement for services can contribute to improving economic security among Native communities while simultaneously developing training opportunities for SOF to learn and develop Arctic capabilities. SOF can also conduct community assessments aimed at development and land leasing for future training activities that provides economic benefit to Indigenous communities while enabling SOF to develop greater regional expertise and cultural awareness.

**Conclusion**

It bears repeating the increasingly obvious: climate change is reshaping global geopolitics, and the Arctic is now in the crosshairs of geostrategic competition. Because of these changes, more stakeholders than ever are strategizing about the Arctic. SOF has a global mission in support of US national security objectives, and the Arctic is increasingly relevant to US national security and the security of North America. Therefore, SOF commands in Canada, the United States, and the Kingdom of Denmark must integrate the Arctic into their missions as a region of increasing relevance and necessity to defend and secure their homelands. In collabora-
tion with Indigenous communities of the North, SOF must understand and develop its future role within the North American Arctic. To do so and intentionally shape the future Arctic, SOF must align with and learn from the Indigenous people of the High North and share the responsibility for defending the homeland.

LTC James R. Morton, Jr., PhD, USAR
Dr. Morton is a faculty researcher in the Center of Alaska Native Research and an affiliate faculty member of the Center for Arctic Security and Resilience, both at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Additionally, Dr. Morton holds the rank of lieutenant colonel in the US Army Reserves and serves as a Native advisor for Alaskan Command. His service began as a Special Forces operator, where he supported theater-level special operations commands.

Dr. Ryan Burke
Dr. Burke is a professor of military and strategic studies at the US Air Force Academy (USAFA) and a veteran Marine Corps officer. He is the research director for the Homeland Defense Institute at USAFA, co-director of Project 6633 at the Modern War Institute at West Point, and an affiliate faculty member of the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Center for Arctic Security and Resilience. Dr. Burke’s latest book, The Polar Pivot (Lynne Rienner, 2022), illustrates how the Arctic and Antarctic are rapidly emerging as geopolitically strategic hot spots.

Notes
1. Arctic Edge is a US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) joint exercise scheduled bi-annually for the purpose of conducting realistic and effective training for participants in premier training locations throughout Alaska.


15. Lackenbauer, Canadian Rangers.


17. JP 3-05: Special Operations.


COMMENTARY

Polar Nights, White Nights, and Normal Days and Nights

Arctic Ground Target Identification and Engagement

DR. LESTER W. GRAU

Abstract

Most armies train to fight on their own soil or that of their neighbors. Some, like the British Army during the days of the British Empire, trained to fight on a variety of terrain and in differing climates. Today, the best-trained Arctic forces are those of Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Canada. With the reactivation of the 11th Airborne Division in Alaska, the United States will join the group of Arctic-specific forces. Arctic tactics and equipment differ from conventional tactics and equipment due to the different geography, climate, and peculiarities of the high latitudes. One of the striking Arctic peculiarities is that of visibility. Russia conducted visibility and detection tests on Russian equipment on the Arctic Kola Peninsula. These tests, aggregated with the local weather and climate, determined the effect of background conditions against which the soldier scout, forward observer, or gunner could detect and destroy targets. Although the results are very tactical, the operational impact of Arctic visibility on Arctic warfare is striking.

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A fundamental concept of contemporary conventional war under nuclear-threatened conditions is that combat will continue uninterrupted to deny the enemy the time to restore combat potential, maneuver reserves, and resupply. This is conditional on the ability to fight at any time of the day or night and under any climatic condition. Special features of the polar region challenge the “normal” concept of night and day. Polar nights occur in the northernmost and southernmost parts of the planet when there is night for more than 24 continuous hours. Polar days [Midnight Sun in the US and White Nights in Russia] occur when the sun stays above the horizon for more than 24 continuous hours. In the Russian Arctic, polar night runs from 2 December through 11 January (39 days), while polar days run from 22 May to 22 July (62 days). This leaves 264 days of relatively normal day and night.¹

