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Editors’ Note

The July–August 2024 issue of the Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs (volume 7, no. 4) offers a comprehensive examination of the critical topic of homeland defense in the context of the evolving geopolitical landscape, with a particular emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region. Guest edited by Dr. Richard Newton and Dr. Cameron Carlson, this issue—a collaboration among Air University Press, the Homeland Defense Institute at the US Air Force Academy, and the College of Business and Security Management at the University of Alaska Fairbanks—brings together diverse perspectives from military leaders, academics, and policy experts to explore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in defending the homeland against an array of threats.

The foreword by Dr. John M. Garver, director of the Homeland Defense Institute, sets the tone for the issue, which is cosponsored by the institute. The opening article by Dr. Cameron Carlson, Troy Bouffard, and Dr. Ryan Burke establishes the foundation by examining the concepts of pacing threats and pacing challenges, specifically in relation to China. The authors provide working definitions for these terms and highlight the necessity for the United States to address China’s growing capabilities while also preparing to counter acute threats.

Senior military leaders featured in the issue provide critical insights into the unique challenges of homeland defense in the Indo-Pacific era and the strategies needed to address the complex threats facing the region.

RADM Scott Robertson’s article, “Tackling Homeland Defense Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Era,” highlights the increasing threats to the North American homeland ranging from cyber to environmental to biological threats, as well as the challenges posed by malign state actors like China and Russia. Robertson emphasizes the need for homeland defense to be seamlessly integrated into strategies, plans, and operations, requiring coordination among combatant commands, services, interagency organizations, and allies and partners. He underscores the importance of pairing resources with policy and incorporating new realities both at home and abroad to safeguard the nation and prevent conflict worldwide.

Maj Gen Randy “Church” Kee (Ret.) focuses on the role of soft power in Arctic defense in his article, “The Role of Soft Power in Arctic Defense: The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies and the Future of North American Homeland Defense.” Kee emphasizes the need to address the increasing geopolitical and security risks in the Arctic, including cyber, conventional, unconventional, and hybrid threats from strategic competitors. He highlights the establishment of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC), the first new Department of Defense (DOD) regional center in more than 20 years, tasked with ad-
vancing Arctic awareness, supporting DOD Arctic priorities, reinforcing the rules-based order in the region, and contributing to deterrence efforts.

COL Matthew Tucker, US Army, and Lt Col Jason Buell, US Air Force, in their article “US Special Operations Command North’s Strategic Defense: Countering China’s Hybrid Warfare with the Band Framework and a Theory of Victory,” examine how SOCNORTH is tasked with defending the US homeland against the growing strategic competition with China. They outline SOCNORTH’s “Band” framework, which organizes its operations across three distinct operational environments: the Arctic region, the continental United States and maritime approaches, and the southern region including Mexico and the Bahamas. They also discuss SOCNORTH’s Theory of Victory, focusing on preventing strategic distraction, assuring power projection, degrading adversary capabilities, eroding adversary influence, and providing specialized military options.

These senior military leaders underscore the importance of integrated strategies, strong alliances, and soft power in addressing the complex threats facing the region. They emphasize the need for seamless integration of homeland defense into strategies, coordination among various stakeholders, and the utilization of both hard and soft power tools to counter challenges from strategic competitors like China and Russia in the Indo-Pacific era.

The issue features several articles that delve into specific aspects of homeland defense, providing in-depth analysis and insights from experts in their respective fields.

Lt Col Kristen “KJ” Heiserman’s article, “Snowblind: Investing in Logistical Infrastructure in the Arctic to Support the Indo-Pacific and NATO,” highlights the necessity of reinvigorating Arctic operational capabilities through Alaska’s logistical infrastructure. Heiserman emphasizes the importance of improving ports, fuel logistics, and transportation networks to sustain military and civilian activities in the region. The article underscores the crucial role of investing in Arctic resources and logistics for ensuring national security, maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, and providing continued support to allies.

Dr. Scott Fisher, Dr. Graig Klein, Dr. Juste Codjo, and Dr. Juris Pupcenoks, in their article “Answering Authoritarian State Asymmetric Challenges: Tools for Deterring Hybrid Threats and Non-Military Coercion from China and Russia,” explore the use of information as a tool for deterring or punishing asymmetric challenges from authoritarian states like China and Russia. They argue that US policymakers should focus on criticizing censorship, advocating for freedom of information access, and using technical or cyber means to undermine information/communication controls in authoritarian states.

Dr. Michael E. Lynch and MAJ Brennan Deveraux’s article, “Landpower, Homeland Defense, and Defending Forward in US Indo-Pacific Command,”
emphasizes the importance of extending the definition of homeland defense beyond North American shores in the 21st-century geopolitical environment. They highlight the role of US military forces stationed throughout the Indo-Pacific in deterring potential aggressors, protecting US interests, and strengthening partnerships with countries in the region. The article advocates for hardening overseas facilities and expanding them to other locations to allow greater operational depth and build resilience through sustainment redundancy.

Mike Carey and Charlie McGillis, in their article “Navigating the Gray Zone: Reframing Space Strategy for Contemporary Operational Environments,” explore adapting gray-zone strategies to the unique operational dynamics of space. They emphasize synchronizing diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments to dissuade and deter adversaries while avoiding kinetic conflict. The article addresses legal frameworks governing space activities, the rise of commercial space ventures, and the need for collaboration between military and commercial entities to mitigate space threats.

Dr. James L. Regens and John S. Beddows, in their article “Warming Arctic—Geopolitical Rivalries: Risks to Continental Defense for North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe,” examine the formidable challenge posed by a warming Arctic in a changing climate to homeland defense and national security for both the United States and its NATO allies. They highlight the escalating competition to assert influence over the Arctic’s vital sea routes, the ramifications of shifting sea levels on international borders and exclusive economic zones, and the pursuit of new economic interests. The article underscores the immediate imperative for a holistic strategy and command framework that seamlessly integrates the operational forces of the United States, Canada, and NATO Nordic member nations.

These articles provide valuable insights into various aspects of homeland defense, ranging from logistical infrastructure and asymmetric challenges to landpower, gray-zone strategies, and the implications of a warming Arctic, offering a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in defending the homeland.

The Views section of the issue offers several other insightful articles that explore various aspects of homeland defense and security.

Dr. Kelsey A. Frazier’s article, “Arctic Insecurity: The Implications of Climate Change for US National Security,” examines the multifaceted implications of changing environmental conditions in the Arctic for U.S. national security. Frazier highlights both the challenges and opportunities presented by diminishing sea ice, altered wave dynamics, increased wind speeds, and emerging weather phenomena. The analysis underscores the importance of leveraging technological advancements, fostering international collaboration, and ensuring robust infrastructure resilience.
to navigate the operational risks and strategic complexities resulting from the Arctic’s evolving climate.

Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché, in her article “Vulnerabilities and Hybrid Threats in the North American Arctic,” explores key vulnerabilities in Alaska and the Canadian Arctic, and how they interact to provide opportunities for China and Russia to advance their interests in the region at the expense of Canada and the United States. Piché emphasizes that resilience is the greatest defense against hybrid threats and is best achieved through a whole-of-society approach to mitigate vulnerabilities before they can be exploited.

CAPT Josh Taylor’s article, “Operation Noble Eagle—Pacific: Integrated Air and Missile Defense for America’s Pacific Homeland,” highlights the need for the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) to prepare for integrated air and missile homeland defense by establishing a named homeland defense operation. Taylor advocates for the establishment of a Joint Task Force — Homeland Defense (JTF-HD) to activate operational forces and staffs, augment with Reserve Component units, and create a coalition to bolster information sharing, operational collaboration, and regional defense.

Col Dr. William “Ox” Hersch and Lt Col Melissa “Sharpie” McLain’s article, “Inside The Gates: Cultivating Cognitive Security to Defend the Homeland,” emphasizes the importance of cognitive security in the twenty-first century, as adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wage comprehensive political warfare campaigns exploiting cognitive vulnerabilities and social media platforms. The authors argue that democracies must take steps to cultivate cognitive security within their societies and security enterprises, leveraging diverse populations and reinvigorating foundational principles of free speech, free markets, and inalienable human rights.

LTC Jeff Hayes’ article, “At 156°W: The Alaska Territorial Guard as a Solution to Arctic Capacity and Domain Awareness,” provides a historical perspective on the critical role played by Alaska Natives in the Arctic during World War II, first as the Alaska Territorial Guard and later as formally incorporated units of the Alaska Army National Guard. Hayes proposes that the Canadian Ranger program could serve as a model for restoring military service as a possibility for Alaska Natives while addressing domain awareness and other shortfalls confronting the United States in the Arctic.

Dr. Catherine Lantigua’s article, “Seize the Gender Inclusion Era to Enhance Homeland Defense and Security,” showcases her experiences implementing a Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) strategy outside the United States and in a culturally diverse context. Lantigua discusses the tools available to promote gender equity and the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity in promoting
meaningful alliances with international partners to prioritize homeland defense and security.

Cleo Paskal’s article, “Protecting the Corridor of Freedom to America’s Asian Border,” examines the strategic importance of the “corridor of freedom” across the central Pacific, consisting of Guam, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. Paskal highlights the vital role this corridor plays in enabling the United States to extend its defense perimeter to Taiwan and its treaty allies in the region, and advocates for a “block-and-build” approach to maintain this Pacific buffer with Asia and counter China’s efforts to undermine the U.S. position.

These articles provide valuable insights into various aspects of homeland defense and security, ranging from the implications of climate change and vulnerabilities in the Arctic to the need for integrated air and missile defense, cognitive security, the role of indigenous populations, gender inclusion, and the strategic importance of the central Pacific corridor. Together, they offer a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in defending the homeland in the Indo-Pacific era.

Overall, this issue of the Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs provides a thought-provoking and comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in defending the homeland in an era of great-power competition, with a particular focus on the Indo-Pacific region. It offers valuable insights and perspectives from a diverse range of contributors, making it a valuable resource for those interested in this critical topic.

—The Editors
Dear Reader,

In the current era of strategic competition, homeland defense is becoming a matter of increasing importance as the North American homeland is now challenged by escalating kinetic and non-kinetic threats. The homeland serves as the core strategic support area, enabling mobilization, deployment, employment, and sustaining combat power against adversaries abroad; however, we can now anticipate a contested homeland where adversaries can obstruct and disrupt power projection and sustainment operations. Homeland defense guidance underscores the necessity for cohesive solutions, emphasizing cross-DOD and interagency coordination and integration to effectively address a multi-domain spectrum of threats and prepare proactively for an evolving battlespace.

The 2022 National Defense Strategy and subsequent 2023 National Defense Science and Technology Strategy accentuate the importance of cooperative efforts across various sectors, including academia, research institutions, and governmental agencies. Within this context, the current issue of the Journal for Indo-Pacific Affairs (JIPA) showcases the Homeland Defense Institute’s (HDI) collaborative endeavors within the defense, policy, and private sector ecosystems. HDI efforts are aligned to facilitating educational initiatives, nurturing innovation, harnessing expertise, and effectively addressing the diverse array of challenges encountered across the homeland defense enterprise.

JIPA emerges as a crucial platform for disseminating knowledge and insights pertinent to homeland defense. As we navigate the complexities of strategic competition, the homeland defense articles encapsulated in this issue shed light on evolving threats in the Indo-Pacific region and their implications for homeland defense strategies. From analyzing Arctic operations to understanding geopolitical shifts, JIPA provides invaluable perspectives that inform our approach to securing the North American homeland. By highlighting the interconnectedness of global security challenges, it reinforces the imperative for collaborative efforts across sectors and regions to safeguard our homeland effectively. As such, JIPA serves as a vital resource for policy makers, military leaders, and practitioners working in the homeland defense space.

Embedded within this issue of JIPA are contributions from a variety of authors, each bringing their expertise and experience in homeland defense to the forefront. From seasoned military strategists to academics specializing in security studies, these thought leaders offer multifaceted analyses and innovative solutions to the complex challenges facing our homeland. Their respective insights reflect a comprehensive understanding of the evolving threat landscape and the need for adaptive and dynamic responses. By harnessing the collective wisdom of these experts,
the journal not only informs current homeland defense practices but also inspires new approaches and methodologies to stay ahead of emerging threats. This collaborative ethos underscores the authors’ and the journal’s commitment to fostering a robust and resilient homeland defense community, united in safeguarding our nation’s security interests.

John M Garver
Director, Homeland Defense Institute
INTRODUCTION

Defining Pacing Threats and Challenges to Homeland Defense and Security

DR. CAMERON CARLSON
TROY BOUFFARD
DR. RYAN BURKE

Abstract

The article, which sets the stage for the present thematic issue of the journal, examines the evolving use of the terms *pacing threat* and *pacing challenge* in the context of US defense strategy, particularly in relation to China. It traces the origins of these phrases, noting that they have been used interchangeably and without a clear, codified definition. The authors provide working definitions for these terms, suggesting that a *pacing challenge* refers to an adversary that poses a long-term risk to US influence and power, while a *pacing threat* denotes a more immediate and consequential military threat. The article also discusses the concept of an *acute threat*, which is applied to more urgent and severe threats, such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The article argues that clearly defining these terms is crucial for informing defense planning and policy. It concludes by highlighting the need for the United States to address China’s growing military, political, and economic capabilities, which constitute a significant pacing challenge, while also being prepared to counter any acute threats that may arise.

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In a July 2020 speech, then–Secretary of Defense Mark Esper referred to China as the “pacing threat” for the Department of Defense (DOD).¹ This appears to be the first public use of the term. Subsequently, in August, Esper reiterated this stance in another speech, tasking the “Military Departments and Services to make China the pacing threat in all of our schools, programs, and training.”²

By March 2021 the *Interim National Security Strategy* elevated China as a *pre-eminent threat* to the national security interests of the United States. Such a designation recognized that China had become increasingly more assertive as the “only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military,

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and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.”

Further, the 2022 fact sheet accompanying the classified version of the DOD’s National Defense Strategy (NDS), designated the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as “our most consequential strategic competitor . . . and the pacing challenge for the Department.” Echoing this sentiment, the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) also identified the PRC as the nation’s pacing challenge, requiring urgency in sustaining and strengthening deterrence capabilities.

Despite these and other subsequent references to pacing threat and pacing challenge in relation to the PRC, there remains a conspicuous absence of officially endorsed definitions for these terms within the DOD. In the absence of any discernible definitions, perhaps lurking in the shadows of a classified document somewhere in the Pentagon, this represents the latest example of hollow, Pentagon-designed phraseology lacking theoretical or conceptual grounding and clarity.

Words matter. For strategic planners, policy analysts, and decision makers to develop capabilities and promulgate policies addressing the nation’s long-term operational needs, the term pacing—as a challenge or threat—must demand precise delineation. Moreover, within public discourse, a more concise definition of pacing challenge and pacing threat, along with elucidation on how “acute” modifies both terms, must be established for consistent and standardized usage. Presently, there is a dearth of literature or doctrine to facilitate the application of a coherent understanding or definition of pacing within the endless bureaucratic mechanisms reliant upon such clarity and authorities. Therefore, this article will provide a working definition for the use of pacing threat and challenge, elucidating the role of acute as a modifier within this lexicon.

Background

DOD leaders formally designated China as the pacing threat to US national security, emphasizing that the PRC represents the only country that could pose a systemic challenge to the United States economically, technologically, politically,

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and militarily. Yet, the 2022 National Military Strategy characterizes the PRC as a pacing challenge, while also categorizing Russia as an “acute threat with aggressive intent.” This begs the question, is a threat the same as a challenge? Further, what constitutes a threat being acute, beyond its inherent menace?

According to the NDS, the term pacing may indicate a temporal quality, highlighting that the United States’ first defense priority is “defending the homeland, paced to the ever-increasing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC” [emphasis added] The phrase pacing threat has evolved into commonplace defense parlance when referencing China—akin to other high-level jargon. Nonetheless, using these phrases without context invites ambiguity and injects uncertainty.

Buzzwords serve as a prevalent mechanism for leaders to shape organizational dynamics and guide bureaucratic efforts. In this case though, the nation is undergoing extensive whole-of-government shaping operations, a necessity given the formidable challenge posed by China. The learning curve to navigate the competitive dilemma posed by China, let alone potential crises and conflicts, will be daunting. While the term pacing may intuitively seem adequate for operationalization, it remains essential to strive for clarity and precision, recognizing that the vertical and horizontal ramifications of a single word can significantly influence a nation’s trajectory.

A comprehensive review of available literature and defense publications suggests that the term pacing challenge has a long but amorphous history in the defense lexicon. A survey of open-source material helps with understanding the term’s evolution, contextual significance, and implications for defense strategy. This exploration serves as an important starting point for several reasons. First, it elucidates the murky origins of the term, affording scholars and policy makers the opportunity to trace its influence on military strategy and doctrine. Second, such scrutiny illuminates shifts and trends in defense strategies, revealing how the term may have adapted in response to significant changes in challenges and threats. Additionally, this endeavor identifies potential areas for policy reform, ensuring that security and defense strategies remain attuned to the changing nature of global threats and security imperatives.

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The closest tendering of an actual definition came from Colin Kahl, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, wherein during a 2021 Pentagon policy meeting, he characterized China as a *pacing threat*. Of significance, during the speech, while Secretary Kahl indicates that conflict with China is not inevitable, he does underscore that “we will have a more competitive and, at times, . . . adversarial relationship with Beijing.”\(^{10}\) In the context of Secretary Kahl’s discourse, in noting the state of competition and potential for conflict, it appears that he employs *threat* synonymously with *military challenge*, without discernibly distinguishing between the two, thus exacerbating the challenge of anchoring these terms with precision.

The lack of a codified definition for the use of *pacing challenge* is further evident in Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner’s 2023 remarks to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In his observations, he stresses that “China remains the pacing challenge for the US government” as “it seeks to become the world’s most influential power.”\(^{11}\) Similarly, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said during a November 2021 news conference, “Although China is developing capabilities that could potentially threaten the security and stability of neighboring nations in the region and globally, the department views that nation as a pacing challenge, not a pacing threat.”\(^{12}\)

### Pacing Threat Yesterday and Today

Contributing to the ambiguous usage of the term *pacing*, the 2012 edition of the *Joint Officer Handbook Staffing and Action Guide* used “outpacing a threat” to describe the imperative of maintaining a military establishment capable of meeting and overcoming advancing and complex challenges.\(^{13}\) Similarly, US Northern Command’s (USNORTHCOM) 2012 vision statement articulated the command’s commitment to “defend North America by outpacing all threats.”\(^{14}\)

A 2019 report from Canada’s Queen’s University noted the temporal aspect by designating China as an emerging pacing threat, while positing that the likelihood

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of conflict was, at that time, higher with Russia or North Korea.\textsuperscript{15} The term extended into the legislative realm as well, with the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act requiring the services to furnish reports on their respective pacing threat assessments and how such threats influence future planning—again capturing the temporal nature of the term.\textsuperscript{16}

The incorporation of the term \textit{acute} into the lexicon serves to emphasize not only the severity but also the immediacy of a challenge or threat. During a Brookings Institute discussion on defense strategy, Kahl remarked that while China remains a pacing challenge for the United States, “the most acute challenge at the moment is obviously Russia.”\textsuperscript{17} In contrast, Kathleen Hicks, Deputy Secretary of Defense, noted in the aftermath of Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine that “Russia poses an acute threat to the world order,” while also reaffirming that the PRC is “our most consequential strategic competitor and pacing challenge.”\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{Defining Pacing Challenge and Pacing Threat}

With the aim of fostering clarity amid ambiguity and uncertainty, the authors propose the following working definitions for consideration and recommend their inclusion in a future edition of the \textit{DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms}.

A \textit{pacing challenge} is an adversary that poses a meaningful risk to US influence, position, and power but does not constitute an immediate military threat. This definition encapsulates the temporal aspect of enduring challenges while emphasizing peacetime competition across the diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) spectrum. It underscores the importance of measured responses to evolving global power dynamics, enabling the United States to strategically allocate its resources, devise effective strategies, forge partnerships, and foster innovations to adeptly confront future challenges and safeguard the homeland during the competitive phase of operations.

A \textit{pacing threat} is defined as a direct, consequential, and near-term, often military, peril to US security interests and core values. The term is applied when adversary actions across the spectrum of national power constitute a more immediate and consequential threat to US interests. To effectively counter such threats, the nation

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} William Braun, Stéfanie Von Hlatky, and Kim Richard Nossal, eds. \textit{The Return of Deterrence: Credibility and Capabilities in a New Era} (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2019), \url{https://media.defense.gov/}.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Jim Garamone, “New Strategy Seeks to Reinvigorate Deterrence in a Changing World,” \textit{DOD News}, 22 November 2022, \url{https://www.defense.gov/}.
\item \textsuperscript{18} “Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Kathleen Hicks Remarks on President Biden’s Fiscal 2023 Defense Budget” (transcript, Department of Defense, 28 March 2022), \url{https://www.defense.gov/}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
must prioritize and leverage the full spectrum of capabilities and resources through integrated deterrence, employing a whole-of-government approach to mitigate potential hazards to homeland security.

