

Campaigning at the Top of the World

Arctic Security and Homeland Defense

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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 advanced 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. ★

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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.

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