Polar days support round-the-clock artillery and aviation missions while increasing the need to camouflage the force and conceal its movement. Polar
nights complicate orientation, the conduct of accurate fire, limit the effectiveness of weapons at their maximum range of fires, and influences the use of aviation. For example, the engineer capability to build defensive fighting positions falls by 25–40 percent during darkness. Low temperatures, strong winds, and frozen soil further degrade engineer capability. Strategic outcomes may result from small-scale fights by battalions and brigades. Polar ground target identification and engagement is critical, as these Arctic targets are often vital due to their purpose, location, and difficulty in rapidly restoring or replacing them. Targeting visibility in daylight varies by the time of day, illumination, atmospheric precipitation, fog, terrain relief, smoke from fires, gun smoke, camouflage, vegetation, enemy technical interference with optical-electronic observation, and building density in cities and hamlets. Electronic night-vision systems assist in night target engagement but are not as effective as daylight observation. The stabilized 30-mm 2A42 multipurpose autocannon on the venerable Russian airborne BMD-2 infantry fighting vehicle has a daylight maximum effective range of 1,400 meters but drops to 800 meters at night using night-vision systems. Russia conducted visibility and detection tests on Russian equipment on the Arctic Kola Peninsula. The peninsula, located between the White and Barents Seas, has mountains, swamps, forest, tundra, and built-up areas (such as Murmansk). The peninsula has a relatively moderate climate for the Arctic. Tests, conducted on the Kola Peninsula, aggregated with the local weather and climate, determined the effect of background conditions against which the soldier scout, forward observer, or gunner could detect and destroy targets.
Table 1. Physical target visibility under normal conditions depending on the background

Abbreviations: BMD (Russian: Боевая Машина Десанта, Boyevaya Mashina Desanta) is an airborne amphibious tracked infantry fighting vehicle; BTR (Russian: бронетранспортер, Bronetransportyor) is an armored transport; and AGTM (Russian: Корнет, Cornet) is a second-generation Russian man-portable antitank guided missile.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Type of Target</th>
<th>Limit of Visibility, km</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Type of Target</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Tank</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Tank</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in tank</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in tank</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BMD</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>BMD</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BMD</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BMD</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BTR</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>BTR</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BTR</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BTR</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in ATGM</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in ATGM</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM crew</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM crew</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Machinegun crew</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>Snow-covered Forest</td>
<td>Tank (white camo)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in tank white camo</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BMD (white camo)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>BMD (white)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in white BMD</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BMD</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BTR (white camo)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>BTR (white camo)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BTR white camo</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in BTR white camo</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM white camo</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>ATGM white camo</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in ATGM white</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dug-in ATGM white</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM crew</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>ATGM crew</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Machinegun crew</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Machinegun crew</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the range of day-lit visibility increases with the degree of target exposure and the contrast between the target and its background. Day-lit tests on the Kola Peninsula ranges had more than 2.5 kilometers visibility and measured the time that it took to detect different targets at different ranges over different backgrounds, first without the use of binoculars or other visual assistance and then with. The mathematical expectation was that, under normal circumstances, the unaided eye could detect a tank in a forest 2.5 kilometers away in 7 seconds when the observer and target were at the same altitude. Differences in background contrast, elevation, and terrain breaks affected the visibility findings. The BMD-2 with the 30-mm automatic cannon and the PKT 7.62-mm co-axial machine gun were used for the fire missions. With an increase in range, the average time expended engaging targets...
increased 12–35 percent, for low hills 10–30 percent, and 5–20 percent on the plains. Some 40 percent of the test area involved hills and higher elevation. This required that the vehicle commander and gunner carefully select their observation and firing posts. Dug-in targets were difficult to detect and destroy.  

**Table 2. Mathematical expectation of the time to detect targets visually depending on the range and background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations: BMD (Russian: Боевая Машина Десанта, Boyevaya Mashina Desanta) is an airborne amphibious tracked infantry fighting vehicle; BTR (Russian: бронетранспортёр, Bronetransportyor) is an armored transport; and AGTM (Russian: Корнет, Cornet) is a second-generation Russian man-portable antitank guided missile.</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Distance by meters and seconds</td>
<td>500m</td>
<td>1,000m</td>
<td>1,500m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannon Target</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMD</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTR</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATGM launch</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank white camo</td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMD white camo</td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTR white camo</td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATGM white</td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinegun Target</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry ≤ squad</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATGM crew</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinegun crew</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grass field</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow-covered forest</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tests determined that observers could detect small targets (ATGM and machinegun crews) without binoculars or other optics up to 900 meters away. The further the target was from the gunner, the less chance of a hit, and the expenditure of ammunition on distant targets increased. When only part of the target was visible, the shots fired were usually high of center mass. The less of the target that was visible reduced the probability of successful target engagement by 1.2 to 1.8 times.\(^7\)

### Table 3. Visual distance is dependent on atmospheric transparency\(^8\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Atmospheric Conditions</th>
<th>Coefficient of Weakening Emanation</th>
<th>Horizontal Meteorological Visibility Distance, meters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy fog</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dense fog</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate fog</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light fog</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy haze</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light haze</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very clear</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally clear</td>
<td>0.0713</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Kola Peninsula has high humidity and is frequently cloud- or fog-covered, with overcast up to 180 days a year (20 days a month in winter, 10 days per month in the summer, and 5–10 days a month in the spring and fall). In the summer, daylight continues for 17 hours or more. Winter overcast is less than eight hours a day.\(^9\)