On the other hand, an *acute threat* refers to immediate and severe dangers that demand urgent attention and response. These threats pose critical risks to homeland security, with the potential to swiftly escalate into direct conflict or cause substantial harm to US interests or its allies and partners. In the present context, the term *acute threat* has been specifically attributed to Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine, gray-zone activities along NATO’s eastern flank, and aggressive utilization of proxy forces across Africa.\(^{19}\)

**Pacing Challenge and Threat Tomorrow**

If a *pacing threat* is defined as a state actor presenting a systemic challenge to the United States across economic, military, technological, and political domains, then China undeniably emerges as the foremost pacing threat in today’s security environment. China’s ascension to this pivotal role stems from its technological sophistication and economic influence, which Beijing adeptly leverages to assert the PRC’s global influence. As previously highlighted by defense officials, the term *pacing threat* implies a potential adversary capable of matching or outpacing US capabilities in critical domains.\(^{20}\)

In this context, China’s advancements in military technology, cyber capabilities, and space exploration pose significant challenges. Additionally, China possesses one of the world’s two nuclear arsenals capable of posing an existential threat to the United States.\(^{21}\) Recognizing these multifaceted challenges, the DOD underscores the imperative of integrated deterrence, advocating for a multidimensional approach to address the diverse dimensions of the challenge posed by China.\(^{22}\)

The PRC has continually bolstered its military, political, and economic capabilities, positioning itself as a formidable and enduring pacing challenge to US homeland defense and security. Notably, the PRC has embarked on a robust military modernization campaign, exemplified by the development of hypersonic weapons aimed at surpassing existing ballistic missiles. This enhancement enhances

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\(^{22}\) Garamone, “Official Talks DOD Policy Role.”
strike precision and evades missile defense systems, significantly amplifying its offensive capabilities.\(^{23}\)

In a striking display of nuclear proliferation, China has amassed more than 400 operational warheads, surpassing earlier projections for the decade. Moreover, the construction of new silo fields for intercontinental ballistic missiles signals a significant expansion of its offensive nuclear capacity.\(^{24}\) Concurrently, the PRC has purportedly bolstered its missile defense capabilities through the development of indigenous systems like the HQ-19, capable of targeting ballistic missile warheads or satellites.\(^{25}\) These advancements align with the Chinese Communist Party’s ambitious goal of achieving a modern and formidable military force by 2049, underscoring a deliberate and enduring military strategy.\(^{26}\)

Politically, the PRC’s support for Russia amid its conflict with Ukraine has garnered widespread international attention. Reports suggest Beijing’s provision of essential technology and support to Moscow, aiding Russia in circumventing Western sanctions following its invasion of Ukraine.\(^{27}\) This technological assistance is deemed crucial for sustaining Russia’s military operations and underscores the intricate geopolitical alliances shaping the conflict’s dynamics. Notably, the European Union has responded by imposing additional sanctions on Chinese entities allegedly facilitating Russia’s evasion of international sanctions, reflecting a concerted European effort to counter the indirect support extended to Russia by Chinese companies.\(^{28}\) Furthermore, US apprehensions regarding the PRC’s military expansion into Africa underscore broader geopolitical rivalries, prompting considerations of expanding efforts to counter Chinese military presence in strategic regions like West Africa.\(^{29}\)


From an economic standpoint, the PRC has been labeled as a “grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States.” This characterization echoes concerns raised by the FBI regarding the PRC’s endeavors to influence lawmakers and public opinion, alongside simultaneous attempts to pilfer intellectual property. Moreover, the practice of forced technology transfer compels foreign companies operating in China to divulge their cutting-edge technologies to local partners, eroding their competitive advantages and stifling innovation. These unjust practices foster an unequal playing field, exposing US businesses to heightened risks and diminishing incentives for investment, thereby adversely affecting the broader US economy.

Conclusion

The United States must proactively enhance its military and diplomatic capabilities to counteract PRC activities that detrimentally impact both itself, its allies, and partners. This objective can be achieved through various means, including but not limited to, bolstering alliances, integrating deterrence measures by aligning interagency policies and harnessing public-private sector capabilities, and reducing economic reliance on China. A steadfast commitment to promoting democratic values, coupled with efforts to strengthen the US relationship with India—the world’s largest democratic nation—will ensure mutual benefits in terms of security, economic prosperity, and technological advancement. These are pivotal elements in programming strategies to address the PRC’s enduring political, economic, and military challenges, while simultaneously preparing for the eventuality of the PRC emerging as a pacing threat, and effectively countering acute threats posed by Russia to the peace and security of NATO and US partners in the region.

Going forward, the United States must establish clear definitions that accurately differentiate between pacing and acute threats and challenges. Once these definitions are disseminated, military and civilian defense officials will benefit from enhanced clarity and precision as they spearhead research, develop strategies and plans, and formulate policies to counter the malign activities jeopardizing homeland defense. While this article aims to raise awareness regarding ambiguous yet frequently used terms, substantial efforts are required to establish a comprehensive understanding of these terms and their diverse applications across various national security sectors. Given the significant impact of words, finalized definitions will facilitate a clearer

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Defining Pacing Threats and Challenges to Homeland Defense and Security

understanding of the nature of pacing challenges and threats, thus enabling effective responses to homeland defense and security requirements.

Dr. Cameron Carlson
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Troy Bouffard
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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.
Tackling Homeland Defense Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Era

RADM SCOTT ROBERTSON, US NAVY

Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region stands at the forefront of global geopolitics, complete with unique opportunities and intricate challenges that demand a comprehensive and fresh global outlook while also prioritizing homeland defense. With increasing threats to the North American homeland ranging from cyber to environmental to biological to malign state actors, it is imperative that homeland defense becomes seamlessly integrated into our strategies, plans, and operations. This effort needs to be a coordinated one, involving combatant commands, services, interagency organizations and our allies and partners. The People’s Republic of China uses economic, diplomatic, military, and technological means to establish a global sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Russia’s actions in Ukraine demonstrate a real threat to all our partners and allies. While the Indo-Pacific region will clearly remain a priority region in global geopolitics, the significance of homeland defense within global plans must be recognized as global threats evolve. Resources must be paired to policy, and daily campaigning must incorporate the new realities both at home and abroad to safeguard our nation and prevent conflict around the world.

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Throughout the twentieth century, the American way of war hinged on the ability to effectively project combat power from a secure homeland onto foreign shores. The homeland served as the core strategic support area, enabling mobilization, deployment, and the employment and sustainment of combat power against adversaries abroad. However, the current strategic landscape is different and presents a stark contrast. Anticipations for future warfare against near-peer adversaries envision a contested homeland. Threats, wielding both kinetic and virtual capabilities, loom, capable of obstructing and disrupting power projection and sustainment operations. Furthermore, the critical infrastructure underpinning power projection shows signs of age and vulnerability to attacks, while key processes and procedures remain partially outside the Department of Defense’s (DOD) control. As we surge further into the twenty-first century, much has evolved. It becomes imperative to reevaluate our outlook and methodology for both defending the homeland and countering threats abroad.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the epicenter of twenty-first-century geopolitics, presenting a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities that demand a global perspective on homeland defense and security. Authoritarian regimes,
flexing economic, diplomatic, military, and technological muscles, seek to undermine the existing rules-based international order. Among them, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) stands out for its comprehensive efforts to establish a global sphere of influence, reshaping global maps both figuratively and literally.

In the current strategic security landscape characterized by ceaseless global competition, the imperative lies in adapting and integrating capabilities, force structures, authorities, and organizational culture. This adaptation enables swift comprehension, decision making, and action. Through better integration of our diverse forces and capabilities, both internally and in conjunction with our allies and partners, we enhance our capacity to deter potential adversaries.

An integrated deterrence approach is crucial because it stresses the importance of building strong and robust partnerships with allies and partners. This strategic outlook entails harnessing and combining strengths across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, and instruments of national power. Such an approach not only deters rivals during competition but also facilitates de-escalation during crises and effectively denies or defeats adversaries in conflicts.

Moreover, it aids in countering the escalating kinetic and nonkinetic threats to the North American homeland from strategic competitors like the PRC and Russia. To realize this strategy’s success, there must be a continued emphasis on deepening partnerships within the region and globally.

The PRC poses a multifaceted threat to global security, particularly to the United States and its allies and partners. Beijing’s ambitious military modernization, encompassing advanced cyber tools, maritime capabilities, and hypersonic technologies, transcends regional ramifications. The PRC’s actions in the Pacific, including joint military exercises with Russia and power projection efforts in the Arctic, highlight its expanding global influence. Concurrently, the Chinese government’s counterintelligence activities, economic espionage, and cyber intrusions constitute a formidable menace to the economic well-being and democratic principles of the United States and our partners in North America and Oceania.

Amid the Indo-Pacific’s elevation as a pivotal arena of geopolitical competition, it is essential to acknowledge the interconnectedness of security concerns and embrace a comprehensive strategy to safeguard national interests and confront homeland defense challenges. Homeland defense transcends being a reactive measure; it assumes a proactive and indispensable role within the overarching national security strategy. Leaders must recognize homeland defense’s significance in operational plans and, when necessary, in projecting power projection abroad. The evolving threat landscape demands a holistic approach that surpasses conventional boundaries and mandates integration into contingency plans both domestically
Robertson

and internationally. The Indo-Pacific’s dynamic nature disrupts traditional paradigms of contingency planning.

US combatant commanders confront an increasingly asymmetric challenge as adversaries prioritize the disruption or destruction of critical infrastructure supporting DOD facilities and functions. This infrastructure, often reliant on US civilian-owned utilities or host-nation assets for overseas installations, plays a crucial role in the deployment, operation, and lethality of US combat forces. Despite DOD efforts since 2012 to strengthen mission assurance through a holistic and integrated approach, adversaries are developing sophisticated cyber weaponry to target industrial control systems and other essential components of vital infrastructure. These include the electric grid, water systems, transportation connectors, seaports, and airports. The fusion of cyberattacks with information warfare and potentially kinetic strikes presents a substantial threat to national security. In any conflict, particularly with the PRC, the DOD must be prepared for adversaries launching cyber and physical attacks against critical infrastructure systems, potentially across multiple sectors simultaneously, triggering cascading failures.

As defined in Joint Publication 3-27, “Homeland Defense is the protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical infrastructure against external threats and aggression or other threats, as directed by the President.”¹ In the contemporary security environment, homeland defense heavily relies on a strategic framework comprising three key elements: all-domain awareness, information dominance, and decision superiority.

The first element, all-domain awareness, emphasizes the importance of creating a layered sensor network spanning North America. This network aims to enable early warnings for air and missile threats, cyber intrusions, and other potential attack vectors. To achieve this, modernization initiatives are pursued, leveraging advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to augment detection, tracking, and attribution capabilities.

The second element, information dominance, stresses the necessity of amalgamating data from diverse sensors to attain a comprehensive understanding of the battlespace. This necessitates streamlining data architectures, enforcing standards, and fostering collaboration to ensure prompt and reliable processing, dissemination, and utilization of information.

The third element, decision superiority, empowers leaders with decision-making capabilities by harnessing insights garnered through all-domain awareness and information dominance. It emphasizes options extending beyond traditional kinetic

Tackling Homeland Defense Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Era

defeat mechanisms, enabling proactive measures and broadening the decision space to deter potential adversaries.

Ultimately, this comprehensive framework aims to strengthen homeland defense by prioritizing early detection, informed decision making, and strategic deterrence, thereby safeguarding the nation and its interests.

For homeland defense to achieve success, it must be globally integrated. This entails aligning strategies, plans, and operations among combatant commands, allies, and interagency organizations to acknowledge the reality that the homeland faces threats from a diverse array of actors and actions. Presently, operational plans lack the necessary integration of homeland defense and strategic deterrence. A cultural shift is imperative, where combatant commands are perceived concurrently as both supported and supporting entities. The emphasis should be on creating global plans with regional components, encompassing strategies, force management, and architecture. The existing array of operational plans inherently fosters competition for resources and compromises response capabilities and valuable time.

As part of the necessary integration, each combatant command must actively engage in campaigns originating from and within North America. Defending the homeland is not only crucial for deterring adversaries but also for providing assurance to allies and partners. Aligned with the principles outlined in the United States’ 2022 National Defense Strategy, the emphasis on campaigning underscores the need to synchronize activities over time, maintaining a competitive advantage and prioritizing defense objectives across combatant commands.2

This strategic approach emphasizes the significance of homeland defense within the different global and regional plans, ensuring the implications are comprehensively understood, regularly exercised, and adequately resourced. Furthermore, the campaigning process fosters close collaboration with regional allies, partners, organizations, and institutions, as they collectively pursue shared objectives. To bring about this transformative shift, commands must establish robust processes, meticulously orchestrating operations, activities, exercises, and investments. This institutionalization ensures a cohesive and synchronized approach, fostering a united front to tackle evolving challenges.

By aligning these efforts with a comprehensive strategy and complementary campaign plans, we not only strengthen our national defense capabilities but also convey a collective determination to safeguard our homeland. Homeland defense campaigning thus serves as a crucial demonstration of our nation’s readiness,
capabilities, and resiliency against potential threats, signaling to adversaries that their actions will ultimately fail to achieve their overarching objectives.

Additionally, the DOD is actively tackling a spectrum of threats by prioritizing mission assurance during execution of combatant command operational plans. This shift, as articulated in DOD Directive 3020.40, underscores the necessity of identifying dependencies on installations, support functions, and infrastructure, emphasizing infrastructure resilience as a core warfighting requirement.³

Mitigating risks associated with potential attacks forms a crucial aspect of deterrence by denial. Various measures can be employed to achieve this, including intercepting incoming attacks, reducing damage through hardening or dispersal, and fielding credible rapid recovery capabilities. Adopting a risk management approach is crucial for comprehensive improvements in joint force lethality. Strategies such as integrating cybersecurity into mission assurance, addressing mission assurance shortfalls, and refining operational plan development processes are recommended.

Additionally, the DOD emphasizes the importance of forging partnerships with critical infrastructure owners, particularly in areas like microgrids and power restoration. Collaborating with the private sector and government agencies is vital for identifying critical assets, while addressing supply-chain risks necessitates cooperation between the private sector and government.

This emphasis extends to mission assurance abroad, recognizing adversaries’ expanding control over critical infrastructure globally. The overarching resilience objective aims to proactively confront potential threats and bolster joint force lethality in the face of asymmetric challenges. Sharing lessons learned and seeking best practices from partners and allies are essential, as collective efforts can enhance our resilience.

In the Indo-Pacific theater, the strategic significance of homeland defense cannot be overstated—it facilitates proactive security measures, safeguards power projection and sustainment, ensures a unified military response, protects critical assets, enables adaptability to emerging threats, and fosters public confidence in the government’s commitment to safety and security. As leaders navigate the multifaceted challenges presented by this dynamic theater, a fundamental acknowledgment arises—every plan, exercise, and policy decision must intricately weigh the necessity of defending the homeland, particularly amid competing demands for forces and evolving threats to global campaigning.

This strategic imperative demands a profound recalibration of defense strategies, compelling leaders to sharpen their focus on developing key attributes essential

for navigating future challenges. The essence of this recalibration lies in cultivating depth, fostering flexibility, harnessing advanced technologies, and fortifying supporting infrastructure. These elements collectively form the bedrock of a robust defense framework, equipping leaders to respond effectively to the nuanced and evolving security landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific theater holds significant importance in the concept of a globally integrated layered defense, encompassing forward regions like Guam, Hawai‘i, and American Samoa—strategic areas where proactive defense measures can be implemented to detect and deter threats before they reach the homeland itself. Additionally, the infusion of advanced technologies into defense strategies is deemed crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Leaders are encouraged to leverage innovations in surveillance, communication, and response mechanisms to enhance overall defense capabilities.

Simultaneously, the strategic imperative underscores the importance of strengthening supporting infrastructure—logistical support, strategic bases, and communication networks—capable of enduring and recovering from potential disruptions. In essence, the strategic imperatives for homeland defense, especially within the Indo-Pacific theater, mandate a holistic and forward-thinking approach, seamlessly integrating considerations for the safety and security of the homeland into military decision-making processes, exercises, and policy formulations.

A capable and persistent defense at home lays the foundation for projecting power globally, ensuring the United States can deter adversaries, de-escalate crises, and effectively deny and defeat in conflicts. The future is defined by global integration, facilitated through proactive planning and real-time collaboration across all domains and combatant commands. The triad of all-domain awareness, information dominance, and decision superiority, coupled with critical infrastructure resilience, strengthened partnerships, and rapid flexible options forms a holistic approach to fortify national defense capabilities. By embracing these principles, the United States can navigate the complexities of the contemporary security landscape and safeguard its interests in an interconnected world.

The threats to our homeland have evolved, as have our adversaries. We must live in the present as we plan for our future, recognizing the very real threats both abroad and to our homeland. Those very real and constantly evolving twenty-first-century threats demand twenty-first-century planning and responses. Fortunately, there is no better group than the United States and its allies and partners to confront such challenges in the Indo-Pacific and around the world.
RADM Scott Robertson, US Navy

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Strengthening Arctic Security Through Soft Power

The Ted Stevens Center’s Vital Mission

Maj Gen Randy “Church” Kee, USAF, Retired

Abstract

The article discusses the growing challenges the United States faces in defending the homeland, particularly in the Arctic region. It highlights the importance of a strong defense alliance, such as the partnership between the United States and Canada through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The article emphasizes the need to address the increasing geopolitical and security risks in the Arctic, including cyber, conventional, unconventional, and hybrid threats from strategic competitors. To address these challenges, the United States has established the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC), the first new Department of Defense (DOD) regional center in more than 20 years. The TSC is tasked with advancing Arctic awareness, supporting DOD Arctic priorities, reinforcing the rules-based order in the region, and contributing to deterrence efforts. The article outlines the center’s five enduring conditions that guide its mission, including improving domain awareness, enhancing defense capabilities, maintaining regional stability, and addressing the impacts of climate change. The TSC is positioned to be a key soft-power complement to the DOD’s integrated deterrence measures in the Arctic.

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The homeland of the United States confronts an increasingly complex and competitive array of challenges. As America’s strategic competitors expand their capabilities and capacities, they escalate risks to US national security interests abroad, demanding a deeper understanding and proactive approach to countering threats at home. Gone are the days when the United States could afford the luxury of debating isolation versus global engagement; today’s threat landscape renders isolationism an impractical strategy for defending the homeland. The most viable path forward for safeguarding America lies in robust defense alliances overseas coupled with a comprehensive national effort to fortify our defenses at home. A globally layered, multilateral, integrated defense is imperative to counter malign threats to US national security interests.

In contrast to its strategic rivals, the United States enjoys a significant asymmetric advantage in the form of a strong and vibrant defense alliance, beginning with our closest and most steadfast ally, Canada. Through the bi-national command structure of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), the
United States and Canada staunchly protect their respective homelands. Sustained by a longstanding and pragmatic collaboration, the armed forces of both nations advance integrated deterrence measures, operating within a “tri-command” framework comprising NORAD, US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), and Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC). This arrangement includes subordinate units within USNORTHCOM and CJOC, collectively creating a robust defense fabric for the homelands of North America.

The North American Arctic is undergoing significant geophysical transformations, progressively diminishing access challenges and emboldening both regional and external strategic competitors. These actors are increasingly assertive in their pursuit of the region’s abundant natural resources, posing a heightened threat to the Arctic approaches to North American coastlines.

Defense challenges in the North American Arctic are becoming more varied and complex. Effectively countering cyber, conventional, unconventional, and hybrid risks originating from adversaries with the capability to rapidly transition into active threats across space, air, and sea corridors poses a tangible and pressing challenge. Incorporating the Arctic, particularly the North American Arctic, into a global, multilayered, integrated deterrence and defense strategy is imperative.

The security interests of the United States in and around the Arctic region begin with safeguarding the US citizens who call the region home and who are relying on US defense leaders and armed forces to defend the region. This includes a significant population of citizens of Arctic Indigenous descent, who have inhabited the region since time immemorial.

When assessing current challenges and prospects, planners, practitioners, force providers, and decision makers confront a growing quandary: Are the United States and Canada adequately equipped and prepared to defend the North American Arctic against strategic rivals who continuously enhance their capabilities to jeopardize Canadian and US Arctic defense and security interests? An essential follow-on inquiry arises: Are US and Canadian defense leaders and key personnel receiving comprehensive analysis and strategic foresight regarding the increasingly complex risk environment? Without such analytical depth, the task of furnishing a pertinent, ready, and effective defense becomes considerably more daunting. It is imperative to anticipate, deter, and if necessary, prevail in times of conflict.

The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) is the first new US DOD regional center in more than 20 years. On 9 June 2021, as authorized and appropriated by the US Congress, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced the establishment of the Stevens Center to enhance cooperation on the distinct challenges and security concerns of the Arctic region, making it the sixth DOD
regional center. Subsequent Department of Defense policy and Congressional legislation formalized the establishment of the Stevens Center at Joint Base Elmendorf–Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska. Under the directive of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, all DoD regional centers are tasked with building strategic alignments and interoperability, enhancing regional networking, and amplifying strategic messaging, while strengthening collaborative relationships with allied and partner nations.

In his directive to establish the TSC, Secretary Austin tasked the Stevens Center with advancing Arctic awareness among partners and within the growingly specialized field of US Arctic service. This involves supporting and promoting DOD Arctic priorities, as well as engaging in programs and activities that uphold the rules-based order in the Arctic while also addressing the impacts of climate change in the region. The decision to create this pan-Arctic focused center was influenced, at least in part, by the escalating security interests associated with the Arctic and the growing imperative to enhance security measures that promote Arctic awareness, literacy, and cooperation among American, allied, and partner nations throughout the region. This complements investments in national defense measures such as fifth-generation fighters, long-range radars, military communications systems, infrastructure, and logistics. In essence, the Stevens Center’s efforts serve as the soft-power complement to the hard-power measures represented by military forces and their associated equipment.

In accordance with US National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and National Strategy for the Arctic Region, and within the parameters of DOD’s current Arctic Strategy, and other promulgated guidance, the Stevens Center is actively advancing scholarship, research, and affiliated engagement programs and activities. Reporting directly to the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs (ASD HD&HA), the Stevens Center is formally aligned to Headquarters USNORTHCOM. Following national strategy and specific directives from ASD HD&HA, the Stevens Center executes a comprehensive set of mission requirements spanning the North American and Trans-Atlantic Arctic regions. Collaborating with fellow regional centers in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, the center adopts a cooperative and partnered approach aligned with each of its authorized mission areas to support DOD policies and security cooperation objectives.

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1 As established in U.S. Code Title 10, Chapter 16 (Security Cooperation) Section 342 and 2611 all six Department of Defense (DOD) regional centers are provided authorities for executive education, research & analysis, and engagement & outreach. These three mission authorities are exercised in support of DOD policy and security cooperation goals and objectives and are oriented to the respective center’s assigned region.
The Stevens Center takes great pride in bearing the name of Senator Ted Stevens (R–AK), one of America’s foremost advocates for the Arctic. As Alaska’s longest-serving US Senator to date, Senator Stevens spearheaded crucial initiatives and legislation aimed at safeguarding US national security interests in the Arctic. His efforts also fostered significant pan-Arctic cooperation with US allies and partners.

The commander USNORTHCOM provides aligned combatant command guidance to the TSC, directing the center to support the command’s homeland defense mission. This guidance emphasizes the crucial collaboration between the TSC, USNORTHCOM, and the US Air Force Academy’s Homeland Defense Institute (HDI), fostering a unique partnership that combines the international security cooperation efforts of the Stevens Center with HDI’s expanding network of homeland defense–focused academics and security professionals. This collaboration holds significant potential to enhance mutually beneficial analysis aimed at bolstering the defense of the North American homelands. While both the TSC and HDI are in their nascent stages of development, they have already joined forces to host a workshop in Colorado, with further collaborative initiatives on the horizon.

As an Arctic nation, America is creating a soft-power center, and its associated network can play a pivotal role in promoting programs and activities geared towards preparing thought leaders within, across, and adjacent to the region. This collective effort aims to advance future initiatives that bolster the defense of US and allied homelands. Homeland defense remains America’s top defense priority. Examining the Arctic through the lens of homeland defense is imperative now, perhaps even more so than during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, along with our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies.

Similar to the previously established regional centers, the Stevens Center serves as an instrument of policy and security cooperation. However, unlike previous regional centers, the Stevens Center aligns with US national and DOD strategy, as well as specific guidance from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and US-NORTHCOM. Driven by the unique characteristics of the Arctic region, it places a greater emphasis on research and analysis to address the concerns of US and international policy makers and practitioners. These concerns include enhancing domain awareness, facilitating decision making, understanding geophysical dynamics, and assessing geostrategic challenges, while also addressing regional climate security. In response to this guidance, the Stevens Center organizes its programs and activities accordingly.

Since the arrival of the center’s first employee in late August 2021, the TSC has been engaged in a dual mission of building infrastructure while actively implementing initiatives. It achieved initial operational capacity on 1 July 2022, and is diligently
working towards achieving full operational capacity by approximately 30 September 2024, following a “hub-and-network” approach. This approach leverages experimentation and innovation to establish networks and solutions in support of U.S., allied, and partner Arctic defense and security efforts. Over the span of 30 months, the center has launched programs and activities across all three mission areas, resulting in the education of more than 1,500 individuals. It has conducted various engagement programs from Arctic Alaska to northern Finland and has contributed to Arctic analyses through the establishment of a new professional journal, publication of an initial set of special reports, and determined support to the International Cooperative Exchange Program for Polar Research.

The TSC is actively developing a wide range of curricula for a planned two dozen practitioner courses, encompassing topics ranging from Arctic security fundamentals to defense-specific programs, and incorporating insights into Arctic Indigenous perspectives on security matters. Similar strategies are being employed to address more than two dozen research tasks, alongside a diverse approach to outreach—spanning fieldwork, conferences, and digital engagement platforms.

These efforts have already yielded early successes across the North American and Trans-Atlantic Arctic regions. New programs and activities are being implemented to facilitate a deeper understanding of risks, support executive education initiatives, conduct analyses, and engage at the strategic level. These endeavors aim to enhance regional planning, programs, and activities, while enhancing the security of US defense allies and security partners.

As previously discussed, strategic competitors of the United States, its allies, and partners are challenging established institutions of international law in the Arctic region, striving to promote their own priorities, and exploit any advantages available to them. Whether through industrial development, political influence, or military capabilities, these competitors have demonstrated their intent to exert influence over Arctic-oriented nations for their own gain.

As a soft-power complement to DOD’s integrated deterrence measures, the TSC’s mission does not aim to achieve a traditional end state, but rather focuses on fostering and maintaining ongoing processes that align with the strategies of the White House, DOD, and specific directives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and commander of USNORTHCOM. Accordingly, the center is developing a set of enduring conditions to guide its ongoing efforts in implementing and advancing measures that support higher-level strategies and directed guidance to the TSC. These enduring conditions are:
• **Enduring Condition 1: Advanced Arctic Awareness.** Improve understanding of the operating environment, challenges, and opportunities Arctic nations face, building awareness and enhancing Arctic operations, capabilities, expertise, and cooperation in the Arctic.

• **Enduring Condition 2: Advanced DOD Arctic Priorities.** Improve Arctic capabilities, domain awareness, polar communications, and ability to conduct sustained multi-domain operations in the North American Arctic, enhancing the defense of North America from the Northern Approach.

• **Enduring Condition 3: Reinforced Rules-based Order in the Arctic.** Enhance and maintain regional stability through strengthened partnerships and unity of effort, reinforcing the rules-based order in the Arctic.

• **Enduring Condition 4: Effective Support to Deterrence.** Contribute to U.S., allied, and partner nation efforts in and across the Arctic region to deter and dissuade strategic, regional, and non-aligned competitors from challenging the existing rules-based order of the Arctic region.

• **Enduring Condition 5: Impacts of climate change in the Arctic region understood and implemented/integrated into defense plans.** Enhanced Arctic climate change research and knowledge contributes to advance DoD’s ability to plan for and operate in and through the Arctic.

As the challenges confronting the United States and its allies and partners continue to escalate, particularly regarding the defense of North American homelands, organizations like the HDI and the TSC have vital roles to play in assisting policy makers and practitioners better anticipate and proactively shape measures to mitigate risks and enhance integrated deterrence efforts, both at home and abroad.

Despite being in its formative stages, the Stevens Center is committed to innovation, experimentation, education, analysis, and engagement as the linchpin of soft power within the DOD’s Arctic strategy. Accordingly, the TSC will strive to advance awareness of Arctic issues, address the implications of environmental change, and emphasize the significance of upholding a rules-based order in the region. Through collaborative and respectful coordination, this emerging institution aims to foster a peaceful and stable Arctic, where international cooperation grounded in shared values is paramount.

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**Maj Gen Randy “Church” Kee, USAF, Retired**

Major General Kee currently serves as the director of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, leading the center’s mission to engage in global security issues through research, communication, and education. Appointed on 14 December 2023, Kee is responsible for building international networks of security leaders to advance US national security priorities in the Arctic region and ensure a stable, rules-based order in the Arctic. Prior to this,
he served as the executive director of the Arctic Domain Awareness Center and was appointed as a commissioner to the US Arctic Research Commission. Kee’s distinguished 30-year military career includes leadership roles at various levels, significant contributions to US Arctic strategy, and extensive political-military, defense policy, and security cooperation experience. He holds three master’s degrees in organizational leadership, air mobility/logistics management, and strategic studies.
Securing the Homefront
Special Operations Command North’s Approach to Secure the Homeland against the People’s Republic of China

COL MATTHEW TUCKER, USA
LT COL JASON “COMRADE” BUELL, USAF

Abstract

This article examines how the US Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH) is tasked with defending the US homeland against the growing strategic competition with China. The article highlights how China’s hybrid warfare tactics—including cognitive warfare, cyber-attacks, and economic coercion—have encroached into nearly every facet of American society, creating an asymmetric advantage for China. SOCNORTH, in coordination with the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), is responsible for executing the nation’s top defense priority—defending the homeland. The article outlines SOCNORTH’s “band” framework, which organizes its operations across three distinct operational environments: the Arctic region, the continental United States and maritime approaches, and the southern region including Mexico and the Bahamas. SOCNORTH has developed a theory of victory to guide its operations, focusing on preventing strategic distraction, assuring power projection, degrading adversary capabilities, eroding adversary influence, and providing specialized military options. The article emphasizes the critical role of special operations forces in safeguarding the homeland and the rules-based international order against strategic competitors like China.

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Chinese President Xi Jinping’s November 2023 summit with President Joe Biden rekindled attention on the escalating strategic competition between the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Prior to this diplomatic engagement, the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) noted that “the most comprehensive and serious challenge to US national security is the PRC’s coercive and increasingly aggressive endeavor to refashion the Indo-Pacific region and the international system to suit its interests and authoritarian preferences.”

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Employing a strategy of “winning without fighting,” the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wages political warfare “below the threshold of large-scale military combat.” The ramifications of China’s all-domain campaign, spanning cognitive manipulation, lawfare, cyber intrusions, and economic coercion, extend far beyond the Indo-Pacific theater, infiltrating transregional networks and penetrating the US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). These hybrid activities permeate nearly every facet of American society, furnishing the PRC with an asymmetrical advantage within the homeland while eroding the joint force’s capacity to project power abroad. The PRC’s gray-zone activities undermine US national security, both regionally and globally, with the potential to isolate the United States from its international responsibilities while eroding democratic institutions. In essence, Xi’s authoritarian regime and its comprehensive societal assaults underscore the notion that the US homeland is no longer a sanctuary. The pressing question persists: How can the United States counter the PRC in a security environment that is not characterized by large-scale conventional military operations? USNORTHCOM, in coordination with Canada via the combined North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), assumes the mantle as the geographic combatant command (GCC) tasked with defending the homeland against the PRC’s unrestrained campaign. NORAD–USNORTHCOM’s (N–NC) overarching vision for executing the nation’s paramount defense priority—defending the homeland—is built upon the following premise: “A capable and persistent defense at home is a prerequisite to project power to a globally integrated forward fight.” However, without assigned forces to execute the homeland defense mission, N–NC does not have the option to deploy large-scale conventional forces to deter, de-escalate, deny, or defeat the PRC within the USNORTHCOM AOR. Consequently, it must lean on the cultivation of robust relationships among its military components, regions, and subordinate commands, as well as engage with international and interagency partners. This approach is essential for executing a globally integrated, layered defense and deterrence strategy (GILD&D), aimed at preempting or swiftly responding to threats against the homeland.

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As the theater special operations command (TSOC) and special operations component command of USNORTHCOM, Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH) plans and executes all-domain special operations aimed at identifying, deterring, and disrupting threats and hazards throughout the USNORTHCOM AOR, while simultaneously positioning the nation for strategic advantage. SOCNORTH has operationalized special operations campaigning to seamlessly integrate with USNORTHCOM’s holistic all-domain, whole-of-government/nations (WOG/N) approach outlined in the 2021 N–NC Strategy. SOCNORTH’s operations, activities, exercises, and investments (OAEI) are meticulously designed and executed yield distinctive outcomes in collaboration with a diverse array of partners, including joint, interagency, multinational, and private-sector entities, across USNORTHCOM’s three integrated geographic defensive layers: the forward layer, the approaches, and the homeland. The N–NC strategic principle of global integration (GI) defines the forward layer as comprising forward-deployed Canadian and US forces, seamlessly integrated with allies and partners; the approaches layer encompasses joint force capabilities, leveraging contributions from Canada, Mexico, and the Bahamas; and the homeland layer includes the US military, interagency, and commercial resources. Despite the comprehensive integration outlined in this framework, it is essential to acknowledge that adversaries are not constrained by such structures. Consequently, SOCNORTH has designed an analytical framework to enhance domain awareness of malign influence and hostile activities in support of GILD&D.

SOCNORTH’s “band” framework (northern, central, southern) underscores the unique value that special operations forces (SOF) contribute to the joint force and the broader WOG/N strategy, enabling deterrence in competition, de-escalation in crises, and denial and defeat in conflict. Central to this framework are principles of all-domain awareness, information dominance, and decision superiority. The SOCNORTH bands necessitate the presence of SOF within the USNORTHCOM AOR to assess challenges, opportunities, and threats across three distinct operational environments (OE), extending beyond the resource networks outlined in the N–NC layers. These bands are based on adversaries’ tactics and strategies targeting the homeland, facilitating the identification of specific challenges, and the development of tailored solutions to bolster homeland defense.

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6 NORAD-USNORTHCOM Strategy.
Figure 1. Gearing Up for Arctic Ops: Special Forces Load Sleds and Ski-Dos for Arctic Edge 24. US Army Soldiers assigned to the 10th and 19th Special Forces Groups load equipment and snowmobiles into a MC-130J Commando II during Arctic Edge 24 in Utqiaġvik, Alaska, 8 March 2024. During Arctic Edge 24, more than 400 joint and allied special operators trained in extreme cold conditions to sharpen SOF readiness across unique specialties like long range fires and movements, special reconnaissance, rapid resupply, personnel recovery, and medical care in the austere Arctic environment. AE24 is a NORAD and US Northern Command–led homeland defense exercise demonstrating the US military’s capabilities in extreme cold weather, joint force readiness, and US military commitment to mutual strategic security interests in the Arctic region. (US Air Force photo by SrA Drew Cyburt)

The Northern band consists of the pan-Arctic approach, stretching from the western end of the Aleutian Islands to the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom (GIUK) gap in the Atlantic Ocean. It is here that SOCNORTH focuses on characterizing malign activity, contesting global chokepoints, enhancing all-domain awareness, and enabling GILD&D campaigning in cooperation with US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and US European Command (USEUCOM). In support of the commander of USNORTHCOM’s responsibility to advocate for Arctic capabilities, SOCNORTH has solidified relationships in both the North American Arctic and the European High North to leverage ally and partner capabilities. Embracing a collaborative pan-Arctic strategy is imperative for countering Russian aggression and expansion, as well as challenging PRC assertions in the region. The support of our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies
and partners is crucial in safeguarding territorial integrity, preserving freedom of movement, and securing access to strategic resources within the USNORTHCOM AOR.

The Central band encompasses the intricate mission of integrating homeland defense with homeland security, spanning the continental United States and the multi-domain approaches, including the Atlantic and Pacific maritime approaches. Within this band, SOCNORTH prioritizes the identification and characterization of threats to disrupt adversarial attempts to contain and isolate the United States. As strategic adversaries employ cognitive warfare tactics to undermine democratic institutions, exploit cyberspace vulnerabilities along the Digital Silk Road, and target critical infrastructure and key resources (CI/KR), SOCNORTH must employ multi-domain red teaming and cultivate deep relationships with law enforcement and intelligence community stakeholders to enhance resilience.7 Equipped with an enhanced all-domain threat assessment, SOCNORTH is at the forefront of efforts to expand authorities, permissions, and capabilities necessary for the United States to uphold its unwavering crisis response capability within the USNORTHCOM AOR and along the Pacific and Atlantic approaches.

In the Southern band—encompassing Mexico, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Bahamas—SOCNORTH confronts a wholly distinct array of challenges. While SOCNORTH engages with NATO allies and partners in the North and collaborates with domestic interagency and commercial sector entities, its interactions in the Southern band entail working with national partners lacking formal security obligations derived from alliances or the Constitution. Moreover, SOCNORTH contends with destabilizing, multi-domain threats from malign actors and conflicting national interests, posing challenges unlike those in the other two bands. Consequently, SOCNORTH is adapting its approach to foster a regional identity based on collective security. OAEIs in the Southern band are crafted to operate alongside Mexican and Bahamian partners, fortifying their capabilities, addressing common threats, pursuing shared interests, and nurturing enduring relationships crucial for operational synergy in advancing the GILD&D of North America as a whole.

7 The Digital Silk Road, an extension of the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative, represents a concerning dimension of China’s global strategy. While portrayed as a means of technological advancement and cooperation, it serves as a tool for extending Beijing’s influence and control. Under the guise of aid and support, China provides recipient states with telecommunications infrastructure, artificial intelligence systems, surveillance technology, and other high-tech solutions. However, these initiatives often come with strings attached, including political leverage and economic dependency on China. Despite its branding as a collaborative effort, the Digital Silk Road primarily serves China’s interests, furthering its agenda of expanding influence and dominance in strategic sectors.
Securing the Homefront

In light of a refined comprehension of the threats and opportunities spanning the USNORTHCOM AOR, SOCNORTH has devised a theory of victory (ToV) to navigate present operations while cultivating strategic advantages for the future. This ToV empowers the TSOC to concurrently establish conditions for the successful execution of homeland defense contingency operations, compete decisively against adversaries, and mitigate risks amid crises and conflicts. Comprising five overarching conditions for victory, the ToV ensures SOCNORTH remains harmonized with regional and global entities tasked with homeland protection, safeguarding US interests, disrupting adversary activities, and fortifying national positions of advantage. To realize these strategic imperatives, SOCNORTH must consistently execute OAEIs in support of all five conditions.

1. SOCNORTH will prevent strategic distraction by integrating SOF into the WOG/N approach, ensuring the United States remains focused on critical contingencies, particularly hostile takeovers of Taiwan and Ukraine.

2. SOCNORTH will assure power projection and domain awareness by leveraging access, placement, and influence with mission partners throughout the USNORTHCOM AOR. This effort aims to enhance SOCNORTH’s capability to detect, characterize, and disrupt irregular threats to the homeland.

3. SOCNORTH will simultaneously degrade adversary capability by illuminating and holding at risk adversary CI/KR across and approaching the USNORTHCOM AOR.

4. SOCNORTH will erode adversary influence and legitimacy by executing operations in the information environment, supporting USNORTHCOM’s strategic messaging campaigns across the AOR. These actions aim to counter malign influence and promote resiliency.

5. Finally, SOCNORTH will provide SOF options to contest critical strategic lines of communications. It will achieve this by leveraging emerging and exquisite capabilities, enhancing its posture in key locations, and maintaining a warfighting advantage across all domains.

The SOCNORTH operational approach is the mechanism that operationalizes the ToV. It is designed to fortify our special operations prowess and innovate exquisite capabilities within the joint force and WOG/N approach. Its mission: outmaneuver adversaries in the present and, if necessary, secure victory in the days to come. SOCNORTH’s operational approach operates through four lines of effort (LOE), empowering special operations campaigning to counter malign
activity in the gray zone and achieve desired outcomes utilizing all facets of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic.

- **LOE 1: Contest Adversary Activity in the AOR** directs SOCNORTH to plan and execute operations and sensitive activities to impose costs, create dilemmas, and generate positions of advantage for the nation over adversaries. LOE 1 ensures SOCNORTH can campaign in all domains and OEs but remain below the threshold of armed conflict through tailored signaling of credible integrated deterrence.

- **LOE 2: Operationalize GILD&D** drives SOCNORTH to strengthen relationships with mission partners and bolster unified action to safeguard the homelands, protect CI/KR, and enable power projection to meet challenges across the competition continuum. LOE 2 focuses SOCNORTH development of operational compatibility with partners and ensuring the necessary agreements and networks are in place to authorize, permit, fund, and execute cooperative WOG/N OAEIs.

- **LOE 3: Set the Theater for Crisis Response and Conflict** enables SOCNORTH to leverage access, placement, and influence with mission partners to execute SOF-peculiar missions in support of GILD&D and activated contingency plans. Campaigning efforts in LOE 3 allow SOCNORTH to field resilient teams to enhance threat awareness and ensure the SOF-enabling infrastructure is in place to facilitate a rapid response to emergent crises.

- **LOE 4: Advance All-Domain Warfighting** challenges SOCNORTH to look beyond the current fight and build all-domain, multidisciplinary advantage to win today and in future OEs. Building an adaptive culture that is willing to innovate and exercise unique capabilities and resilient capacity allows SOCNORTH to rapidly evolve and demonstrate next-generation effects to deter strategic competitors and other hostile actors from attacking the homeland and United States interests abroad. With the ToV and operational approach, SOCNORTH has the vision and campaigning mechanisms to set the conditions to both defend the USNORTHCOM AOR in its entirety and successfully execute operations abroad when directed, hone threat-identification efforts, and map out the necessary investments to overcome the challenges of modern and future warfighting.

The vast oceans that border our coastlines no longer afford us the advantages of time and distance from our adversaries they once did. These strategic competitors now operate both within our near abroad and inside our own borders. We must be willing to adapt to this new environment in new and meaningful ways that include...
enhanced authorities and resourcing along with integration of emerging technologies. Failure to do so will only exacerbate the pressing need to confront both conventional and irregular threats to our homeland. We must set the theater today to ensure we can maintain advantages over our adversaries and rapidly counter crises and conflicts. We cannot afford to await until a national calamity to rally our resolve against existential threats. This endeavor demands concerted effort at every echelon, from the individual to our highest-ranking leaders, to contest our adversaries, uphold democracy, and defend the rules-based global order. Rooted in strategic competition and honed by decades of experience, SOF stand uniquely poised to safeguard our homeland and national interests.

**COL Matthew Tucker, USA**

Colonel Tucker, a graduate of the US Military Academy, began his military journey in May 1998 as an Infantry Officer. Throughout his career, he served in various leadership roles, including commanding Company C, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and leading Task Force 220 in Afghanistan. He graduated from the National War College in 2021 and assumed command of the 2nd Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) before becoming Commander of Special Operations Command North in May 2023.