### Table 4. Effective foreign systems to hide tanks and means of optical-electronic suppression (OEP)\(^10\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Upgrades</th>
<th>Countermeasures</th>
<th>Effectiveness of OEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1A2 and Leopard 2 tanks</td>
<td>Laser and television fire direction system for cannon and missile armaments with laser rangefinder and television aiming. Semi-active laser placement (GPS and target acquisition). Second-generation ATGM with semi-active command system for location and target acquisition.</td>
<td>Reduces probability of hit by 1.2–2.3 times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Future foreign tank systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Upgrades</th>
<th>Countermeasures</th>
<th>Effectiveness of OEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laser and radar illumination indicator. Automatic systems to create smoke screens, portray false locations and traps. Active optical and radio-location jamming station. Use of “adaptive” technology.</td>
<td>Thermal and radio-location recce systems, ATGM with laser radial-command placement.</td>
<td>Reduces probability of hit by 2–3.5 times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tests used Russian weapons systems, which generally have lower silhouettes, less mass, less weight, and wider tracks than their Western counterpart systems. Furthermore,
the Russians design their equipment to function primarily on Russian terrain. However, the Russians are monitoring Western tank developments and their incorporation of optical-electronic suppression systems in current and planned tanks (table 4).

Table 5. Time for a dust–smoke cloud from a 30-mm automatic cannon to disperse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ground at firing position</th>
<th>Wind speed</th>
<th>Wind direction</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry grassy ground</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry ground w/o grass</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusty ground</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy ground</td>
<td>2-2.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassy ground after rain</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soggy loamy soil</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caked snow 0.4–0.5 meters</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dust and smoke clouds are common on the battlefield. They can be deliberate smoke screens laid as part of the masking effort or incidental to the battle, usually formed by the impact and explosion of artillery rounds and large-caliber machine-guns firing on targets, as well as terrain fires sparked by explosion and tracer rounds. These dust and smoke clouds can obscure or completely hide the target, frustrating target tracking and fire corrections. Factors enhancing dust and smoke clouds include varying ground pressures from explosions, the ground composition and type of ground cover, the type of fires employed, and the wind direction of the surface winds. Table 5 shows the common types of ground and ground cover on the Kola Peninsula. In dry weather, it gets very dusty, and a moderate wind can create a dust cloud lasting 3–40 seconds. Explosions of different types of ordnance produce their own dust and smoke clouds. A 152-mm or 155-mm HE-fragmentation round cloud will last from 5–20 seconds and restrict visibility 6–7 times. Table 5 shows the time for a dust–smoke cloud created by the stabilized 30-mm 2A42 multipurpose autocannon to disperse. Wind direction is indicated with the weapon laid on 0º of a 360º circle and is unrelated to geographic north.

Russia is a northern country, and winter training is normal training. The Russian tests indicate that the ability to detect and destroy enemy targets is often hostage to terrain background, atmospheric conditions, degree of target exposure, enemy optical-electronic suppression, dust, battlefield smoke, and available light. Night-vision devices are effective at close distances but not at longer ranges. Much of the Russian testing was against stationary targets. Movement is always a good indicator of enemy location. Consequently, necessary movement is often restricted to nights or
during adverse atmospheric conditions. One-sided illumination markers, direction azimuths, and ground guides are often necessary for nighttime movement. Thermal sensors are a threat to maintaining secrecy as warming tents, generators, and engine warmth can readily give away positions. Radar and radio transmissions also invite enemy counters. Noise carries over long distances of open snow-covered terrain, and acoustic targeting is still part of Russian training. The Arctic adds to normal cold–weather challenges, but a study of its special demands and characteristics aids in adapting effectively to the region. The ongoing fighting in Ukraine has demonstrated the value of satellite and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) reconnaissance on the contemporary battlefield. Polar satellite orbits are difficult to position and relatively short-lived. Russian Arctic ground forces train regularly with UAVs for visual and thermal reconnaissance and radio retransmission, but UAV coverage can only be partial and never constant in the vast Arctic. Arctic ground target identification and engagement remains a primary concern of the ground scout and artillery observer.

Dr. Lester W. Grau
Dr. Grau is the research coordinator for the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He is a graduate of the Defense Language Institute–Foreign Language Center (Russian) and the US Army's Institute for Advanced Russian and Eastern European Studies. He retired from the US Army in 1992 at the rank of lieutenant colonel. His military education included the Infantry Officers Basic and Advanced Courses, the US Army Command and General Staff College, and the US Air War College. His baccalaureate and master's degrees are in international relations. His doctorate is in military history. He served a combat tour in Vietnam, four European tours, a Korean tour, and a posting in Moscow. He has published extensively in academic journals and books.

Notes
1. A. Zelenov, “Ночьью как днем: Факторы влияющие на ведение боевых действий в северных условиях” [Night is like day: Factors influencing military activity in the north], Армейский Сборник [Army Digest], April 2017, 5.
10. Zelenov, “Ночью как днем, 11
The Three-Fold Path of the Snow Dragon

China’s Influence Operations in the Arctic

CPT CHRISTOPHER BARICH, MINNESOTA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Abstract

This article argues that, since 2013, China’s involvement in Arctic affairs has accelerated, and Beijing has begun to assert its political and economic ambitions more formally in its white papers, Vision for Maritime Cooperation Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China’s Arctic Policy, and China’s National Defense in the New Era. Simultaneously, China has been conducting influence operations targeting Arctic governance regimes, scientific research, and economic investment in pursuit of long-term strategic objectives. These Chinese influence operations utilize the strategy of the “three warfares”—public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare—to set the conditions such that the consequences, the attainment of long-term strategic objectives, are a natural outcome from its engagement. China’s three warfares strategy is designed to cultivate influence through governance, scientific, and economic vectors to construct, support, and set the conditions for the emergence of political power and lay the groundwork for future operations in the Arctic.

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In 2005, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) first released public statements indicating its aspiration to become a polar great power with the ability to project influence and power globally from the Arctic to Antarctica. In 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping announced the One Belt, One Road initiative, an ambitious transnational infrastructure investment and construction program that has since become known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2017, the PRC published Vision for Maritime Cooperation Under the Belt and Road Initiative, laying out Beijing’s intention to establish a maritime economic passage to link mainland China to Europe via the Arctic Ocean. In 2018, the PRC announced its ambition to establish a trans-Arctic shipping route, called the Polar Silk Road (PSR), as part of the BRI. In 2020, Beijing assessed the Arctic region as a “global strategic commanding heights” and an important passage of “geostrategic value.” The PRC utilizes the “three warfares” strategy—public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare—to conduct influence operations in the Arctic.
For the North, the Chinese enterprise of influence operations focuses on three overlapping Arctic areas of interest: the participation in Arctic affairs and governance, scientific research activities and expeditions, and economic investment in critical infrastructure along the PSR. The purpose of these influence operations is to promote narratives of China as an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs, committed to scientific collaboration, research and exploration in the Arctic, and investment in the economic development and prosperity of all Arctic states and that China should be considered an equal partner as a near-Arctic state. These international and domestic narratives, propagated through repetition and presence, aim to secure Beijing a greater political economic advantage, to secure and maintain access to Arctic natural resources, and to shape and align Arctic states to China's interests. The purpose of this article is to frame Chinese influence operations in the Arctic through the concept of the three warfares strategy and understand how these operations serve China's Arctic narratives, support wider political and economic interests, and further advance long-term security and development strategic objectives. To that goal, the article will provide essential context involving official positions and policies, followed by an introduction of how China employs the three warfares into its priority Arctic national interests.

**Key Policies and Positions**

**China’s Defense Strategy**

In 2019, the PRC published the *China’s National Defense in the New Era* white paper, outlining defensive national security policies and key objectives in order to safeguard China’s sovereignty, security, and development interests. Three key national defensive aims in the white paper are of particular importance for understanding Chinese influence operations in the Arctic: (1) the safeguarding of maritime rights and interests, (2) safeguarding overseas interests, and (3) supporting economic and sustainable development. According to the white paper, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established development milestones for People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to achieve that involve requirements to improve strategic capabilities by 2020, complete modernization by 2035, and transform into a “world-class” military by the centennial founding of the PRC in 2049.

The PLA is not an institution outside of the CCP, such as the military in the United States system is, rather the PLA an extension of the Party. The PLA function is to protect and preserve the dominance of the CCP inside China, to pursue the Party’s directives and interests, and to achieve the CCP’s strategic objectives. In the white paper, the CCP has identified overseas interests as a crucial part of
China’s national interests. The mission of the PLA is to effectively protect the security, rights, and interests of overseas Chinese citizens, organizations, and institutions by addressing deficiencies in overseas operations and support, build maritime forces, develop overseas logistical facilities, and enhance capabilities to accomplish CCP strategic objectives. According to the PRC, the PLA also conducts overseas support operations focused on vessel protection, maintains the security of strategic sea lines of communication, provides overseas noncombatant evacuation operations, and protects maritime rights throughout the globe.