**Lt Col Jason “Comrade” Buell, USAF**

When the article was written, Lieutenant Colonel Buell was serving as the Chief of Policy and Arctic planner in the J5 at Special Operations Command North. He is a graduate of the University of Washington and holds an MA from St. Mary’s University, an MA from Air Command and Staff College, and an MPhil from the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies. Throughout his career, he has provided intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, joint all-domain operational planning, and remote combat support to Kosovo Task Force Falcon, Operations Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn, Enduring Freedom, Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support, and campaigning efforts to gain advantage in strategic competition. Lieutenant Colonel Buell is currently serving as a squadron commander for an Air Force Special Operations Command unit in North Carolina.
Snowblind

Investing in Logistical Infrastructure in the Arctic to Support the Indo-Pacific and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

LT COL KRENSTEN “KJ” HEISERMAN, USAF

Abstract

The prolonged engagement of the US military in desert climates has sidelined Arctic operational capabilities for two decades. As the Arctic emerges as an arena for strategic competition, this article contends that reinvigorating these capabilities through Alaska’s logistical infrastructure is imperative. It emphasizes Alaska’s historical and current geopolitical significance, which is central to US interests, and underscores the necessity for improvements to sustain military and civilian activities, including ports, fuel logistics, and transportation networks. Investing in Arctic resources and logistics is crucial for ensuring national security, positioning the United States to effectively respond to evolving global threats, maintaining a free and open Pacific, and providing continued support to allies.

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Over the past three decades, the United States has predominantly operated in desert environments such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa. This prolonged exposure to arid, hostile terrain, characterized by violent extremist organizations, fostered proficiency in unconventional and irregular warfare tactics, albeit at the expense of preparedness for cold-climate challenges and strategic competition. This timeline of events unexpectedly created a pernicious blind spot in our readiness for gray-zone warfare and cold environments, which pose lethal threats that can surpass those posed by traditional adversaries.

As the Arctic experiences significant climate change in the coming years, a convergence of factors including the melting of sea ice, escalating capabilities of peer nations, technological advancements, and challenges to the international rules-based order are prompting analysts to regard the Arctic as a potential future arena of conflict. Simultaneously, anticipated rises in sea levels, thawing of permafrost, and increased coastal erosion in the US-defined Arctic are presenting complex challenges in infrastructure maintenance and engineering across civilian, interagency, and military sectors. Environmental and geopolitical shifts are

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Snowblind is an ocular condition induced by ultraviolet rays reflecting off icy and snowy surfaces. It is particularly prevalent in polar regions, notably the northern latitudes, where sunlight can persist for up to 24 hours per day during the summer season, resulting in impaired vision. This analogous notion of snow blindness can be extended to potential capability gaps that have garnered attention from both private industry and defense professionals regarding the treatment of the Arctic by the United States and its assigned importance in terms of commerce, defense, and overall global positioning.

This article aims to dispel the transient neglect, ignorance, and disregard surrounding Alaska and the Arctic domain, shedding light on its strategic significance both from a national security standpoint and as a critical logistics hub essential for safeguarding a free and open Indo-Pacific theater, while also assuring the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of the United States’ capacity to provide support in times of conflict. As outlined in the Implementation Plan for the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSARIP), our nation “must plan and develop the targeted infrastructure necessary to enhance Arctic domain awareness and our ability to monitor and respond to threats in support of homeland defense.”

The Alaska of Yesteryear

The United States has been an Arctic nation since 1867, when Secretary of State William H. Seward orchestrated the purchase of Alaska from Russia. Initially derided as “Seward’s Folly,” the dismissive tone toward the acquisition shifted when Brig Gen William “Billy” Mitchell declared in a 1935 congressional address that “whoever holds Alaska will hold the world. I consider it the most crucial strategic location on the planet.” This statement gained credence during World War II, as significant military presence and operations occurred in both the Alaska–Aleutian Islands region and the broader Pacific theater to counter Imperial Japan.

In the Alaska region, notable engagements, such as the Battle of the Aleutian Islands, occurred, during which Japanese forces occupied two islands, Attu and Kiska, from June 1942 to August 1943. The United States and Canada conducted

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Heiserman

joint land, air, and naval operations to reclaim these islands and secure the Aleutians. However, these actions were distinct from the major campaigns waged in the broader Pacific theater.\footnote{Canadian War Museum. “The Aleutians—Canada’s Military History,” June 1942, https://www.warmuseum.ca/}

The Alaska campaign, alongside the achievements of the Lend-Lease program, affirmed General Mitchell’s foresight regarding Alaska’s strategic importance. From 1941 to 1945, the Lend-Lease program enabled the supply of military equipment, supplies, and weaponry to 39 Allied nations, including tanks, ships, and aircraft. Notably, more than half of the aircraft allocated to the Soviet Union transited through Ladd Field (now adjacent to Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks). These developments prompted the construction of the Alaska Highway, a monumental undertaking that aimed to create a military supply route linking the contiguous United States to Alaska through Canada. Constructed in less than a year, the highway addressed concerns about the security of the Alaska Territory and facilitated the transportation of troops, equipment, and supplies to Alaska in anticipation of a potential Japanese invasion. These initiatives also paved the way for the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and Alaska’s eventual attainment of statehood in 1959.\footnote{John Dougherty, “Pearl Harbor Day: Tragedy in Hawaii Shaped Alaska’s Place in History,” Web Center Fairbanks, 7 December 2020, https://www.webcenterfairbanks.com/}

The rapid infrastructure improvements were necessitated by the need to accommodate the influx of 45,000 US troops and the establishment of 12 new military sites to defend the northern frontier.\footnote{US Army Air Corps, “Alaska Air Depot, Anchorage, Anchorage, AK,” Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/}

Throughout the Cold War era, Alaska witnessed significant developments, including the construction of new roads, utilities, towns, and military bases. This was a direct response to Alaska’s crucial role as the “Guardian of the North,” serving as the foremost line of defense against Soviet air and missile threats.\footnote{US National Park Service, “Alaska’s Site Summit: Cold War Defense and Its Legacy in the North,” Teaching with Historic Places, n.d., https://www.nps.gov/}

It was evident that the most direct and probable route for a Soviet attack on the United States would be through Alaskan and Canadian airspace. The Soviet Union could potentially deploy its bombers over the North Pole to reach North America. To detect and counter these threats, the United States and Canada established the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line of radar stations across Alaska and Canada, now known as the North Warning System (NWS).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States’ investment in Alaska’s infrastructure waned. Like many nations, the United States...
pursued a “peace dividend,” reducing military and defense spending. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 further diverted resources and priorities away from Russia to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

Amid evolving global dynamics and a shift from GWOT to strategic competition with China, Russia, and other near-peers, Alaska once again finds itself at a critical juncture. At the 2024 Aspen Security Forum, US Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK) emphasized Alaska’s strategic significance, touting its abundant natural resources, vital geographical location, and the proximity to key international regions such as Korea, Japan, and the Taiwan Strait. Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy underscored his state’s proximity to global threats, stating, “At just a few miles from Russian territory, just a few hours from China, and within potential striking distance of North Korean missiles, Alaska is truly a frontier outpost standing on the front lines in between a rough neighborhood and North America.”

US military units in Anchorage, like the 11th Airborne Division, equidistant from Frankfurt, Germany, as is the 82nd Airborne Division in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Alaska’s global proximity provides immediate global reach capability anywhere in the northern hemisphere.

Alaska stands at yet another geopolitical crossroads, necessitating an immediate logistical overhaul in the Arctic to ensure preparedness for future challenges. This imperative lies in proactively shaping the environment to our advantage rather than simply reacting to adversarial developments. The United States must undertake proactive measures to modernize and strengthen critical infrastructure within the Alaskan region. Such steps are vital to establishing a robust posture for deploying forces and resources from and through Alaska and serve the dual purpose of deterring potential conflicts in both the Pan-Arctic and Indo-Pacific theaters. As technology advances and peer competitors expand their global influence, the luxury of reacting to events is no longer tenable from a temporal perspective.

**Two-Theater and Two-Ocean War**

The “two-theater” strategy was a defense planning model aimed at determining the size and composition of US forces necessary for optimal military readiness. It proposes that the United States maintains the capability to simultaneously engage

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in two geographically separated major conflicts. Over time, this concept evolved into various adaptations based on prevailing threats. It swiftly adjusted to emerging challenges such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the ascent of China, resulting in a more flexible and rapid-response force. However, some analysts argue that this strategy was effectively sidelined in the 2000s in favor of a more pragmatic and streamlined military approach.\(^{12}\)

Given the current geopolitical intricacies, proxy conflicts, and ongoing wars in regions like Ukraine and Israel, the DOD is compelled to reevaluate the allocation of resources necessary to sustain logistics for simultaneous engagement in two theaters. NATO is concerned that the United States may be preoccupied with matters in the Pacific, potentially limiting its ability to provide support during a crisis on NATO’s northern flank.\(^{13}\) Even without such distractions, doubts persist regarding the United States’ readiness to effectively manage a conflict in the Arctic today. Amid these uncertainties in the Arctic, similar challenges emerge in the Red Sea region, reflecting a broader pattern of maritime security threats worldwide.

The Red Sea region is witnessing escalating tensions and security concerns, particularly regarding attacks on container ships by Iran-backed Houthi rebels operating from Yemen. These attacks disrupt global trade and provoke fears about their potential impact on supply chains and the global economy. In response, the United States has initiated an allied naval task force, Operation Prosperity Guardian, aimed at safeguarding critical maritime routes and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of global trade, especially through the Suez Canal.\(^{14}\) Adding to the complexity of geopolitical escalations, in April 2024, Israel experienced a combination of 300 drone, cruise and ballistic missile attacks from Iran in retaliation of Israel’s airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria.\(^{15}\) There is widespread concern for the potential of these events to lead to a larger regional conflict, affecting not only the Middle East but drawing in global powers due to the strategic interests and alliances at play. Should China choose to invade Taiwan today, the United States would confront the possibility of a two-ocean conflict, spanning the South China Sea and the Red Sea.

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\(^{15}\) “Iran attacks Israel with 300 drones, missiles: What you need to know,” Al Jazeera, 14 April 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/.
In *The Two-Ocean War*, Samuel Eliot Morison meticulously recounts the US Navy’s logistical challenges and successes during World War II, spanning the Atlantic and Pacific theaters. This intricate narrative underscores the indispensable role of logistics in sustaining naval forces. Leveraging Alaska’s strategic terrain, such as Adak and Cold Bay, the Navy devised innovative logistical and sustainment strategies across the Pacific. These initiatives ranged from establishing global supply chains and naval bases to pioneering new ship designs and repair facilities.\(^{16}\) This campaign underscored that logistics are not merely a support function but a pivotal determinant of victory. These challenges in managing two-theater/ocean scenarios emphasize the complexity of handling high-demand, low-density assets in operational plans (OPLAN).

As Gen Glen D. VanHerck stated while serving as commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) & United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), “Generically, our OPLANs double- or even triple-task forces and resources, creating a competition for high-demand, low-density assets. That means, for example, in a crisis overseas, the Secretary of Defense, with advice from the Chairman as the Department of Defense (DOD) global integrator, will have to adjudicate competing requirements from multiple combatant commands to determine apportionment of scarce resources—compromising response and, more importantly, ceding valuable and irreplaceable time to the adversary. OPLANs today need to move past this model, identify distinct requirements for each commander, and deconflict force apportionment in advance, knowing that simultaneous demands will exist in any large-scale crisis.”\(^{17}\) Both the Biden administration and the DOD have voiced concerns about vulnerabilities stemming from reliance on a diminishing pool of sub-tier providers and the disruptions to US defense supply chains caused by geopolitical instability.\(^{18}\)

## Arctic Gaining More Attention

Most branches of the US military have published Arctic strategies, which have influenced the updated 2022 *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*. This overarching strategy emphasizes core priorities such as security, climate change mitigation, environmental protection, sustainable economic development, and international

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cooperation and governance. Notably, this update coincided with the release of the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), which also highlights the importance of enhanced shared maritime domain awareness, close collaboration with allies and partners, and commitment to internationally agreed-upon rules and norms.

These strategies collectively accentuate the imperative for a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach toward the Arctic for homeland defense and national security. They encompass safeguarding resources, the economy, and territorial integrity. However, notable challenges remain. One conspicuous omission from both the National Strategy for the Arctic Region and the US Indo-Pacific Strategy is the term logistics.

While logistics may appear confined to tactical matters, its strategic significance is frequently underestimated across all echelons. This becomes particularly concerning when confronting the complexities of allocating and distributing limited resources during a global conflict.

**Challenges**

The unforgiving Arctic environment presents significant infrastructure challenges, impacting not only the military but also communities in Alaska. Equipment, facilities, and personnel must contend with extreme temperature fluctuations and adverse weather conditions. Two primary factors contribute to the hurdles in enhancing logistical infrastructure: climate and distance.

**Climate**

Temperatures fluctuate dramatically in Alaska, ranging from -50 to more than 90 degrees Fahrenheit, depending on the time of year and location. The state’s vast size encompasses diverse geography and climate, from Arctic tundra in the north to temperate rainforests in the southeast. In regions above 66 degrees north latitude, the challenge of seasonal darkness not only disrupts transportation schedules and operational efficiency but also poses a significant obstacle to maintaining infrastructure. Moreover, warming temperatures are impacting the permafrost, which underlies approximately 85 percent of Alaska. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) 15th annual Arctic Report Card, the 12-month period from October 2019 to September 2020 was the second-warmest

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year on record for surface-air temperatures over land in the Arctic (see figure). The Arctic is warming at a rate two to four times faster than the rest of the world. Scientists supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea are predicting ice-free summers in the Arctic by the 2030s.

Figure 1. Climate change in terms of Arctic warming. (Source: NOAA)

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Tyranny of Distance

Environmental changes will not only challenge Alaska’s infrastructure but also the tyranny of distance and the recent expansion of US claimed territory, which will strain the limits of current resources. Alaska boasts the largest land area of any state in the United States, spanning 663,300 square miles. This vast expanse surpasses the combined area of the next three largest states: Texas, California, and Montana, resulting in logistical constraints and limited accessibility. Alaska’s immense size and lack of infrastructure contribute to the considerable separation between its two major population centers, Fairbanks and Anchorage, with Anchorage serving as the central hub and home to approximately 40 percent of the state’s population. The remainder of the state comprises small towns and villages, often with populations of just a few hundred people. These settlements are typically hundreds of miles apart, leading to a sparse population distribution that complicates connectivity via road, rail systems, and fiber optic cable, further hindered by the numerous mountain ranges between Anchorage in the south and Utqiagvik (Barrow) in the far north. Additionally, DOD facilities play a crucial role in maintaining communication lines in remote areas. These installations often precede and catalyze the development of surrounding communities, serving as the initial foundation upon which these communities are established and grow. Facilities in remote areas, such as US Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, on Kodiak Island approximately 250 miles southwest of Anchorage, and Clear Space Force Station, a remote installation about 75 miles southwest of Fairbanks, add an additional layer of complexity to logistical planning.

Following extensive mapping of continental shelves, the United States is poised to extend its territorial claims in the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea by an additional 987,700 square kilometers, an area twice the size of California. The addition of this sovereign area, named the Chukchi Borderland, could help in placing long-distance fiber-optic cables as well as regulating and inspecting other nation’s research vessels operating in that area.

Arctic Logistics that Support US Indo-Pacific Command and NATO

Alaska’s strategic significance, reminiscent of its role in World War II, is paramount in a potential South China Sea conflict. From the perspective of US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), US European Command (USEUCOM), NATO, and USNORTHCOM, Alaska's bases will play a pivotal role in homeland defense and in projecting forces for contingency operations, both in the Arctic and actions in the USINDOPACOM and USEUCOM theaters. Given Alaska's relative proximity to the South China Sea, it also serves as a valuable location for reducing response time and swiftly mobilizing forces to the Indo-Pacific theater, concurrently acting as a forward deployment and a staging area. This capability is essential for rapid deployment and logistical support, including the potential for refueling and resupply of naval vessels and aircraft. In the event of missile threats, Eareckson Air Station’s Cobra Dane—located on the island of Shemya, in the Aleutian Islands—provides early detection, Clear’s facility offers target discrimination capabilities, and Fort Greely's Ground-based Missile Defense (GMD), 350 miles north of Anchorage, engages targets, collectively forming a comprehensive ballistic missile defense (BMD) shield for NORAD over the United

Figure 2: Extended Continental Shelf regions. (Source: US Department of State.)
States and Canada. As the demand for Alaskan infrastructure growth rises, the importance of providing critical logistical support, such as fuel, cold weather materiel, and munitions, intensifies.

**Where to Focus US Effort**

The United States should prioritize investment in dual-use military and civilian infrastructure in Alaska to facilitate efficient movement of equipment and supplies, crucial for rapid deployment and response to global security threats. Alaska’s 2021 critical infrastructure report card highlights the state’s infrastructure vulnerabilities, garnering a grade of C-. Some of the most concerning areas include drinking water, energy, marine highways, ports and harbors, and wastewater. When evaluating extensive logistical support networks, it becomes clear that the United States should focus efforts on modernizing ports, strengthening fuel distribution networks for maritime forces, and constructing a railway linking North America to Alaska.

**Ports**

The Don Young Port of Alaska, located in Anchorage, holds the distinction of being one of 17 designated “US Commercial Strategic Seaports” by the DOD. Responsible for 90 percent of military sustainment, it stands as the sole port in Alaska certified to receive aviation fuel. Military-grade fuels are sourced from refineries within Alaska at Valdez and Nikiski (Marathon) or imported by oil tankers from the west coast of the Lower 48. However, the Port of Alaska is rapidly aging and has limited docking capacity. It faces mounting challenges from erosion, corrosion, coastal processes, climate change, and seismic activity. Failure to update and repair the port in a timely manner not only hampers the flow of supplies but also makes it vulnerable to nonkinetic threats like cyberattacks or economic pressure, further disrupting logistics operations.

Two decades ago, the US government allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to expand the Port of Alaska, but issues during design and construction halted the project. Today, under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), a

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USD 68.7–million reconfiguration of shoreline and material removal is planned for the port. However, the comprehensive modernization project is estimated to cost USD 1.6 billion, with the IIJA covering less than 7 percent of the required repairs. It is imperative for the Department of Transportation and DOD to jointly prioritize this modernization effort.

The Army Corps of Engineers’ feasibility report outlining improvements for the Port of Nome emphasized its strategic importance. The report stated, “In addition to providing fuel for forces operating in the northern Bering, southern Chukchi, and western Beaufort Seas, an accessible port would provide unique benefits to Homeland Defense, including a port of refuge, logistics support, and a location to loiter as the maritime situation unfolds.” The USD 490–million project is designed to bolster support for diverse maritime missions, encompassing cargo transportation, search-and-rescue operations, emergency response efforts, oil spill containment, and natural resource exploration.

This entails reducing draft limitations to accommodate more efficient vessels, expanding dock space to handle a greater number of ships without delays or safety

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concerns, and enlarging the navigation area to ensure safe and efficient maneuvering for all types of vessels, including military ships. Phase I is scheduled to commence in 2024, Phase II in 2025, and the final phase will commence in 2027.

Situated on the southern coast of Alaska, approximately 120 miles east of Anchorage, the Port of Valdez offers access to the Gulf of Alaska and the North Pacific Ocean. Its strategic location makes it a valuable deepwater port for military operations in the Arctic region and the Pacific Rim. The Port of Valdez stands as one of the few year-round ice-free ports in the Arctic, playing a crucial role in supporting military operations and logistics in the Arctic and serving as a vital entry point for military personnel, equipment, and supplies into the state, which are then transported to bases in Alaska and the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, Valdez serves as a pivotal transit hub for cargo entering and exiting Alaska. Serving as the southern terminus of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, it facilitates the transportation of crude oil from Alaska's North Slope for export.

The Port of Valdez is instrumental in facilitating the transportation of energy resources, including oil and natural gas. Over 95 percent of Alaska's crude oil production originates from the North Slope. Commercial and government agencies in Alaska utilize three refineries: Petro Star Valdez, Petro Star North Pole, and Marathon on the Kenai Peninsula (Nikiski). Although there are four refineries in total, the fourth, BP on the North Slope, exclusively produces oil for its internal operations and does not supply external markets. Most of the oil extracted from the North Slope is transported via the Trans-Alaska pipeline, loaded onto barges at Valdez, and shipped to Washington and Oregon for refining. In 1989, it took only four and a half days for the oil to reach Valdez from the North Slope; however, today, it takes 19 days due to a decrease in volume.

Moreover, Valdez holds the distinction of being the sole seaport in Alaska certified to handle munitions. The transportation of munitions in Alaska poses a unique set of challenges that necessitates careful consideration. Depending on the timing of resupply, winter road conditions in Alaska must be taken into account for the transportation of ammunition to its destination. This presents additional challenges in supporting USINDOPACOM bases in a USNORTHCOM area of responsibility during peacetime deliveries.

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Snowblind

One provision of the Taiwan Relations Act mandates that the United States provide support to Taiwan in the form of arms sales, including munitions. Since 2020, the United States has supplied Taiwan with USD 4.45 billion worth of arms. The transfer of munitions from the United States to Taiwan typically occurs through the Port of Kaohsiung in Taiwan. The specific port of origin is not publicly disclosed for national security reasons. However, considering the distances from US Pacific ports certified to handle munitions, the distances to Kaohsiung are:

- Port of Seattle, WA: 7,100 nm
- Port of Long Beach, CA: 6,500 nm
- Port of Valdez, AK: 6,000 nm

Valdez stands as the nearest ammunition-certified port on the US mainland to Taiwan. Guaranteeing the security and operational readiness of this port is paramount for safeguarding both national economic security and energy supply.