**China’s Arctic Strategy**

In 2018, the PRC published *China’s Arctic Policy* white paper, outlining China’s policy goals, principles, policies, and positions on Arctic affairs, governance and international cooperation, scientific exploration, and exploitation of resources. The white paper describes China as an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs; committed to scientific collaboration, research, and exploration in the Arctic; and invested in the economic development in all Arctic states and asserting China should be considered an equal partner as a near-Arctic state. Changing conditions in the Arctic, claims the white paper, have a direct impact on China’s climate, ecological environment, and economic interests; thus, Beijing proposes China should have rights and privileges in the Arctic analogous to those nations having territories within the Arctic Circle. The PRC assessed the current situation in the Arctic “goes beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature, having a vital bearing on the interests of States outside the region and the interests of the international community as a whole, as well as on the survival, the development, and the shared future for mankind.”

According the *Arctic Narratives and Political Values: Arctic States, China, and NATO* report, the PRC assesses Arctic issues have global implications and international impacts, and “States from outside the Arctic region do not have territorial sovereignty in the Arctic, but they do have rights in respect of scientific research, navigation, overflight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines in the high seas and other relevant sea areas in the Arctic Ocean, and rights to resource exploration and exploitation in the Area, pursuant to treaties such as UNCLOS [United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea] and general international law.” Thus, Beijing holds Arctic exploration, exploitation, and development of Arctic natural resources as key strategic objectives for China’s future energy, economic, and development needs, while portraying China as having “shared interests with Arctic States and a shared future with the rest of the world in the Arctic.”
The Three-Fold Path of the Snow Dragon

Polar Silk Road

In 2013, President Xi announced the ambitious and global initiative currently referred to as the BRI. The PRC stated goal of the BRI is to promote policy coordination, the connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, “unimpeded” trade, financial integration, and “people-to-people bonds.” China encourages countries along the BRI routes to “align their strategies,” to further “pragmatic cooperation”, and to build “unobstructed, safe and efficient maritime transport channels.” The BRI promotes cross-border marine spatial planning to establish common principles, implement technical standards, and for the PRC to provide technical assistance to partner countries.

In 2013, China was approved for observer status by the Arctic Council. Since 2013, China’s involvement in Arctic affairs has accelerated, and Beijing has begun to assert its political and economic ambitions more formally in published government documents. In 2017, the PRC published Vision for Maritime Cooperation Under the Belt and Road Initiative, which stated Beijing’s priority to establish a maritime economic passage to link China to Europe via the Arctic Ocean. In 2018, the China’s Arctic Policy white paper announced the establishment of the PSR as part of the BRI. The PSR focuses on the development of two Arctic shipping routes: the Transpolar Sea Route (TSR), bisecting the Arctic Ocean from the Chukchi Sea to the Greenland Sea, and, most predominately, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) along the northern coast of Russia from the Chukchi Sea to the Barents Sea. Three strategic objectives for the PSR aim to achieve, to include “sustaining economic development,” “[d]efending national sovereignty, security, and development interests,” and “[r]eforming the global system to align with PRC interests.”

Sino-Arctic Shaping Efforts

China’s Influence Operations in the Arctic

According to the Army Techniques Publication 7-100.3: Chinese Tactics, the PRC strategic objectives can be understood in two basic categories: security and development. The PLA’s security objectives include protecting the CCP, defending China’s territorial sovereignty, and deterring attacks against China, Chinese peoples, and Chinese interests by state and nonstate actors. The PLA development objectives include the protection of PRC economic interests, ensuring freedom of navigation for Chinese military and civilian vessels, procuring natural resources, and establishing new markets. The PRC influence operations in the Arctic are best understood through the three warfares strategy to support, reinforce, and achieve the PRC strategic objectives.
According to Stephan Halper in *China: The Three Warfares*, a report to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, these warfares are three mutually reinforcing strategies focused on public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.\(^{16}\) **Public opinion warfare** represents information operations designed to support PRC interests and operations by shaping public discourse, influencing political positions, and building international sympathy. **Psychological warfare** is defined as information operations targeting a specific audience intended to influence that audience’s behavior and are integrated deception operations into conventional and unconventional warfare. **Legal warfare** comprises information operations using domestic and international laws, rules, and norms designed to support PRC political and economic interests through valid legal frameworks and unbalance potential opponents. These Three Warfare strategies are indirect methods are designed to influence a targeted population’s perceptions, assessments, and decision making, to facilitate actions by the targeted population that are favorable to China’s long-term strategic objectives.\(^{17}\)

In 2005, the PRC first released public statements indicating its aspiration to become a polar great power with the ability to globally project influence and power from the Arctic to Antarctica. According to leading China polar expert Anne-Marie Brady, “China’s thinking on the polar regions and global oceans demonstrates a level of ambition and forward planning that few, if any, modern industrial states can achieve.”\(^{18}\) In 2020, the PRC published *Science of Military Strategy*, identifying the two polar regions as belonging to the “global strategic commanding heights” and as passages of important geostrategic value.\(^{19}\) In the Arctic, establishing the presence of the PRC and maintaining access to the region are key political and economic goals Beijing aspires to reach as long-term strategic objectives by 2049.\(^{20}\)

**The Three Warfares in the Arctic**

Since the introduction of the three warfares into the PLA lexicon in 2003, this strategy has advanced considerably and a useful theoretical framework for analyzing China influence operations in the Arctic.\(^{21}\) According to a recent report by the China Aerospace Studies Institute, *Propensity, Conditions, and Consequences: Effective Coercion Through Understanding Chinese Thinking*, the Chinese strategic approach to strategy is to set the conditions such that the consequences, the attainment of long-term strategic objectives, are a natural outcome from the inherent potential of the situation.\(^{22}\) China’s engagement in the Arctic is designed to cultivate influence through governance, scientific, and economic vectors, in order to build political power and lay the groundwork for future operations in the region.\(^{23}\) The three warfares are intended to construct, support, and set the condi-
tions for the emergence of political power. This slowly emerging political power allows for the long-term development of forms of control—coercive capability, consensual inducements, and pursuit of legitimacy—in the Arctic.

**Geopolitical**

China’s three wars strategy represents a tool meant to facilitate global Sino ambitions through specialized regional application, including the Arctic. Beijing’s fundamental position on its need to be an equal governance actor in the Arctic exists through its global equities (great-power access) and concerns (climate-change impacts). Chinese global and Arctic legitimacy cannot be separated according to the regime, which presents advantageous geopolitical circumstances for China. China’s ability to effectively compete in various sectors throughout the world allows Beijing to set conditions for additional influence that is often difficult to contest. For example, the PSR policy involving the Arctic is largely an extension of the multiregional BRI.

The three wars strategy is most pronounced in the geopolitical arena, by penetrating bilateral and multilateral institutions, governance regimes, and decision making to facilitate positive legal, psychological, and public opinion effects to set conditions for China’s long-term strategic objectives in the Arctic. Since 2013, Beijing has increased China’s participation in Arctic affairs and governance as an observer to the Arctic Council; as a partner in the Arctic Circle Forum, hosting the organization’s annual assembly in Shanghai in 2019; as a member of the Arctic Economic Council; as chair of the Pacific Arctic Group, organized under the International Arctic Science Committee; as a full member of the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum; and through China’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council. China’s engagement in organizations, inside and outside the Arctic region, facilitates the building of bilateral and multilateral relationships that provide opportunities for generating influence and political power. In 2018, the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (the CAO agreement) was negotiated and implemented among the Arctic coastal states of Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States and non-Arctic states with distant-water fishing capacity, China, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, and South Korea, aligning with Chinese policy positions and preferences outlined in China’s Arctic Policy white paper. The CAO agreement is an example of legal warfare setting conditions for future operations in the Arctic with psychological and public opinion effects enabling those future operations. China’s participation and ratification of the CAO agreement consolidated Beijing’s long-term position in Arctic fisheries regimes and prevented restrictions on Chinese marine scientific research, while nurturing its environmental profile and strengthening perceptions of China as a power that can legitimately pursue scientific advance in the Arctic.
Barich

Additionally, China gains leverage as a responsible fisheries actor in the Arctic for the purposes of offsetting and/or distracting from other contested regions. At the very least, China establishes the official position of the state, which allows Beijing to maintain a position that Chinese-involved illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing violations are a substate actor issue. China’s membership to the agreement yields other three warfares benefits, too. Through a multitude of working groups, task forces, and expert groups, Beijing is able to conduct influence operations targeting the bilateral and multilateral decision-making regimes that have positive psychological and public opinion effects that promote China’s near-Arctic state narrative, legitimize the PRC’s participation in Arctic affairs as an important stakeholder, and shape the policy discussions to achieve Chinese interests.\(^\text{29}\) As far as Chinese society is concerned (public opinion), the regime is successfully fulling its duties as required by the self-proclaimed Middle Kingdom. Contrary to popular (Western) belief, most Chinese are generally satisfied with the geopolitical performance of Beijing. The Arctic regional pursuits of China—geopolitically—continue to fit within the larger national sentiment also. Lastly, China’s strongest psychological warfare component geopolitically manifests through its consistent use of “peace” overtones involving its interests.\(^\text{30}\) Such a premise presents difficulties for competitors to respond with counternarratives—by design. For the Arctic and its notable characteristic of cooperation, China’s “peaceful” pursuits could be particularly problematic for the West.