Fuel

Currently, there is no maritime fuel available north of Dutch Harbor of a scale sufficient to sustain major combat operations. However, this scenario could change with the expansion of the Port of Nome. This absence, coupled with a consistent 200 percent rise in sea lane traffic in the Bering Strait since 2009, creates a chokepoint where all three sea routes intersect, posing a critical vulnerability for several reasons. The surge in vessel traffic, in the absence of adequate fueling stations, heightens the probability of vessels carrying excessive fuel, thereby increasing the risk of major spills, as outlined in the Arctic Council’s Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment report.

Fuel plays a critical role in all aspects of transportation. A report by the US Coast Guard underscores the difficulties encountered in effective search-and-rescue operations in the Arctic due to limited infrastructure, including fuel availability.
Figure 4. Bering Strait terminal location of Northern Sea Route, Northwest Passage, and Transpolar Sea Route. (Source: “Shipping in the Bering Strait Region: Overview,” Ocean Conservancy, n.d., https://oceanconservancy.org/.)

From an economic perspective, the absence of fueling options may dissuade shipping companies from utilizing shorter Arctic routes, thereby missing opportunities for decreased transit times and costs. This deficiency could impede the ability of the United States and its allies to project power and maintain a presence in the Arctic, a concern emphasized in the *Strategy for the Arctic Region* and reiterated by the commander of NORAD and USNORTHCOM.

The former commander of NORAD and USNORTHCOM, Gen Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy, articulated to the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) in 2020 that “we have a stated requirement for fuel north of Dutch Harbor—1,000 miles from Utqiagvik—it is the ability to continue to operate once it gets there, and not just have to turn around and go get gas.”39 Additionally, the next com-

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Snowblind

commander, General VanHerck, stated the same requirement “in the Aleutian Islands—that will help with that persistence and will also provide infrastructure for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms and fighter aircraft . . . this will help the U.S. better compete in the Arctic and continue to be aware of Russian activities in the region.40

**US Navy Catch-22**

The US Navy’s objectives for the Arctic, as delineated in the “a Blue Arctic” blueprint, are to maintain an enhanced presence, strengthen cooperative partnerships, and bolster a more capable Arctic naval force.41 However, according to US Naval Institute, as of 1 February 2023, the highest latitude where the US Navy is consistently operating on the surface is 48 degrees North.42 This falls short of constituting the maintenance of an enhanced presence in the Arctic, and there are several factors contributing to why US Navy surface vessels are not persistently in this region.

The US Navy primarily operates with F-76 fuel for ships and JP-5 for aircraft, which presents logistical challenges in Alaska due to the lack of these specific fuels. The US Navy’s preference for F-76 over Marine gas oil (MGO), despite both being suitable for ships, is driven by F-76’s added stability and quality, which minimizes engine wear.43 However, MGO and F-75 are superior maritime fuels for cold-weather conditions and are the only types produced by Arctic nations.44 While the Navy can utilize these fuels, the challenge lies in how Combat Logistics Force (CLF) ships manage their fuel cargo. Once a CLF vessel loads MGO or F-75 into its tanks, it cannot refill them with F-76 until a thorough cleaning is conducted. Storing MGO effectively restricts the operational range of the CLF ship primarily to the far north.45 Positioning these specialized fuels in Alaska entails significant costs and logistical hurdles, particularly as the US Navy has a limited operational presence in the region.

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According to Alaska Command (ALCOM) and the Defense Logistics Agency’s (DLA) Energy Americas North, there is an initiative to establish JP-5 under the Petroleum War Reserve Requirement (PWRR) at the Defense Fuel Support Point (DFSP) in Anchorage by Naval Forces Northern Command (NAVNORTH), designed to enhance readiness for naval operations within the Aleutian Islands and the broader Arctic region before 2030. Maritime fuel storage and distribution in Alaska require substantial investment in location scouting, transportation, maintenance, and regular fuel replacement, which poses a challenge given the current infrequency of US Navy presence in Alaskan waters. The activity level of the US Navy is primarily determined by OPLAN requirements and the current priorities of NAVNORTH. These factors would rapidly override any issues related to fuel placement and storage when it comes to power projection. However, this is not a quick solution, and neither is how the United States will cover their new Arctic territory.

The US Navy must prioritize fueling infrastructure, including staging, regulations, and delivery mechanisms, ideally before ice-free summers arrive. In a November 2023 House Committee on Homeland Security hearing, Senator Sullivan emphasized in his opening remarks that “We not only need more Coast Guard assets, but also a Navy presence back in Alaska. We will need to be able to respond more rapidly in the future. That means places for Navy ships to refuel and refit in the Aleutian Islands and on Alaska’s west coast near the Bering Strait.”

Connecting North America to Alaska by Railway

Alaska’s road system is relatively limited. The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities reports approximately 14,336 miles of public roads, a stark contrast to the over 313,000 miles of public roadways in Texas. Primarily concentrated in the southern coastal region, Alaska’s road network leaves many northern and interior areas inaccessible by road. The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), spanning 470 miles from Seward to Fairbanks, serves communities in South-central and Interior Alaska, but does not extend to key regions like the North Slope, home to Utqiaġvik.

Given Alaska’s limited rail capacity, transportation of supplies, equipment, and personnel relies heavily on airlifts, trucking, or sealifts. While the 2023 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allocates USD 8.2 billion for 10 major passenger rail projects nationwide, there are no designated funds for establishing a railway connection.
between Alaska and the contiguous United States. However, the law does allocate USD 8.2 million for the replacement project of the ARRC Milepost 190.5 bridge. Rail infrastructure is essential for military operations, especially in strategic locations like Alaska, facilitating the swift and efficient movement of troops, equipment, and supplies. However, limited rail capacity poses constraints on military readiness and response capabilities. For instance, transporting a typical Army brigade combat team (BCT), comprising infantry, cavalry, field artillery, special troops, and support, requires more than 600 rail cars. Considering air transportation based on weight alone, moving a single heavy armored BCT demands more than 500 C-17 flights, which exceeds the total number of C-17s in the entire US inventory.

One promising solution was the USD 22 billion Alaska–Alberta Railway Development Corporation (also known as A2A for Alaska to Alberta) railway project, aimed at linking North American transportation networks by extending a rail line from Delta Junction, Alaska, to Fort McMurray, Alberta. However, due to irregular business dealings, the project encountered significant setbacks in 2021, derailing its progress.

The envisioned railway offers a strategic advantage by connecting the Port of Valdez with the contiguous United States, streamlining the transportation of essential military supplies, fuel, and ammunition currently reliant on slower shipping methods. Presently, a barge voyage from Los Angeles to Taipei consumes about 19 days, whereas a journey from Anchorage takes approximately 14 days. Integrating the A2A rail link could curtail transit times between North America and Asia by an additional two to four days. Logistics experts assert that trimming shipping durations by two to four days could potentially tip the balance between victory and defeat in a conflict.

Beyond expediting transit, the proposed railway would enhance national security by introducing redundancy in infrastructure. This augmentation could ease military resupply efforts and broaden access to Arctic training areas, substantially bolstering

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As discussions regarding its reactivation gain momentum, the A2A railway’s potential emerges as a catalyst for unlocking the Arctic region’s latent economic and strategic potential.

**Conclusion**

To prepare for the future of ice-free summers in the Arctic and escalating global tensions, strategic investments in critical infrastructure and logistics capabilities in Alaska are imperative. These preparations are not only essential for navigating the emerging challenges in the Arctic but also for effectively managing potential conflicts in the South China Sea while shoring up support for NATO.

Operating in the Arctic during peacetime affords the United States the opportunity to fortify infrastructure and capabilities, preempt crises, and sidestep make-shift solutions. Conversely, delayed action could force fighter combat air patrols and ground forces into deployment under more arduous, contested conditions. Much like the perils of snow blindness, neglecting the development of our Arctic capabilities opens the door for strategic competitors to exploit the evolving Arctic landscape to their advantage. Leveraging the Arctic’s potential through advanced logistics capabilities offers a unique avenue for projecting power and deterrence. We must not wait for another Pearl Harbor or Cold War to fortify the Arctic’s infrastructure—it is an endeavor of strategic necessity and foresight.

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**Lt Col Kristen “KJ” Heiserman, USAF**

Lieutenant Colonel Heiserman is a fellow at The Institute for Future Conflict and an instructor of management at the United States Air Force Academy. She is a senior Air Force Special Operations Command pilot with more than 2,300 flying hours and has served at the wing and combatant command levels, most recently as the speechwriter for the commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command & US Northern Command.

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Answering Authoritarian State Asymmetric Challenges
Tools for Deterring Hybrid Threats and Non-Military Coercion from China and Russia

DR. SCOTT FISHER
DR. GRAIG KLEIN
DR. JUSTE CODJO
DR. JURIS PUPCENOKS

Abstract

For US leaders and policy makers attempting to deter or punish asymmetric challenges from China, Russia, and other authoritarian states, information has been an underutilized tool. Beijing and Moscow react more negatively to information tools, especially those that challenge regime controls over information, than they do to military, economic, and diplomatic tools. US policy makers should focus on criticizing censorship, advocating for freedom of information access, and using technical or cyber means to undermine information/communication controls in authoritarian states. Doing so offers an opportunity for the United States and its democratic allies to balance authoritarian state practices designed to manipulate the open information environments of democratic societies, with a tool that targets authoritarian regimes’ reliance on information control to maintain power.

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Deterring an adversary requires, at the most fundamental level, understanding the adversary. Threatening to isolate an adversary that craves isolation, for example, is unlikely to produce benefits for US policy makers, as borne out by decades of failure to achieve US policy aims in North Korea.

The United States faces similarly counterproductive risks when attempting to deter asymmetric challenges from China and Russia. A common view, supported by both precedent and scholarship, is that military capabilities are effective at deterrence. Our research supports these earlier findings—US and allies’ military capabilities clearly produce negative reactions in Moscow and Beijing. Unfortunately, the scope of these earlier findings is too narrow; they fail to provide the insight required to understand and then effectively deter challenges beyond the military tools of statecraft.

Instead, Washington requires a broader understanding of which instruments of national power can deter a broad spectrum of economic, diplomatic, and political challenges from adversary states. Using a unique new methodology and an approach
that examines all instruments of national power, we develop several key findings that will assist US senior leaders and policy makers attempting to deter authoritarian states:

- military instruments, especially exercises near adversary borders, can harm US deterrence goals by inadvertently supporting the leadership in Beijing and Moscow;

- economic instruments, chiefly sanctions, produce little reaction—the international relations equivalent of a yawn—while possibly also supporting the leadership in the targeted regimes;

- information instruments, sometimes in conjunction with diplomatic instruments, can produce the most negative reactions by the targeted states and appear to be an underutilized tool for asymmetric deterrence of authoritarian states, specifically China and Russia.¹

We develop these findings below, first through a brief look at deterrence. Then, after an overview of our approach and methodology, we apply our methods to case studies of China and Russia. Finally, we conclude with a discussion and policy recommendations for more effectively attaining US goals, including deterrence, regarding authoritarian adversaries.

Deterrence

Recent developments in deterrence scholarship, often dubbed “fourth-generation deterrence theory,” feature a broad spectrum of foreign policy tools, including nonmilitary practices designed “to penetrate democratic society” for the “[manipulation of] other states’ strategic interests.”² These challenges have sparked discussions among practitioners, strategists, and scholars. In 2017, former Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper observed that current deterrence/punishment tools have created a “permissive environment” for hostile activity because they lack an ability to deter mid-spectrum actions—those that fall short of war but rise above minor annoyances.³

The 2022 US National Security Strategy (NSS) recognizes this challenge and proposes developing and deploying integrated deterrence as “the seamless combination of capabilities to convince potential adversaries that the costs of their

¹ The authors find similar patterns for North Korea and Iran. Please contact authors for information.


hostile activities outweigh their benefits.” The 2022 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) adds further details, “Integrated deterrence entails working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, all instruments of US national power, and our network of Alliances [sic] and partnerships. Tailored to specific circumstances, it applies a coordinated, multifaceted approach to reducing competitors’ perceptions of the net benefits of aggression relative to restraint.”

An organization cannot tailor activities to specific circumstances without a thorough understanding of the adversary. Our research assists this process by developing tools and methods that allow policy makers to better understand how authoritarian states, specifically China and Russia, perceive and react to US deterrence activities.

**Methodology and Data**

By analyzing which foreign policy tools create the most and least negative reactions in Beijing and Moscow, this article addresses three critical questions:

1. What, if any, foreign policy tools are effective at deterring asymmetric challenges from authoritarian states?

2. How can deterrence effectiveness be measured?

3. What variations exist between countries in how they respond to Washington’s use of foreign policy tools?

Because of its portability across the academic and policy communities, we used the diplomacy, information, military, and economic (DIME) framework to conduct our analysis. Here the specific focus was which US foreign policy tools created the strongest responses in Beijing and Moscow. Measuring how states respond involved three key components:

1. Data, specifically information capable of effectively illustrating what states say or do.

2. A method for analyzing this data that can produce baselines and detect any variations from the baseline tied to specific activities.

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3. An understanding that actions taken to deter can involve “apples-to-oranges” comparisons, for example, an actor may attempt a diplomatic and/or economic activity to deter a military activity.⁶

We amassed a dataset comprising more than 1.6 million articles spanning from 2000 to 2022, sourced from English-language publications of the Chinese and Russian ministries of foreign affairs (MOFA) and specific state-controlled media outlets.⁷ This data collection was funded by a grant from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and is accessible to the public.⁸ We focused on English-language articles because China and Russia—like many non-English-speaking countries—allocate resources for English publications to advance their respective state strategic narratives.

This collection of open-source data is well-suited for big data analytic tools, specifically sentiment analysis because it computationally measures and quantifies “opinion, sentiment, and subjectivity in text.”⁹ Applying sentiment analysis to government reports and state media articles, or a government’s every mention of a subject, quantifies official state opinion and allowed us to establish a country’s

⁶ See Erik Gartzke and Jon R. Lindsay, eds., Cross-Domain Deterrence (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) for more on ‘apples to oranges’ deterrence tools.

⁷ Our data consists of the following:
   - Global Times (China): 677,532 articles, from 2009–2022
   - People’s Daily (China): 544,940 articles, from 2007–2022
   - Russia Today (Russia): 291,515 articles from 2006–2022
   - Sputnik (Russia): 136,469 articles, from 2019–2022


⁹ This is a critical tool for studying the narratives states are attempting to propagate, but it is a relatively underutilized methodology in international relations. Analysis typically involves converting text data into a Likert-scale positive-neutral-negative numerical range. For our sentiment analysis, we used the AFINN package in R and used R Studio. AFINN is a standard sentiment analysis tool/dictionary used in the social sciences, see Finn Årup Nielsen, “A new ANEW: Evaluation of a word list for sentiment analysis in microblogs,” in Proceedings of the ESWC2011 Workshop on ‘Making Sense of Microposts’: Big Things Come in Small Packages 2011, 93–98, https://core.ac.uk/. It is not an acronym.

baseline, detect and compare responses to DIME framework tools, and conduct quantitative analyses to identify statistically significant patterns.\textsuperscript{11}

To capture Chinese and Russian reactions to different DIME tools, we systematically selected and measured the sentiment of key terms and events.\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Diplomatic} terms reflect UN resolutions that target China or Russia. Important \textit{information} terms are based on previous research and \textit{military} terms reflect bilateral and multilateral exercises. \textit{Economic} terms reflect sanctions in general and specific sanctions levied by the United States and others (e.g., European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization member states). Table 1 includes the search terms for both countries. If a document referenced the search term, we used AFINN sentiment analysis values to classify the document as very negative, negative, neutral, positive, or very positive. We then conducted Chi-Square and Difference of Means statistical tests analyzing the distribution of sentiment frequency and average sentiment, respectively, across the documents per country within each DIME tool category. We are not directly testing China and Russia against one another; so, differences in search terms or the number of articles per country did not influence the statistical tests.

\textbf{Table 1. DIME Framework Search Terms}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIME Tools</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Russia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
<td>UN Human Rights</td>
<td>UN Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Rapporteur</td>
<td>UN General Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uyghur Human Rights Policy</td>
<td>START Treaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Freedom House</td>
<td>Freedom House</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporters Without Borders</td>
<td>Reporters Without Borders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Ulchi</td>
<td>Baltops</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RIMPAC</td>
<td>Cold Response</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keen Sword</td>
<td>Hedgehog</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Han Kuang</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balikatan</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>AUKUS</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arms Sales</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Economic Sanctions</td>
<td>Economic Sanctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huawei</td>
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\textsuperscript{12} Ibid; see also Fisher, “Testing the Importance of Information Control,” \textit{Journal of Information Warfare} 18, no. 1: 23–38; Fisher et al., “FOCUSdata: Foreign Policy Through Language & Sentiment,” \textit{Foreign Policy Analysis}.  
Our approach is replicable, applicable to other countries, and adaptable, i.e., by expanding or changing the search terms. This provides a useful new tool for predicting which activities under which instruments of national power are most or least likely to achieve a desired deterrence effect for a particular country.

**China Case Study**

Key findings:

1. The information tool in DIME clearly stings Beijing and represents an underutilized instrument for deterring or countering China, as well as other authoritarian regimes. Such states tend to react quite negatively to criticism of domestic information controls.

2. Criticism of Beijing’s human rights record and domestic information controls generated strongly negative reactions. This “naming and shaming”—e.g., UN investigations and nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports criticizing domestic information controls—deserves additional attention from policy makers.¹³

3. Beijing reacted more negatively to criticisms of its human rights and press freedom policies than it did to Taiwanese military exercises—including iterations of those exercises that involved the US military.

4. Starting in 2021, the Chinese MOFA turned very negative regarding the South China Sea. This shift could indicate decreased acceptance by Beijing of narratives or activities that challenge its official claims in the region.

We explore these and related findings below. As a starting point, we emphasize that baseline sentiment is positive in the *Global Times* (54.2 percent), *People’s Daily* (58.2 percent), and Foreign Ministry (87.2 percent) data. When discussing the key search terms in table 1, in all three sources, there was significant variation across DIME tools in sentiment and how often sources addressed a specific tool. There were variations and statistically significant patterns that indicated strategic reactions, decision making, and therefore, opportunities to learn about customized DIME-based deterrence strategies.¹⁴

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¹³ Fisher, 2018 identifies similar patterns in North Korea.

¹⁴ We categorize identified articles into crisp sets and conduct Chi-Square Tests for each data source. All three Chinese open-source information sources produce statistically significant tests, which indicates that how China discusses different DIME framework elements is not random, rather it is calculated and suggests strategic decision-making dictates how China responds to or discusses the key search terms. Complete results are available upon request.
Rather surprisingly, when China discussed joint military exercises, the average sentiment was positive in all three sources. This suggests that deterrence through traditional force projection or brinksmanship may be less effective than many may assume. When discussing economic tools, the average sentiment scores for both Global Times and People’s Daily were also positive. Conversely when those sources discussed diplomatic and information tools, the average sentiment was negative. These differences in average sentiment are statistically significant.¹⁵

Notably, China’s MOFA remains positive across all four tools, but here too there was statistically significant variation in how it talked about each DIME tool. Overall, China is less sensitive—it responded less negatively and more positively—to economic sanctions and most military exercises than it did to the diplomatic and information tools of the DIME framework.

Below, we analyze the DIME tools and present key research findings in D-I-M-E order. We conclude with a summary before transitioning to the Russia case study. As needed or beneficial, we incorporate data visualizations to express or clarify our findings.

Diplomatic

Overall, China consistently expressed criticism toward diplomatic efforts and engagements in its discourse within state-controlled media and through the MOFA. In fact, while still using primarily positive sentiment, MOFA communications discussing diplomatic tools yielded the lowest sentiment within the DIME framework. Notably, at a statistically significant rate, People’s Daily and Global Times diplomatic sentiment is more negative (i.e., lower) than military and economic sentiment;¹⁶ MOFA diplomatic sentiment is lower than military and economic sentiment.¹⁷ Specifically, People’s Daily diplomatic sentiment is 220.3 percent lower than its baseline sentiment, Global Times’ is 394.0 percent lower, and the Foreign Ministry’s is 93.5 percent lower.¹⁸

Below are examples from People’s Daily and Global Times illustrating state media reactions to discussions of Beijing’s Uyghur human rights policy in comparison to baseline sentiment. The first image depicts baseline sentiment encompassing all

¹⁵ Analysis is based on two-sample t-tests specifying unequal variances between the samples. This accounts for the variation or imbalance in the number of observations for different DIME search terms within each data source. Using the crisp set classifications, Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic sentiment scores are calculated and compared to one another. Complete results are available upon request.

¹⁶ Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.

¹⁷ Statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level.

¹⁸ All three are statistically significant differences at a 99.9 percent confidence level.
articles; the second image for each source is specific to Uyghur human rights. Note the clear, negative changes from the baselines. The MOFA rarely discussed the term (N=2), thus related visualizations are omitted.