**Scientific Research**

The three warfares strategies are the most subtle in the realm of scientific research, by maintaining China’s presence in the Arctic region through expeditions, facilities, and collaboration with Arctic states, Beijing slowly develops positive psychological and public opinion effects inside and outside the region to set the conditions for legal participation in the geopolitical arena and support China’s long-term strategic objectives in the Arctic. Public opinion, legal, and psychological aspects of the three warfares strategy have been shaped by mostly contemporary Arctic-related developments. In 1993, China purchased an icebreaker from Ukraine, upgraded the vessel for polar conditions, and named it the *Xue Long*, translated as the *Snow Dragon*.\(^\text{31}\) In 1999, China launched its first national scientific research expedition to the Arctic into the Bering and Chukchi Seas. In 2019, a second polar-capable icebreaker, the domestically built *Xue Long 2*, entered into service, and China is reportedly planning to build a third polar-capable icebreaker.\(^\text{32}\) Since 1999, the Chinese National Arctic Research Expeditions (CHINARE) have conducted 12 expeditions into the Arctic, with the *Xue Long* and *Xue Long 2* as the primary research vessels. In 2004,
China built its first Arctic research center, the Yellow River Station, in Ny-Ålesund, Norway. Since 2004, China has built a satellite ground receiving station in Kiruna, Sweden, in 2010; a second remote-sensing satellite ground station near Kiruna in 2016; and the China–Iceland Arctic Science Observatory station in Kárhóll, Iceland, in 2018. Additionally, China unsuccessfully pursued scientific research stations in Canada and Greenland.

China's scientific development interests invest heavily in bilateral and multilateral cooperation, focusing significantly in forums that allow for non-Arctic state participation, that can bolster China's image as an extraregional Arctic power protecting the common interest, raise its environmental profile, and legitimatize its participation in the Arctic governance regimes. Public sentiment and academic commentary within the PRC highlights the importance of China as a scientific and technological power that must play an active, preemptive, and vigilant role in exploration, exploitation, development, and governance in Arctic affairs. China's science diplomacy is an example of psychological and public opinion warfare setting conditions for future operations in the Arctic with legal effects enabling legitimization for those future operations. Through scientific exploration and cooperation, Beijing can conduct influence operations utilizing its scientific expedition platforms and research facilities to normalize China's presence in the Arctic, to gain acceptance or indifference from Arctic states to its presence in the region, and to solidify the PRC's self-narratives as an important stakeholder and near-Arctic state.

Gaining increased access into the Arctic for scientific purposes remains an important regime endeavor and facilitates other access goals. However, China also knows how to establish its own access and influence. The opening of the China–Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC) in Shanghai is an excellent example. This institute allows China to attract international participation while having significant control over agendas and interests. The organization also helps to strategically improve China's legitimacy and need to be an Arctic governance actor.

Public opinion warfare is relatively straightforward. Negative climate-change impacts on China allow Beijing to pursue scientific access with almost default Chinese social acceptance and support as a natural expectation. As a result, psychological and legal warfare are areas where China might maintain more focus and resourcing.

**Economic**

Through the BRI, specifically the PSR policy in the Arctic, China's three warfares strategy represents a complex challenge to Arctic states with significant investment needs relative to their development strategies and the most direct tool for China to set conditions for influence and build political power. Beijing advo-
cates for the exploration, extraction, and exploitation of Arctic resources by Arctic and non-Arctic, and China is best situated to leverage its advantages of capital, technology, and domestic market to develop these resources.\textsuperscript{36}

The three warfares strategies are the most acute in China’s investments in critical infrastructure and resource extraction industries, by providing well needed capital to Arctic state development, incentivizing and solidifying cooperation, maintaining access to resources and routes along the PSR, and facilitating the emergence of Arctic state asymmetric dependency on China in support of Beijing’s long-term strategic objectives in the Arctic.