Figure 1. *Global Times* AFINN baseline

Figure 2. *Global Times* Uyghur human rights policy
We also note a recent change in the Chinese MOFA sentiment regarding mentions of the South China Sea. Starting in 2021, the MOFA took a very negative turn when discussing the South China Sea. Our database includes 2,607 MOFA
articles dating to 2000 and contains 48 “very negative” articles. Out of those 22 years with 48 very negative articles, 13 (27 percent) are from 2021 and 2022 and mention the South China Sea. This is a significant outlier and sudden change versus the baseline. While further investigation is necessary, this finding could indicate decreased acceptance by Beijing of narratives or activities that challenge its official claims in the region and may presage additional activities to protect its claims—activities that will likely conflict with the United States and its regional partners.

Information

China displays a notable sensitivity toward information tools. International reports regarding the country’s human rights practices elicited the most negative average sentiment across DIME tools for both the Global Times and People’s Daily. The MOFA rarely discussed the key search terms in table 1; thus, analysis is restricted to the Global Times and People’s Daily. At a statistically significant rate, People’s Daily information sentiment is more negative (i.e., lower) than diplomatic sentiment.19 Average information sentiment in the Global Times is not statistically different than average diplomatic sentiment. The People’s Daily and Global Times information sentiment is more negative than military and economic sentiment.20 Specifically, the People’s Daily information sentiment is 331.4 percent lower than its baseline sentiment, and the Global Times’ is 401.2 percent lower.21

Military

On average, China’s sentiment about the military tools of DIME was positive. The exceptions were US military exercises with South Korea and Taiwanese exercises that the US military occasionally, but not always, joins. Reactions to these exercises tended to be more negative compared to other exercises, although they were generally less negative than responses to diplomatic and information tools.

At a statistically significant rate, the People’s Daily and Global Times military sentiment is higher (and more positive) than diplomatic and information sentiment;22 MOFA military sentiment is higher than diplomatic sentiment,23 but the military sentiment is based on a very small sample. The People’s Daily and Global Times military sentiment are 16.9 percent and 3.6 percent lower, respectively, and are not

19 Statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level.
20 Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
21 Both are statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level.
22 Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
23 Statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level.
Answering Authoritarian State Asymmetric Challenges

statistically significantly different than their baseline sentiment. The MOFA’s sentiment is 49.5 percent lower and statistically different compared to its baseline.24

Beijing reacted more negatively to criticisms of its human rights and press freedom policies than it does to Taiwanese military exercises—including iterations of those exercises that involve the US military. Based on the authors’ previous research involving Russia and North Korea, China’s overall lukewarm response to military exercises is not atypical. Though it requires further research to confirm, our initial suspicion of the cause of these findings—that authoritarian states respond less negatively than expected to nearby military exercises held by competitors—is that outside threats actually align with regime narratives of external threats and calls for national unity. Effectively, these exercises can be perceived as bolstering regime narratives and nationalist appeals.

To illustrate these findings, below we compare baseline sentiment from the Global Times with articles discussing Reporters without Borders’ activities and then Taiwan’s Han Kuang military exercises (that sometimes include the US military). Note the differences with the baseline, then between the two instruments.

Figure 5. Global Times AFINN baseline

24 Statically significance decrease at a 99.9 percent confidence level.
Figure 6. *Global Times* Reporters without Borders

Figure 7. *Global Times* Han Kuang
Economic

In both *People’s Daily* and *Global Times*, economic sentiment registered the highest (most positive) average sentiment. At a statistically significant rate, *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* economic sentiment is more positive (i.e., higher) than diplomatic, information, and military sentiment.\(^{25}\) Furthermore, the MOFA economic sentiment is higher than diplomatic sentiment and is not statistically different than military sentiment.\(^{26}\) Specifically, the *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* economic sentiment are 100.8 percent and 78.3 percent higher, respectively, than baseline sentiment, and the MOFA’s sentiment is 50.7 percent lower, all of which are statistically significant differences.\(^{27}\)

Summary

Our findings bear clear relevance for policy makers. Information tools, sometimes in combination with diplomatic tools, generate the most negative average sentiment. This suggests an underutilization of this tool in deterring or influencing Beijing. We also identified two surprising patterns. First, naming and shaming provokes a more negative reaction in China compared to military exercises involving the US and neighboring states, including US involvement in Taiwanese military exercises. Second, while economic sanctions were expected to evoke anger and higher rates of negative sentiment from China, we found a muted impact.

Russia Case Study

Key findings:

1. Information tools provoked a stronger negative response compared to diplomatic, military, or economic tools—including NATO military exercises and economic sanctions.\(^{28}\) Recent updates to our research materials validate earlier findings.

2. Criticism from human rights NGOs—such as Reporters without Borders and Freedom House—elicited a very negative response. This finding aligns

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\(^{25}\) Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.

\(^{26}\) Statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level.

\(^{27}\) Statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level.

with findings in our China case study regarding authoritarian state sensitivities to naming and shaming.

3. Moscow displayed minimal reaction to diplomatic tools. For example, sentiment was often near or even more positive than baseline sentiment regarding United Nations resolutions criticizing Moscow. However, Russia exhibited a notably more negative response to the UN General Assembly’s (UNGA) criticism of its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine compared to other diplomatic tools and baseline sentiment.

We explore these and related findings below. As a starting point, we emphasize that in Russia Today stands at 65 percent negative, while in Sputnik, it stands at 62.9 percent negative. This is a marked difference from China’s state-controlled media outlets, which exhibit positive baselines. The majority of Russian MOFA sentiment is positive (66.6 percent). Once again, there existed significant variation across DIME tools in sentiment and how often sources addressed a specific tool. This variability indicates strategic reactions, decision making processes, and consequently, opportunities to consider customized DIME-based deterrence strategies.

When discussing diplomatic and economic tools, the average sentiment for both Russia Today and Sputnik is negative, whereas Russia’s MOFA remains positive. When Russia Today and Sputnik discuss joint military exercises, the average sentiment is negative. Across all three data sources, the average sentiment is negative when discussing information components. These differences in average sentiment are statistically significant.

Overall, Russia was extremely sensitive—it responded more negatively—to information than it did to diplomatic, military, and economic DIME tools.

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29 We categorize identified articles into crisp sets and conduct Chi-Square Tests for each data source. All three Chinese open-source information sources produce statistically significant tests, which indicates that how China discusses different DIME framework elements is not random, rather it is calculated and suggests strategic decision-making dictates how China responds to or discusses the key search terms. Complete results are available upon request.

30 Analysis is based on two-sample t-tests specifying unequal variances between the samples. This accounts for the variation or imbalance in the number of observations for different DIME search terms within each data source. Complete results are available upon request.
We explore the findings in greater detail below; as in the China section, through a D–I–M–E order. Where necessary or helpful, we add data visualizations to help express or clarify our findings.

**Diplomatic**

Following diplomatic protocol appears to be the standard practice for *Sputnik* and the MOFA, as the average sentiment of the former is the least negative of the four DIME tools and positive for the MOFA.\(^{31}\) *Russia Today* also uses comparatively less negative sentiment. Across all three sources, diplomatic sentiment is statistically significantly higher (i.e., more positive/less negative) than information sentiment, but no different than military sentiment.\(^{32}\) *Sputnik* uses statistically significant higher (less negative) diplomatic sentiment than economic sentiment.\(^{33}\) *Russia Today*'s diplomatic sentiment is 26.7 percent lower than its baseline sentiment; *Sputnik*'s is 46.6 percent higher, and the MOFA's is 16.4 percent higher.\(^{34}\)

An interesting example of Russian views on diplomatic criticism is seen in reference to the UNGA. Nearly 75 percent of Russian MOFA articles mentioning the UNGA use positive sentiment, but in March 2022 when the UNGA adopted a resolution calling for Russia to end its invasion of Ukraine, 50 percent of MOFA articles mentioning UNGA that month were negative. In *Sputnik* and *Russia Today*, which primarily discuss the UNGA negatively, there was also an increase, 33.2 percent and 14.7 percent, respectively, in negative sentiment in March 2022.\(^{35}\) We use visualizations below to illustrate these findings; the first image for each source (the MOFA, *Russia Today*, *Sputnik*) is general sentiment regarding the UNGA. The second image for each source is specific to sentiment toward the UNGA in March 2022. Additional research and data are required to better understand these changes.

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\(^{31}\) Only military sentiment records a higher average for Russia's Foreign Ministry, but only one document was identified in the executed procedure.

\(^{32}\) Statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level.

\(^{33}\) Statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level.

\(^{34}\) All are statistically significant differences at a 99.9 percent confidence level.

### Russia MOFA UN General Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afinn (group)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>74.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>16.87%</td>
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**Figure 8. Russia MOFA UN General Assembly**

### Russia MOFA UN General Assembly March 2022

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**Figure 9. Russia MOFA UN General Assembly March 2022**
Answering Authoritarian State Asymmetric Challenges

Figure 10. Russia Today UN General Assembly

Figure 11. Russia Today UN General Assembly March 2022
Figure 12. *Sputnik UN General Assembly*

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<td>52.68%</td>
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Figure 13. *Sputnik UN General Assembly March 2022*

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<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
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Information

Russia is extremely sensitive to information tools. For Russia Today, Sputnik, and the MOFA, international reports about the country’s human rights practices generated the most negative average sentiment across DIME tools, a finding that supports previous research by the authors. At a statistically significant rate, information sentiment in all three sources is more negative (i.e., lower) than diplomatic sentiment. In Russia Today and Sputnik information sentiment is more negative than military sentiment. Average information sentiment is lower than economic sentiment in Russia Today, Sputnik, and the MOFA. Russia Today’s information sentiment is 88.1 percent lower, Sputnik’s is 119.9 percent lower, and the MOFA’s is 251.2 percent lower, compared to their baseline sentiment, respectively.

As noted in the China section, authoritarian states often react negatively to criticisms of their human rights records. Russia appears to be particularly responsive to reports of a lack of press freedom, as the MOFA’s, Sputnik’s, and Russia Today’s negative sentiment is 39.4 percent, 30.0 percent, and 28.0 percent higher than their respective baselines regarding related reports from press freedom and international human rights NGOs (e.g., Reporters without Borders, Freedom House). The visualizations below illustrate this increased negativity; also note the relatively high levels of very negative sentiment.

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37 Statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level.
38 Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
39 Statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level.
40 Statistically significant at a 90 percent confidence level.
41 Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
42 All are statistically significant differences at a 99.9 percent confidence level.
Russia MOFA Reporters Without Borders

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Figure 14. Russia MOFA Reporters Without Borders

RT Reporters Without Borders

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Figure 15. *Russia Today* Reporters Without Borders
Compared to their baseline sentiment, *Russia Today* and *Sputnik* are less negative (but not statistically different) when discussing US military activities (2.8 percent and 26.0 percent, respectively). Military sentiment is statistically significantly less negative than economic sentiment in *Sputnik* and less negative than information sentiment in both. Our Russia MOFA data only records one article referencing the searched military tools, so we focus our analysis on *Sputnik* and *Russia Today*. These findings are similar to the China section and match previous research by the authors. Below we include visualizations of the exercise that generated the most negative content—Baltic Operations (BALTOPS).

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43 Statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level.
44 Statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
Further research is required to better understand why Russia and China react to competitors or adversaries conducting nearby military exercises less negatively than many would expect or predict. Our working theory to explain this finding is
that adversaries using military tools and conducting exercises supports regime narratives of outside threats and are viewed less negatively than tools like information that threaten regime narratives and information controls, thereby threatening the regime itself.

**Economic**

*Russia Today’s* economic sentiment is 32.4 percent lower than its baseline sentiment, *Sputnik’s* is 65.8 percent lower, and the MOFA’s is 49.3 percent lower.\(^\text{47}\) In the three sources, average economic sentiment is less negative (i.e., higher) than information sentiment, but only in *Sputnik* is economic sentiment statistically different and lower (more negative) than diplomatic and military sentiment.\(^\text{48}\) *Sputnik* appears to be the mouthpiece for critical and negative economic sentiment. Though economic sanctions generated a negative response from Russian state media, the strength of the response was less than some of the other DIME tools or combinations.

**Summary**

The findings from the Russia case study echo those from China—criticism of human rights practices, including censorship and access to information, badly stings Moscow and Beijing. Military tools, especially given Russia’s oft-discussed animosity toward NATO, were expected to produce greater effects than those shown here. However, as with the research into China, and previous research into North Korea and Iran, authoritarian states react very negatively to tools that threaten state narratives and domestic information controls, but military threats can serve to reinforce regime narratives of external threats, possibly benefiting the very leadership elements that the military exercises were designed to target.

**Recommendations**

Information tools can generate powerful responses by Beijing and Moscow. These tools are so powerful that an NGO report can generate a stronger response than a multinational military exercise. This is not to say traditional notions of deterrence are unimportant; military capabilities and nuclear weapons retain their ability to deter. What our research highlights is that beyond traditional concepts of deterrence, what the current national security and defense strategies label *inte*-

\(^\text{47}\) The differences in state-controlled media sentiment are statistically significant at a 99.9 percent confidence level and at a 95 percent confidence in the Foreign Ministry’s sentiment.

\(^\text{48}\) Statistically significant, respectively, at 99.9 percent and 95 percent confidence levels.
grated deterrence, lie tools and capabilities that can help policy makers confront asymmetric, nonmilitary challenges from authoritarian states.

For authoritarians, much more than their democratic peers, control of information is vital for regime preservation. Control of information—not just a dominant narrative but controlling the actual networks—allows authoritarians to successfully rationalize poor economic performance, identify and mitigate potential or actual opposition, decrease protests, and increase the overall durability of the regime. For these reasons, challenges to authoritarian information control can generate the powerfully negative results we consistently see in our research.

For US leaders and policy makers attempting to deter, confront, or punish asymmetric challenges from China, Russia, and other authoritarian states, information tools offer a powerful capability. This is less about constructing specific narratives—modern information environments contain multitudes of narratives and efforts to outperform native Chinese, Russian, and other storytellers at the center of their regime’s efforts to dominate the information environment are problematic. Rather, as seen repeatedly in our research, the more powerful approach is to challenge the actual controls in two ways: (1) fostering increased nonregime information flows into authoritarian information environments and (2) helping people inside the country more freely share nonregime information within the country.

In operational terms, focus less on having an American speaker of Russian create social media posts targeting Russian military mothers to get them to decrease support for Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine; instead, help the moms access and share information they can use to organically and natively create their own messages. This creates a two-fold challenge for Putin: challenges to information controls that will demand resources to protect Russian systems, while simultaneously having to pit government censors against a powerful constituency. Rather than an external, US-created narrative versus an internal state narrative, US policy makers should focus on criticizing censorship, advocating for freedom of information access, and using technical or cyber means to undermine information and communication controls.

Authoritarian states have more successfully deployed practices designed to manipulate the open information environments of democratic societies than democratic states have successfully targeted authoritarian reliance on information control. Shifting that balance by the threat or the actual weakening of those controls would

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clearly generate significant attention in Beijing and Moscow, providing the United States and its allies with powerful new deterrence options.

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Dr. Codjo is an assistant professor of Security Studies and director of the Doctor of Science in Civil Security at New Jersey City University. His teaching, research, and policy interests revolve around political violence, US–Africa strategic relations, peace operations, as well as governance and stability in the developing world. His work has been published in journals including African Studies Reviews, Foreign Policy Analysis, and International Studies Review.

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Dr. Pupcenoks is an associate professor of political science at Marist College. His research deals with threat perception, ethnic politics, strategic narratives, humanitarian intervention, and Russian diplomatic communication. Publications include Western Muslims and Conflicts Abroad (Routledge 2016) and articles in International Interactions, Nationalities Papers, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, and Middle East Journal.
Landpower, Homeland Defense, and Defending Forward in US Indo-Pacific Command

Dr. Michael E. Lynch
Maj Brennan Deveraux, US Army

Abstract

Homeland defense does not begin at the water’s edge, at least not on the east and west coasts of the United States. In the twenty-first-century geopolitical environment, the definition of homeland defense must now extend well beyond North American shores. The network of US military forces stationed throughout the Indo-Pacific provides a strong military presence in the region that deters potential aggressors and protects US interests. This builds and strengthens partnerships with countries in the region and allows the United States more deployment flexibility. The Chinese government is extending its reach throughout the Pacific, and the United States must do the same. The US military must harden its overseas facilities and continue to expand those facilities to other locations. This will allow greater operational depth and build resilience through sustainment redundancy.

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It was a beautifully clear fall day in Calumet, Colorado, a small, rural town on the front slope of the Rockies. It was a quiet little town, significant only to those who live there. But after that terrible day in the fall of 1984, Calumet became significant to the rest of the country and signified the indomitable American spirit. The sound of large aircraft engines broke the stillness that morning. Unusual, but not enough to cause any alarm . . . until hundreds of paratroopers began landing all over town. The citizens were surprised and amused, assuming a military unit from nearby Fort Carson had landed in the wrong area. Surprised amusement quickly turned to horror, as the soldiers began to fire on the crowd gathering to watch. Rather than US soldiers on a misguided exercise, the troops were Soviet Spetsnaz, and the assault on Calumet was the opening salvo of Operation Red Dawn, which saw the Soviet Union capture much of the United States before suing for peace.

Alert readers will have recognized the proceeding vignette as one of the opening scenes from the 1984 movie Red Dawn, which imagined an airborne assault on the American heartland. The film premiered during the heightened tensions of the Cold War, as US and Soviet relations deteriorated and the Soviet economy began...
to collapse.\(^1\) While this movie presents a classic nightmare scenario for homeland defense, and one that fires the imagination of all and the fears of many, such a scenario is neither likely nor logistically possible.

The homeland faces significant and credible external threats from ballistic missiles, terrorists, and cyberattacks, all of which render the islands at the nation’s periphery even more vulnerable. The worst-case scenarios of Pearl Harbor, 9/11, or even a *Red Dawn*-type attack cannot be discounted, but they should not be the sole planning focus. Instead, homeland defense means not just establishing protection for the continental United States (CONUS), although that is necessary, it also means extending the umbrella of protection to US territories and neighboring areas. Moving forward, a broader appreciation of homeland defense in the Pacific relies on understanding the region’s historical military importance, approaching the problem with a joint mind-set, identifying the current territorial situation, and analyzing the threat the United States must counter.

**We’ve Been Here Before: A Historical Look at the Region**

Pearl Harbor jolted the US military, catching it unprepared and ill-equipped for immediate offensive action. After the loss of the Philippines, Wake Island, and Attu and Kiska early in World War II, the United States adopted a hemispheric defense based on a triangle stretching from Alaska through Hawai’i to Panama. This vast swath of ocean and coastline, under the control of the Western Defense Command, offered little in the way of defensive sources.

US bases in Hawai’i were still repairing the damage from the Pearl Harbor attack; the Panama Canal zone offered very few available forces, though some units were shifted from CONUS to guard the critical canal immediately after Pearl Harbor. Alaska contained very few military forces at all. The triangle offered a large area for US Navy ships to patrol to defend the West Coast of the United States, especially the critical aircraft construction facilities in California and Washington.\(^2\)

The Aleutians proved to be one of the first important strategic areas for the United States. In 1911, Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that a US fleet concentrated at Kiska would deter Japanese intentions in the Pacific. The potential for land operations in the North Pacific gained prominence, fueled by memories of US military involvement in Russia during the Bolshevik War from 1918 to 1920, still fresh in the Soviet Union’s collective military consciousness. Modern Arctic watch-

\(^1\) *Red Dawn*, directed by John Milius (MGM, 1984), 1:54.

ers will find the views of airpower theorist Billy Mitchell hauntingly familiar—Mitchell cited this region as the only place where Japanese, Russian, and US spheres of interest came together.³

As part of its global war strategy during World War II, the United States provided crucial support to the Allies through lend-lease shipments to the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. Initially, planners intended for lend-lease materials destined for the Soviet Union to follow the standard North Atlantic shipping routes to Britain, then proceed around the North Cape to Murmansk. However, the relentless wolf packs of the German Navy rendered this route untenable.

The planners devised a second route, originating from the East Coast, circumnavigating the African continent, and ascending into the Persian Gulf. From there, they unloaded supplies in Iran and transported them overland. Although this alternative path was more secure than the North Atlantic route, it significantly extended delivery times.

The third route, initially met with resistance by Soviet premier Joseph Stalin, traversed the Pacific from the West Coast along the Great Circle Route to Vladivostok, passing directly through the Aleutians, notably Dutch Harbor. Additionally, the United States orchestrated the delivery of newly manufactured airplanes from Great Falls, Montana, to Fairbanks, Alaska, where Soviet pilots assumed control and flew the aircraft to Siberia. This underscored the critical importance of the North Pacific route in the overall strategic calculus.⁴

The primary lend-lease route from the US West Coast to Siberian ports in the Soviet Union passed through the Aleutians adjacent to Dutch Harbor to Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula or to the Port of Vladivostok. More lend-lease material flowed to the Soviet Union through the Aleutian route than through the north Russian and Persian Gulf corridors combined. This area was also exposed to potential Japanese attacks.

The Japanese Kurile Islands lay within easy striking range from the Aleutians, closer to them than to Tokyo.⁵ If the Japanese were to capture Dutch Harbor on the island of Unalaska, much of mainland Alaska would also be vulnerable. A foothold in southeast Alaska would put the Japanese within three hours of the United States.

In June 1942, seven months after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese again did the unthinkable—Japanese Army troops landed on Attu and Kiska islands in the Aleutian chain. Not since the War of 1812 had foreign invaders occupied American soil. By attacking in the Aleutians, the Japanese aimed to divert US attention and resources away from Midway, disrupt key lines of communication for lend-lease, and occupy US soil to gain a psychological victory. The strategy was partially successful, and the United States devoted an entire division to liberating the two islands, which required nearly a year of planning, training, and preparation.