Since establishing the PSR in 2018, Beijing has increased its utilization of a multitude of economic tools, most particularly foreign direct investment, to advance China’s interests and influence in the Arctic region.\textsuperscript{37} In the CNA report, *Exploring the Relationship between China’s Investment in the Arctic and Its National Strategy*, such investments have concentrated heavily in resource extraction industries of oil, natural gas, minerals, and rare earth elements and critical transportation infrastructure—namely tunnels, bridges, rail, and port and airport facilities. Through private PRC-based companies and state-owned enterprises, China can provide guidance and regulations to encourage, restrict, or prohibit particular investments and to ensure consistency with Chinese national interests and long-term strategic objectives. These investment projects have either been completed or attempted in multiple Arctic states, particularly Norway, Iceland, and Greenland, but most predominately in Russia. China has made significant investments in Russia’s oil and gas industry, such as Yamal LNG, a liquified natural gas facility along the NSR, and China continues to be Russia’s primary foreign investor following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.\textsuperscript{38} Aside from Russia, China has concentrated its influence operations efforts on the smaller Arctic states of Iceland and Greenland. Since 2008, both countries were particularly politically and economically vulnerable to foreign investment: the Icelandic economy fell into deep economic depression following the global financial crisis, and Greenland adopted the Self-Government Act, allowing for greater autonomy to negotiate agreements with foreign states, independent of the Kingdom of Denmark.\textsuperscript{39} China has been developing bilateral commercial and economic relations within Iceland and Greenland, investing in joint energy and minerals exploitation and taking advantage of Iceland’s bankrupt finances and Greenland’s ambitions to gain independence from Denmark.\textsuperscript{40}

China’s economic investments in Arctic state’s critical infrastructure and resource extraction industries are examples of psychological and legal warfare setting conditions for the emergence of asymmetric dependency between underdeveloped Arctic states and China with positive public opinion effects by advancing the image of China as important stakeholder, invested in the common good, and reliable partner.
in the Arctic. China’s economic investments allow Beijing to conduct influence operations that have long-lasting structural impact by leveraging economic investment power to cultivate dependency on China for Arctic states’ future development strategies, to secure and maintain access to Arctic resources along the PSR, to promote China as a trusted partner and its near-Arctic state narratives, and to legitimize China’s participation in Arctic affairs and governance.\textsuperscript{41}

**Conclusion**

Since 2005, China has aspired to become a polar great power and has proven its ambition to project influence and power globally from the Arctic to Antarctica. Through the BRI and the PSR, Beijing has utilized elements of the three warfares strategy to conduct influence operations in the Arctic region, focusing on three overlapping Arctic areas of interest to promote China’s increasing role and participation in Arctic affairs and governance, its leadership in scientific research activities and expeditions, and its economic investment in critical infrastructure along the PSR. The goals of Chinese influence operations are to propagate and promote China as an important stakeholder, scientific expert, trusted partner, and near-Arctic state; to shape Arctic states’ perceptions of China’s intentions; and to secure greater political and economic position to meet long-term strategic objectives by 2049.

The use and effectiveness of the three warfares strategy, as applied to the Arctic region, remain uncertain given these remain relatively early in their development. Given emergent globalization circumstances, the pace of China’s interests pursued through influence strategies seems nominal perhaps. At the same time, Chinese state-related behavior in the Arctic remains under close scrutiny from the West. This consideration to the Three Warfares in the Arctic hopefully provokes interest to follow the topic and maybe even continue studies and research on ways in which to understand Chinese Arctic influence methods and goals.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{CPT Christopher Barich, Minnesota Army National Guard}

Captain Barich is a Field Artillery officer in the Active Guard Reserve program for the Minnesota Army National Guard. He serves as the full-time officer-in-charge for a field artillery battalion and is currently in command of the Headquarters Battery. He holds a Master of Public Policy degree in global public policy with a concentration in United States foreign and international security policy from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. He is currently a graduate student in the Arctic Security program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The opinions expressed in this publication are the perspectives of the author and do not represent the views of the US Department of Defense or any of its components.
Notes

10. Allen, *Arctic Narratives and Political Values, 2–3.* [emphasis added]
11. PRC, *Vision for Maritime Cooperation*, 1. [emphasis added]
13. Five additional non-Arctic States were approved for observer status in 2013 by the Arctic Council: India, Italy, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea. For a complete list of the observer states, see Arctic Council, *Non-Arctic States*, 2022, https://arctic-council.org/.
15. US Army, ATP 7-100.3: *Chinese Tactics* (Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Combined Arms Center, 2021), 1–3.


33. Fravel, et al., China Engages the Arctic, 150.


35. P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Bryan J.R. Millard, Trojan Dragons?: Normalizing China’s Presence in the Arctic (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, June 2021), 5.

36. PRC, China’s Arctic Policy, 7.

37. DeThomas, et al., Exploring the Relationship between China’s Investment, 22.

38. O’Rourke, et al., Changes in the Arctic, 36–38.


41. DeThomas, et al., Exploring the Relationship between China’s Investment, 29.
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