These same historical areas are rising in importance today. The necessity for defending far-flung Pacific islands remains as pertinent now as it was in the 1930s and 1940s, albeit with more precisely defined security requirements. Attu and Kiska contained few residents at the time and are now completely uninhabited, yet they remain key strategic locations from which to stage forces in the event of deployment. Eareckson Air Station on nearby Shemya Island hosts the Cobra Dane radar used to detect intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches.13 With this historical backdrop in mind, the United States must embrace a broader definition of homeland defense.

A Broader Definition of Homeland Defense and a Joint Mind-set

The homeland is no longer a sanctuary. This statement has been echoing through the Defense Department (DOD) for years, the mantra elevating the importance of homeland defense and expanding the national security conversation. Adversaries now possess the capability to target bases both within CONUS and overseas, as well as their surrounding communities, using cyberattacks, inciting protests, and engaging in criminal activities. Consequently, the DOD must harden and protect installations against cyber and physical attacks.

The Army Installations Strategy requires facilities to “possess active and passive protection measures that preserve critical assets, capabilities, and activities essential to meeting National Defense Strategy (NDS) requirements.”6 The 2022 NDS warns that the “scope and scale of threats to the homeland have fundamentally changed.”7 Consequently, the defense establishment has begun to study the challenges of defending the homeland more closely.

One often-overlooked aspect of homeland defense involves safeguarding regions of the United States situated beyond the CONUS. Apart from Alaska, Hawai’i

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(including Midway), and US territories such as Guam, American Samoa, Wake Island, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, the United States also undertakes the responsibility of defending specific Pacific Island nations through bilateral agreements.

In 2020, Alexander Gray, the Director for Oceania and Indo-Pacific Security at the National Security Council, testified before Congress regarding the strategic importance of US territories in the Pacific and the challenge posed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) within this expanded concept of the homeland. Before outlining specific regional issues, he expressed his frustration at the lack of US “focus on Beijing’s efforts to penetrate, influence, and subvert territories for which the United States Government is directly responsible.” Beyond this underlying responsibility that the country must protect its territory and citizens, Gray asserted that US territories and possessions are likely to be instrumental in long-term plans to compete with the PRC.

Identifying potential threats poses the most challenging obstacle, given the wide variance in opinions among decision makers regarding the perceived dangers. How a particular analyst or policy maker defines the homeland shapes their arguments or conclusions. Recommendations for refocusing on the homeland will vary drastically among individuals who view the term as encompassing solely the 50 US states and those who include the various territories. Therefore, defining the homeland is a prerequisite for future national security conversations.

For the DOD, this expanded notion of homeland defense presents a joint problem. The Navy’s role is obvious, given the Pacific theater’s composition of numerous island nations and vast expanses of water. Similarly, the importance of airpower is also straightforward, not simply as ship killers or bombers but also as a means of strategic transport for personnel and supplies. In fact, what historically made some of these areas so strategically critical was the simple fact that there were working runways on them—staging points that allowed the US military to leapfrog across the great Pacific Ocean.

The thousands of US service members stationed in South Korea and Japan provide a strong deterrent in the region. However, the significance of landpower in the area extends beyond the conventional massing of forces or staging of advanced military equipment to dissuade adversaries. GEN Charles Flynn, the commanding general of US Army Pacific, recently commented that because armies “play a cen-
Landpower, Homeland Defense, and Defending Forward in US Indo-Pacific Command

Landpower plays a critical role in building relationships and demonstrating a persistent presence in the region with allies and partners, a prerequisite to deterring the PRC. The US Army uses a variety of programs and units to demonstrate this presence. For more than 30 years, the Army National Guard has administered the State Partnership Program (SPP). In coordination with the combatant commanders, this program pairs National Guard units with military units of partner countries, facilitating long-term relationships and developing partner capacities. GEN Joseph L. Lengyel, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, 2016–2020, explained that these military-to-military engagements with partner nations build personal bonds and enduring trust: “The goal of the SPP is developing and maintaining important security relationships between the United States and other nations sharing a long-term view of common interests.”

In the Indo-Pacific, the SPP includes 14 nations paired with 11 states and Guam. This includes larger nations such as Thailand and Vietnam, as well as smaller island nations such as Fiji and Timor-Leste. Palau will join the program starting in 2024.

The US Army has been steadily enhancing its presence in the region, spearheaded by US Army Pacific Command’s Operation Pathways, which establishes “interior lines through tailored forces and equipment, exercises strategic systems for force projection and increases experimentation, accelerating capability integration in real-world conditions.” Bilateral and multilateral exercises in the region have bolstered relationships and facilitated access and forward defense for the US military.

Talisman Sabre in 2023 demonstrated the multilateral desire to advance “a free and open Indo-Pacific by strengthening relationships and interoperability among key allies and enhancing collective capabilities to respond to a wide array of potential security concerns.” This extensive military exercise, involving the United States and Australia, included participation from other regional actors. In the past year, the exercise expanded to incorporate island nations such as Tonga, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and several others.

Similarly, during Super Garuda Shield, the Philippines hosted a multinational exercise with seven participating nations and twelve observing nations. The exercise

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featured “an amphibious exercise, airborne operations, an airfield seizure exercise, and a combined joint field training that culminates with a live fire event.”

While fighting an envisioned conflict or addressing a security challenge is the foundation of most exercises, simply getting the US military forward into the Pacific theater is a difficult task. To refine this essential capability, a recent bilateral exercise between the United States and Japan evaluated the deployment process, focusing on the “reception, staging, onward-movement, and integration of US forces deploying to Japan.” Through such endeavors, among others, General Flynn contends that the Army is creating “joint interior lines” by “building forward positions to create enduring advantage, to create operational reach and to build operational endurance for the joint force.”

To complement the series of multilateral wargames, the Army maintains a persistent presence through bilateral training opportunities. The 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) also enjoys a long association with nations of the Indo-Pacific region. Stationed at Joint Base Lewis–McChord (JBLM) with one battalion deployed in Okinawa, 1st SFG(A) conducts training with partner and ally special operations forces. Moreover, the group has engaged in combat operations with the Armed Forces of the Philippines during the Global War on Terror.

The 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB), also based at JBLM, is the newest addition to the security cooperation enterprise. Activated in 2020 as one of six regionally aligned SFABs, the 5th SFAB has established relationships with Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Maldives, Japan, Mongolia, and Malaysia. The SFAB provides a dedicated team of active-duty advisors that conducts conventional small-unit training with US partners in short rotational deployments. The first commander of the 5th SFAB, COL Andrew Watson explained: “We’re there to achieve interoperability, share how we do things, learn how they do things, have a conversation to build our relationship, and sustain access in the Pacific.”

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15 Hurd, “USARPAC.”
16 For more on the 5th SFAB, listen to COL Brandon Teague, commander 5th SFAB, interview by Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, Indo-Pacific Visions (vodcast), Episode 13, 30 January 2024, https://www.dvidshub.net/.
Landpower, Homeland Defense, and Defending Forward in US Indo-Pacific Command

Apart from a handful of organizations dedicated to the Indo-Pacific theater, there exists an institutional knowledge gap concerning US territories and their strategic importance. This deficiency hampers the effective application of a broader definition of homeland defense. Therefore, homeland defense entails more than merely securing US territories, although such measures are imperative; it also entails extending protective measures to neighboring areas. Moving forward, a broader appreciation of homeland defense in the Pacific relies on understanding the region’s historical military significance, the present territorial dynamics, and the threats confronting the United States.

The Territorial Situation in the Indo-Pacific

Island chains denoting imaginary boundary lines carve up the vast area of the Pacific theater into three distinct sections extending eastward from mainland China. While the specifics of each line are not universally agreed upon, they are generally recognized as follows: the first chain encompasses Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia; the second chain originates from Japan, extends south through the Marianas and Guam, and further south to Micronesia; and the third chain is centered on Hawai’i (see fig. 1).  

More recently, literature has also explored the potential existence of a fourth and fifth island chain to address Chinese potential influence in the Indian Ocean. These boundaries extend westward, with the fifth chain commencing at Camp Lemonnier Djibouti and encompassing the eastern coast of Africa. Overall, these boundaries provide a framework for understanding and prioritizing the region geographically, establishing benchmarks for comparison.

Viewed through this lens, the PRC aims for regional dominance within the first chain, challenges the United States within the second, and modernizes its navy to operate within the third and beyond. Often overlooked in these geographical discussions is the strategic significance of the Arctic.

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20 VornDick, “China’s Reach Has Grown.”
The Arctic has regained military significance due to climate change, following a period of neglect after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The melting polar ice cap has opened potential new commercial routes through the Arctic, spurring competition among many nations. This competition has taken on a military dimension as Arctic nations such as Russia build military facilities in the Arctic, and non-Arctic nations such as China seek to expand their presence through multi-use commercial, scientific, and military facilities.\textsuperscript{21}

All US military units assigned to the Arctic are based in Alaska. The sheer size of Alaska presents a daunting challenge for homeland defense planning. Alaska is one-third the area of the entire CONUS, yet its population of 700,000—roughly half the population of Hawai‘i—is concentrated in major cities, with vast expanses characterized by very low population densities elsewhere.

Alaska boasts significant active military forces, but they are all aligned to the Indo-Pacific theater. The US Army stations the 11th Airborne Division along with various enablers in Alaska, while the Air Force maintains two fighter squadrons, one airlift squadron, one refueling squadron, and a command-and-control squadron. In addition to the search-and-rescue aircraft stationed at Kodiak, the US Coast

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Guard operates 15 ships, 52 small boats, and 17 aircraft for maritime security missions in and around Alaska.

If Alaska faces a homeland defense threat after deploying the DOD units, there exists limited protection for them and no designated units to replace them. The Alaska Army National Guard numbers only about 1,734 Soldiers, supplemented by 2,120 Airmen in its Air Guard. Additionally, the state maintains the Alaska State Defense Force and the Alaska Naval Militia, which could potentially be deployed within the state to safeguard critical infrastructure such as the Alaska pipeline and the 49th Missile Battalion facility at Fort Greeley.

Hawai’i is the center of gravity of the Pacific defense, serving as the headquarters for several key commands, including US Indo-Pacific Command, Pacific Fleet, Pacific Air Forces, Space Forces–Indo-Pacific, US Army Pacific, and the Defense Logistics Agency–Indo-Pacific. Pearl Harbor serves as the homeport for approximately 25 Navy vessels and is a naval shipyard as well as a maintenance facility. The Navy also maintains the world’s largest instrumented, multi-domain range, the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) Barking Sands.

Nearby Hickam Field hosts three airlift squadrons, two fighter squadrons, and a refueling squadron (both active and Reserve), as well as command-and-control for Air Force operations throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, Hawai’i is home to the 25th Infantry Division and various enabler units under the US Army’s purview.

The Army’s newest formation, the Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF), adds a novel and innovative dimension to landpower. The MDTF provides “theater-level maneuver elements designed to synchronize precision effects and precision fires in all domains against adversary antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) networks in all domains, enabling joint forces to execute their operational plan (OPLAN)-directed roles.” Indo-Pacific Command hosts the 1st MDTF (JBLM) and the 3rd MDTF (Hawai’i), with plans for another MDTF to be stationed in the Indo-Pacific region. Departing from the traditional landpower force structure, the MDTF employs long-range precision effects, including long-range fires, cyber, intelligence, and electronic warfare (see fig. 2). MDTFs are designed to be scalable and easily

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22 Alaska Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, “FY 2018 Department Overview,” January 2018.
modified to support the combatant commander’s requirements, so the structure in figure 2 is a description of capabilities rather than a standard force structure.  

Figure 2. Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF) example task organization

Once the epicenter of a pivotal naval battle during World War II, Midway Island is located 1,300 miles from Honolulu—geologically but not politically part of the Hawaiian Islands. The Midway Naval Air Facility ceased operations in 1993, yet the airfield retains the potential for reactivation if required. Presently, Midway falls under the administration of the US Fish & Wildlife Service, with fewer than 100 employees stationed on the island.

While technological advancements have surged since the last US military campaign in the Pacific, geographical obstacles persist across the vast theater. Consequently, places such as Wake Island hold strategic importance as vital homeland defense sites. This US territory, under the jurisdiction of the US Air Force, is situ-

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26 Army Multi-Domain Transformation.
ated between Hawai‘i and Guam and has historically functioned as a trans-Pacific refueling site. The island’s most important feature is its 9,800-foot runway. Recently, the Air Force committed USD 87 million toward upgrading this strategic air bridge, undertaking modernization efforts to upgrade the runway for C-17 Globemaster III operations.27

The US territory of Guam, heralded as the point where America’s day begins, holds similar military significance for Pacific theater operations. With a population of 153,836 US citizens, their safety is no less important than the safety of those residing in CONUS. Positioned 3,800 miles from Hawaii, 2,000 miles from Darwin, 1,700 miles from Taiwan, 1,600 miles from Manila, and 1,500 miles from Tokyo, Guam occupies a central position in planning for Pacific operations.

Guam boasts one of the largest air bases in the Pacific and was a hub for the Navy and Army Air Forces during World War II. During the Vietnam War, Guam played a crucial role as a forward staging area for B-52 bombers. Presently, Guam is assuming renewed importance as Marines relocate forces from Okinawa to Camp Blaz. Moreover, Guam hosts the Theater High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system, positioned to deter ballistic missile threats from China or North Korea. Additionally, Guam accommodates a strategically significant naval base, reestablishing itself as a bastion for US military power projection and homeland defense.28

Unfettered access to the facilities on Guam provides the United States with a strategically vital location for supporting continuous operations in the region as well as a logistical hub for ship repair and theater-level resupply. Nonetheless, advancements in missile technology are heightening the island’s vulnerability. Positioned just beyond China’s main missile threat zone (for now), Guam serves as a staging ground for US military capabilities (see fig. 3). The Chinese-made DF-26 missile possesses the range to target the island with either conventional or nuclear warheads, earning it the nickname “Guam Killer” or “Guam Express.”29

Patty-Jane Geller, a former analyst for nuclear deterrence and missile defense at the Heritage Foundation, urged the DOD to act quickly and send more air- and-missile defense systems to counter the growing PRC missile threat, noting that “time is of the essence for defending Guam.”30

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American Samoa, with a population of 49,710, lies 3,750 miles from Honolulu and 3,500 miles from Guam, serving as a potential base for US forces.\textsuperscript{31} In 2023, Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga emphasized the territory’s strategic significance to Congress, stating, “American Samoa may be small in population numbers, but our location, as the southern-most jurisdiction of the United States based in the South Pacific region, is critically important to our strategic defense and national security,” adding that the territory “is well known to be the most successful recruiting station

\textsuperscript{31}“Census Bureau Releases 2020 Census Population.”
for the US military.”

Despite its modest population, American Samoa has consistently led the nation in per capita enlistments over the past decade, with the Army recruiting office on the island frequently ranking first out of more than 800 stations. American Samoa does not host any active-duty military units but does accommodate a few small reserve component units.

The geometry of geography in the Pacific presents a difficult truth: protecting the homeland does not begin on the east or west coasts of the United States nor is it limited to the island areas just discussed. National responsibilities—whether military, legal, ethical, or moral—include defending other democracies and partner nations in the Pacific islands that could easily fall to enemy forces and then require significant efforts to liberate. Chief among these sovereign partners are the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau (see fig. 4).

The US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), with a population of 47,329, holds strategic significance but remains susceptible to non-military advances from China. Governor Arnold Palacios recently acknowledged in Congressional testimony that the current conditions make the “Commonwealth acutely vulnerable to [Chinese] exploitation.” He concluded that “this time, it’s not Marines who are needed to liberate [the CNMI] and give it a chance to come out of the darkness, it’s forensic accountants, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents, special investigators and others who can shine a light on corruption—the fuel that drives PRC expansion.”

Marianas Islands such as Saipan and Tinian were vital assets for the United during World War II, serving as staging bases and airfields for bombing missions that contributed to the downfall of Imperial Japan. The Air Force has recently begun repairing and renovating the base on Tinian. The United States has committed to reinvesting in these WWII-era airfields, clearing out vegetation and spending “$26 million for airfield development, $20 million for fuel tanks, $32 million for parking

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34 “Census Bureau Releases 2020 Census Population.”
36 Paskal, “Northern Mariana.”
aprons, $46 million for cargo pad and taxiway extension, and $4.7 million for a maintenance and support facility.\textsuperscript{37}

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) agreements between the United States and the Republic of Palau (Palau), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) also provide critical basing opportunities across a sector of the Pacific Ocean larger than the CONUS, while denying this basing to other nations. In return, the citizens of these nations enjoy many of the benefits of US citizenship, including eligibility to join the US military and access to certain federal programs and services. However, leaders of these critical partners express alarm over the recent failure of the US Congress to approve new funding packages and caution that China is actively seeking to sway their allegiances. Despite enjoying bipartisan support, the proposed USD 2.3 billion in supplemental funding remains stalled in Congress due to requirements prioritizing southern border security over international military or humanitarian assistance.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{US Associated Pacific Islands}
\end{figure}


In 2021 the US government reached an agreement with the FSM to build new military facilities. The following year, both governments reached an agreement for US Coast Guard patrols across the islands to deter Chinese maritime interference, while also providing support for the rehabilitation of the commercial airport on Yap Island to facilitate its use by the US military. These developments afford the US military greater flexibility for Pacific operations. Additionally, the US Air Force’s Tactical Mobile Over-the-Horizon Radar is presently under construction in the Republic of Palau, with completion slated for 2026. President Surangel Whipps Jr. reported in 2023 that Chinese survey vessels had begun operating in Palauan waters, particularly around sensitive areas hosting fiber optic cables, prompting a call for US assistance: “The United States is responsible for our security, and we would also inform them that we need them to engage and help us in deterring any unwanted activities.”

Whipps also requested a permanent deployment of Patriot missiles batteries to defend Palau’s 18,000 residents, contending that the Air Force’s new radar system will become an inviting target for the Chinese. However, this proposal encountered a setback when the Palauan Senate passed a resolution rejecting it. Opposition within the Senate was spearheaded by pro-Chinese Senator Hokkons Baules, who asserted that the deployment of Patriot missiles would pose a threat to Palau’s sovereignty. Additionally, some residents, mindful of Palau’s turbulent history during World War II, expressed concerns about the nation once again becoming a battleground. Cleo Paskal, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), observed that “For those that are pushing ‘the US is making us a target of a military target and isn’t helping with our schools or health care system,’ this plays right into that argument.”

The key strategic base at Kwajalein Atoll in the RMI houses the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, serving as the designated impact area for ICBMs test-fired from the CONUS. The atoll is home to 42,415 Marshallese citizens, as well as 2,500 American citizens. The test site facilitates missile testing and launches, space reconnaissance and surveillance operations, and scientific experiments utilizing radar, optical, and telemetry sensors stationed on the atoll. Operated

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**Contested Space: Great-Power Competition in the Pacific**

China, as the current pacing threat, has already extended its reach into the islands of the western Pacific and has expanded its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to many of these island nations. The postwar era brought independence to many of the former colonial possessions and protectorates in the Pacific, and with sovereignty came name changes for many. These changes, coupled with diminished US interest in the sparsely populated areas of the region, have obscured the burgeoning threat. China has expanded its influence into these islands to counter US presence in the region. While tiny islands or remote island chains with unfamiliar names may hold little interest for Americans initially, China’s involvement has brought attention to these locales, many of which are soaked with American blood.

- **Solomon Islands** (Guadalcanal, Vella Lavella, New Georgia): The Solomon Islands signed a security pact with the PRC in 2022, following Honiara’s severance of ties with Taiwan and recognition of the PRC in 2019. Despite a 30-year absence, the United States reopened an embassy in the Solomons, but its arrival came too late to influence the security pact.\(^{44}\)

- **Kiribati** (Gilbert, Phoenix, Lines Islands capital): Kiribati straddles both the equator and the International Date Line, situated approximately 2,000 miles from Hawai‘i. Having also severed ties with Taiwan and embraced the PRC in 2019, Kiribati solidified its stance with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) linking its “Kiribati 20-year vision” to the BRI the following year. The ruling government, with Chinese assistance, plans to build two “transshipment hubs” (major ports)—one hub on Tarawa Atoll in the west and the second on Kiritimati (Christmas) Atoll in the east. The islands of Kiribati, averaging a mere two meters above sea level, face the looming threat of becoming the first nation lost to climate change. Given the nation’s modest economy, insufficient to support such grandiose endeavors, the port development project serves as a likely cover for the establishment of Chinese bases.\(^{45}\)

\(^{44}\) Kate Lyons and Dorothy Wickham, “The deal that shocked the world: inside the China-Solomons security pact,” *The Guardian*, 20 April 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/.

• **Vanuatu** (New Hebrides): Vanuatu, located 1,000 miles off Australia’s north-east coast, established relations with the PRC in 1982 and supports Beijing’s “island building” strategy. Presently, China is in the process of constructing a commercial wharf capable of accommodating deep draft naval vessels on the island of Espiritu Santo, alongside upgrades to the adjoining international airport. Rumors suggest China may contemplate the placement of its inaugural forward defense installation in the Pacific on the island.⁴⁶

Overall, it is imperative to thoroughly assess these strategically crucial territories and their adjacent regions. Embracing a more comprehensive definition of homeland defense constitutes the initial stride toward achieving this goal.

**Conclusion**

The network of defense installations spanning the Pacific offers critical security measures, but they must not be regarded as a Maginot line, lest the adversary treat them as such. It is imperative to establish and maintain relations throughout the region and do so in ways that are mutually beneficial to both the United States and the island nations throughout the Pacific. As recent wargames and exercises have shown, any fight in the Indo-Pacific theater is not only inherently joint but also dependent on allies and partners in the region. In fact, simply getting forces deployed across the expansive Pacific Ocean in a contested environment is likely to prove a difficult venture. Consequently, the United States must emphasize relationships and identify issues that are important to potential client states.

This begins with understanding the historical significance of the region, appreciating the nuances of each territory and protectorate, and having a broad and realistic conversation about the threats in the area. It is time for the United States to embrace a broader definition of homeland defense that includes critical areas in the Indo-Pacific. Doing so is not only vital for a future strategy for competing with China but also for shaping security cooperation activities, supporting sustained engagement strategies, and addressing climate change mitigation. This deterrence is vital for the US territories and the surrounding areas, and US presence must grow if the US military is going to revamp its role in the Pacific.

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Navigating the Gray Zone
Reframing Space Strategy for Contemporary Operational Environments

MIKE CAREY
CHARLIE McGILLIS

Abstract

In the complex landscape of global security, operating in the gray zone—employing strategies that fall below the threshold of armed conflict—has become increasingly vital. This article explores adapting gray-zone strategies to the unique operational dynamics of space. It emphasizes synchronizing diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments to dissuade and deter adversaries while avoiding kinetic conflict. Focusing on the Indo-Pacific region’s strategic significance, particularly China’s activities, it delves into nonkinetic actions such as jamming and cyber operations aimed at degrading satellite capabilities, which can impact homeland defense operations. The article addresses legal frameworks governing space activities, the rise of commercial space ventures, and the need for collaboration between military and commercial entities to mitigate space threats. It advocates for transparency, international cooperation, and response strategy development to uphold space sustainability and stability. Ultimately, the article stresses collective responsibility in navigating the gray zone to preserve space accessibility for future generations.

Operating in the gray zone necessitates synchronizing the elements of national instruments of power—diplomatic, informational, and economic—to dissuade and deter adversaries, along with crafting a strategy to achieve national objectives. The military, too, plays a crucial role in developing and executing these strategies, asserting strength through displays of force and forging alliances with partners and allies, while refraining from physical strikes. To avoid kinetic conflict in space, the United States and its allies must devise effective strategies enabled by coercive capabilities within the space domain, thereby avoiding a transition out of the gray zone.

The gray zone avoids large-scale conventional conflict and employs strategies such as competition, coercion, and compellence to achieve political objectives. Gray-zone operations encompass coercive actions falling below the threshold of armed conflict, surpassing normal diplomatic, economic, and other activities to achieve national objectives.

Despite differing national objectives among China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, these nations share common adversaries—the United States and its like-minded
Carey & McGillis

allies and partners. This interconnectedness, particularly within the global economy, underscores the necessity of assessing each country in relation to others. Notably, the Indo-Pacific region, through which two-thirds of the world’s container trade traverses, plays a pivotal role in global trade and energy supplies. China, boasting the world’s second-largest economy, tightly links its security to the South China Sea, where strategic importance is magnified.¹ With more than half of the world’s population residing in the Indo-Pacific region, its strategic significance is further underscored. China, as the second-largest military spender after the United States,² has modernized its forces at “the fastest pace we’ve seen since World War II,” as noted by ADM John Aquilino, the commander of US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).³

Chinese activities in the gray zone strategically align with the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) overarching domestic, economic, foreign policy, and security objectives in the Indo-Pacific. Beijing prioritizes this region, seeking to reshape the regional status quo in its favor while remaining below the threshold that might provoke a militarized response from the United States or China’s neighbors.⁴

While consensus is lacking on which gray-zone activities and operations pose the greatest challenges to the United States and its allies, this article will concentrate on one specific domain—the space domain. Often dubbed the final frontier, space does not lend itself to isolation and presents opportunities for strategic competitors to inflict harm on the US homeland, its national interests, and its allies within the gray zone.

Operating in the gray zone is not a novel concept. Influencing adversaries and non-allies has been integral to military operations for centuries. It is the unique environmental features of space, along with recent activities in orbit, that have brought gray-zone concepts to the forefront in the space domain. Gray-zone actions have been standard operations for the space enterprise since the first military spacecraft entered orbit in the 1960s. Nonphysical, nonkinetic operations have been and will remain the norm in the accessible and contested environment of

Navigating the Gray Zone

space. As the 1980s progressed, command control warfare evolved into information warfare, which further expanded to include cyberwarfare. These nonkinetic activities manifest in various forms that contribute to operational objectives encapsulated in the “Five Ds”—deceive, degrade, deny, disrupt, and destroy—with gray-zone operations predominantly addressing the first four.

Gen Stephen Whiting, the commander of US Space Command, emphasizes that space capabilities empower a “joint force to be a truly global military able to see over the next hill and able to conduct operations anywhere on Earth.” The enigmatic realm of space, epitomizing the final frontier, has seamlessly integrated into our daily lives, underpinning essential functions such as communications, weather monitoring, precision navigation and timing, and earth imaging for climate change or humanitarian response. It serves as the backbone for critical sectors like government, finance, and global positioning systems (GPS). Beyond these everyday conveniences, space capabilities serve to achieve strategic effects and safeguard national interests.

In space, gray-zone operations are deemed “situation normal,” delineating an environment where nations engage in discrete actions across the counterspace continuum, employing reversible and nonkinetic effects to assert influence. These calculated tactics aim to degrade or deny satellite usage. Many activities—such as jamming, spoofing, cyber operations, and laser usage—serve military objectives by imposing economic costs or providing diplomatic leverage. The strategic interplay in the gray zone of space operations underscores the evolving dynamics of global security and emphasizes the delicate balance nations must maintain to safeguard their interests while avoiding open conflict.

As we navigate this complex space domain, it is imperative to unravel the layers of ambiguity surrounding the gray-zone activities. This article will explore the nuances of the strategic sequencing in space, shedding light on the tactics employed and their ramifications. Through understanding these subtleties, our goal is to facilitate informed discourse on space security and promote sustainable and responsible use of the final frontier for the betterment of all humankind. The article will delve into diverse scenarios that illustrate the evolving landscape of space warfare, remaining below the threshold of armed conflict.

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Legal History/Lawfare

During the initial space race in the 1960s, the prevailing sentiment was that “Military space programs helped keep the peace and civilian space programs helped us live better in peace.” At that time, space was primarily a government-only domain, with the two major players being the Soviet Union and the United States. The foundational framework of international space law, which regulates and governs the exploration and use of outer space, emerged with the UN Outer Space Treaty of 1967. This treaty, ratified by 99 countries and signed by 27, aimed to harness the vast potential of the space age for the collective benefit of humanity, even amid deep political divisions between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The principles enshrined in the treaty include ensuring the peaceful use of outer space for the betterment of all; prohibiting the placement of nuclear weapons or any other weapons of mass destruction (though conventional weapons are not explicitly prohibited, even to this day); fostering international cooperation, especially in exploration and research; acknowledging national sovereignty, with states retaining jurisdiction and control over their space activities, including those conducted by nongovernmental entities; holding states liable for any damage caused by their space activities or objects; mandating the registration of space objects launched into outer space; and rejecting any claims of sovereignty over outer space, including celestial bodies such as the Moon. Subsequent treaties, such as the Rescue Agreement (1968), Liability Convention (1968), Registration Convention (1975), and Moon Agreement (1979), further elaborate on the fundamental tenets of the Outer Space Treaty. Notably, the Moon Agreement garnered limited ratification, particularly among space-faring nations like the United States, China, and Russia.

Despite the existence of these treaties, nations have frequently employed lawfare to advance their strategic objectives, often with the sole purpose of impeding the progress of strategic adversaries. An illustrative case is the joint proposal by China and Russia in 2008, reissued in 2014 to the United Nations, aiming to “Prevent the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and the Threat or Use of Force against Space Objects,” which failed to address Earth-to-space weapons—thus, permitting activities such as the Chinese antisatellite (ASAT) missile test in 2007 (further elaboration on this incident will follow). In December 2022, the United Nations

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passed a nonbinding resolution with 155 votes in favor, while nine countries, including China and Russia, voted against it, and nine abstained, including India. This resolution discouraged countries from conducting ASAT tests, underscoring the stagnation in negotiations for international agreements to restrict weapons testing, deployment, and usage in outer space.\textsuperscript{10}

Recognizing the significance of these agreements is crucial, particularly as reliance on space capabilities continues to grow. While terrestrial boundaries are delineated by state borders, giving states exclusive rights to regulate and control the use of airspace above their lands and territorial waters, airspace extends vertically from the Earth’s surface to the Kármán Line, approximately 100 kilometers (62 miles) above sea level. Aircraft entering a sovereign state’s airspace must obtain clearance and authorization from the relevant aviation authorities. For instance, when traveling from California to New York or from California to France, airlines manage this process on behalf of passengers. This delineation of airspace is exemplified in the case of the US Air Force’s inability to traverse French airspace during the 1986 mission to bomb Libya from bases in the United Kingdom—Operation El Dorado Canyon. French aviation authorities refused permission for overflight, highlighting how a state can imbue a diplomatic dimension into military actions by controlling its airspace. This instance also highlights the significance of partnerships and alliances, particularly in scenarios warranting military intervention, a principle that extends to the maritime domain as well.

A state’s sovereignty extends 12 nautical miles from its coastal baseline, encompassing the authority to regulate and enforce laws pertaining to customs, immigration, and pollution. Various maritime zones and boundaries exist, including the high seas, intended for peaceful purposes and facilitating freedom of navigation, particularly for global commerce, without any single state exerting sovereignty. This framework explains why the United States can intervene militarily to safeguard commercial vessels traversing the Red Sea, even though it lies far from American shores, when they come under threat from Yemen’s Iran-sponsored Houthi rebels.

In contrast to the domains of land, air, and maritime, no state can enforce a quarantine or establish a no-fly zone in space. Objects in space enjoy freedom of navigation, capable of traversing any path at any time, orbiting Earth in low Earth orbit (LEO) approximately 16 times within a 24-hour period. While the UN Outer Space Treaty holds states accountable for authorizing and overseeing satellite launches and operations, the absence of sovereign control in outer space presents challenges. The international community collaborates to develop legal frameworks

addressing emerging issues, such as debris mitigation. Initiated in 2007 by the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines primarily respond to incidents like the Chinese ASAT test, with a focus on minimizing debris creation. Recent efforts prioritize space traffic management and norms of behavior in light of the increasing number of objects and the heightened risk of space collisions. As nations navigate the intricacies of space activities, continually evolving legal frameworks are indispensable for ensuring the stability and sustainability of outer space for the benefit of all.

**Complex Space Domain Operations**

As the space domain has evolved from a bilateral race in the 1960s to a multifaceted arena involving more than 90 countries and numerous commercial entities, the challenges and dynamics have grown exponentially intricate. In 2023, Lt Gen John Shaw, US Space Force, delineated three distinct Space Ages.\(^{11}\) The initial era revolved around national security and scientific exploration, epitomized by the Apollo missions, during which commercial presence was minimal, save for a handful of communications satellites. The subsequent age witnessed increased collaboration between NASA and commercial entities. Throughout the 1990s, commercial space activities thrived, primarily in geosynchronous orbit. Concurrently, other nations observed how the United States and its allies leveraged space for military purposes, realizing its potential significance in conflicts, particularly with the advent of GPS; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and missile warning satellites. However, space access and operations remained predominantly under governmental purview, with governments heavily investing in commercial space ventures.

A pivotal juncture for the space domain occurred during the second Space Age when space ceased to be a benign environment, transforming into an openly contested realm. In 2007, China demonstrated this shift by launching a ground-based missile into space, intercepting its defunct weather satellite, Fengyun 1, and generating a debris cloud comprising over 32,000 fragments. The consequential aspect was China’s willingness to compromise space integrity, with the debris cloud projected to remain in orbit until approximately 2108, spanning altitudes ranging from 100 to 2,300 miles above Earth.\(^{12}\) China’s objective was to showcase its ability to counter satellite surveillance in wartime scenarios and compel the United


States to engage in negotiations, following President George W. Bush’s authorization of a new national space policy that disregarded calls for a global ban on such tests and emphasized American freedom of action in space.\(^\text{13}\) Despite a robust international response to the incident, it garnered scant attention from the general populace. Gen Chance Saltzman, Chief of Space Operations, lamented that “the Air Force’s myopic focus on space as merely an enabler for other forces caused it to lose sight of the increasing competition in space and to forget how contested it had been throughout the Cold War.”\(^\text{14}\)

\[\text{Figure 1. Chart showing number of objects >10 cm in LEO. (Source: US Space Force and NASA)}\]

Around 2015, the onset of the third Space Age marked a competitive shift in the space domain, with commercial space endeavors surpassing government space programs in both spending and revenues. By 2021, these earnings had soared to


USD 362 billion. This transformation was propelled by the remarkable capabilities demonstrated by commercial space entities like SpaceX and Planet. Innovations such as reusable rockets and satellite constellations in LEO have revolutionized various applications, including commercial internet and electro-optical uses.

While these commercial advancements have significantly enhanced global communication, provided internet access to remote areas, and bolstered Earth observation capabilities, they have also raised concerns regarding space congestion. The proliferation of satellites, especially with large constellations like Starlink and OneWeb, has resulted in a substantial increase in active satellites in LEO. Projections indicate that by 2030, the number of active satellites could surpass 100,000. The surge in satellite numbers amplifies concerns over space debris, further complicating the already congested space environment. In addition to active satellites, Earth monitoring detects over 2,800 defunct satellites, 2,040 rocket bodies, and 21,000 other debris objects exceeding 10 cm in size. Notably, more than 130 million debris pieces smaller than 10 cm pose a significant risk to space operations, eluding detection and tracking. Incidents such as the June 2021 collision, wherein a piece of space debris traveling at more than 15,000 miles per hour struck the International Space Station’s robotic arm, resulting in a substantial hole in a section of the arm boom and thermal blanket, vividly illustrate the potential hazards of space debris to spacecraft and astronauts alike.

Efforts to mitigate such risks entail maneuvers by satellite operators. Between 1 June and 30 November 2023, SpaceX’s Starlink satellites executed 24,410 collision avoidance maneuvers. The US Space Force assumes a crucial role in providing space situational awareness services, issuing warnings to satellite operators about potential collisions. This service has been operational since 2009, following the first and only collision incident to date. However, as space commercialization burgeons, responsibilities are transitioning, with the Department of Commerce (DOC) assuming space traffic coordination services from the Department of Defense (DOD). The Office of Space Commerce within the DOC intends to integrate data from the DOD while incorporating commercial data to help maintain a comprehensive space catalog and issue conjunction warnings.

Navigating the Gray Zone

While advancements in space traffic coordination are imperative for ensuring safety, understanding the intent behind satellite behavior poses a significant challenge. Space domain awareness serves as a cornerstone for assessing activities and providing indications and warnings, particularly in the gray zone. For US Space Command, space domain awareness is essential for deterring aggression, safeguarding national interests, and, if necessary, neutralizing threats.

Figure 2. Satellites vs debris (Source: European Space Agency and UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, “Satellites vs Debris,” June 2023, https://www.esa.int/.)
Deterring aggression in the gray zone using the elements of national power presents challenges, given that counterspace threats can range from reversible to nonreversible effects. These deliberate tactical maneuvers have persisted since inception and are employed to achieve strategic effects that remain below the threshold that would warrant a military response. The erosion of US policy and military options in response to reversible, nonkinetic threats raises questions about when and where a response is justified. Space functions as a conduit for achieving economic stability, accessing information, and asserting relative power. In this context, Russia and China, as strategic competitors to the United States and its allies, employ gray-zone counterspace tactics to further their respective national objectives.

**Gray-Zone Counterspace Tactics and Potential Solutions**

Reversible effects stemming from denial, deception, and electronic warfare are transient and nondestructive, whereas directed energy weapons, cyberspace threats, and orbital threats can cause either temporary or permanent effects. As stated, “Permanent effects from kinetic energy attacks on space systems, physical attacks against space-related ground infrastructure, and nuclear detonation in space would result in degradation or physical destruction of a space capability.”

Counterspace measures and satellite design considerations play crucial roles in mitigating these threats and bolstering resilience in the continually evolving space domain. Nonetheless, as Rebecca Reesman and James Wilson point out, it is important to acknowledge that “even if satellites and spacecraft are designed to have more energy for maneuverability, distances in space are so big that extensive maneuvering will remain painstakingly slow.”

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Beginning with direct-ascent ASAT capabilities, these kinetic threats pose enduring damage not only to the targeted satellite but can also render segments of space unusable for protracted periods. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union conducted destructive ASAT tests, generating substantial debris that continues to orbit today. More recent tests, including those by the United States, China, Russia, and India, have heightened concerns due to the increased risk of collisions in the congested LEO.

Notably, the international response in the third space age reflects a heightened awareness of the interconnected nature of space operations across governmental, civil, and commercial sectors. Russia’s ASAT test shortly before its 2021 invasion of Ukraine brought space threats to the forefront of global attention. US Space

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Command commander, Gen James Dickinson, US Army, asserted that Russia is “deploying capabilities to actively deny access to and use of space by the United States and its allies,” further emphasizing that Russia’s counterspace weapons systems undermine strategic stability. Furthermore, in February of this year, US Representative Mike Turner (R–OH), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, expressed grave concern about a potential Russian space-related nuclear system designed to destroy satellites. Although this concept is not novel, its utilization would result in irreversible damage to satellites and render large portions of orbits unusable. It would contravene the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which prohibits the stationing of weapons of mass destruction in outer space. These incidents underscore the imperative for diverse response options, including military interventions for catastrophic events in space. While the US has historically held a well-documented negative stance on proposed space weapons bans, as recently as 2020, citing challenges with verifying such proposed treaties, the Biden Administration announced a voluntary moratorium on destructive direct ascent-ASAT testing and introduced a non-binding UN resolution in 2022, garnering support from 150 countries and signed by the US, albeit opposed by Russia, China, Iran, and five other states.

It is crucial to acknowledge that in the years leading up to this period, the United States established the US Space Force in 2019 and subsequently reinstated a new combatant command, US Space Command, in 2020. These actions were significant policy decisions aimed at affirming that the space domain constituted a warfighting domain necessitating its own dedicated force. However, the failure to achieve deterrence in the gray zone emphasizes the persistence of national interests and the need to maintain offensive options. Consequently, it is imperative to develop and consider options for neutralizing such threats.

USINDOPACOM must possess distinct operational plans and options for neutralizing threats before a missile is launched, despite the challenges posed by

Navigating the Gray Zone

China’s road-mobile platform, which complicates targeting. Failing to act could yield immense consequences if the target is a communication (SATCOM) or ISR satellite, resulting in the loss of crucial communication or “eyes in the sky” required to pursue non-gray space counterforce strategies. As space operations continually advance and grow more sophisticated, the need for strategy, doctrine, and policy to keep pace with the evolving landscape becomes increasingly crucial. The loss of space assets at one juncture would have been catastrophic and considered an assault on “national technical means,” resulting in the loss of strategic warning capabilities. However, this may no longer hold true. With the proliferation of technical means for detecting and verifying a strategic attack, including varied orbits and detection methods, gray-zone operations against these assets may not garner the same reaction they would have during the Cold War.

Progressing along the spectrum of space threats, cyberattacks on satellites have emerged as another significant concern. The example of Russia’s cyberattack against a ViaSat commercial satellite during the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, disrupted Kyiv’s command-and-control communications. This incident underscored the potential for spillover effects into other critical infrastructure, affecting wind turbines and tens of thousands of customers in Europe. In May 2022, three months following the attack, the United States disclosed that “Russia had been doing a series of disruptive cyber operations, including website defacements, distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, and cyber-attacks to delete data from computers belonging to government and private entities.” Although this attack purportedly had reversible effects, it demonstrated to the global community that commercial satellites could be targeted at the behest of an adversary country (the perpetrator remains unattributed). The attribution of such actions is critical for gray-zone deterrence and timely responses. The United States provided direct support to Ukraine to bolster its digital connectivity, even as they were being physically attacked by Russia. Cyberattacks can be irreversible and carry severe consequences, such as shutting down critical infrastructure. Therefore, it is imperative for all satellite operators to prioritize cybersecurity and implement measures to defend against such threats.

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27 The authors do not distinguish this as a space threat that should be nominated by US Space Command. This constitutes a threat (comparable to ground, air, or maritime threats) to USINDOPACOM and should be prioritized according to the magnitude of the threat it poses prior to or during a conflict. See also Kristin Burke, PLA Counterspace Command and Control (Maxwell AFB, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, December 2023), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/.

28 Antony J. Blinken, “Attribution of Russia’s Malicious Cyber Activity Against Ukraine” (press release, Department of State, 10 May 2022, https://www.state.gov/).
However, the hurdles of information sharing in the commercial space sector, driven by concerns over financial implications and shareholder interests, present a complex landscape. The DOD endeavors to address this challenge through an upcoming commercial strategy, yet cultivating trusting relationships with commercial satellite operators remains a challenge. Establishing a collaborative model, akin to the Commercial Integration Cell, is essential to nurturing mutual trust and ensuring superior space domain awareness along with coordinated response options.

Orbital threats, ranging from close approaches, to “grabbling,” or the ability of one satellite to seize, propel, or dismantle another satellite, to intentionally colliding with another satellite—introduce additional layers of complexity to space operations. Instances of close approaches by Russia to US satellites in geosynchronous earth orbit (GEO) have persisted for decades. If a satellite were to intentionally collide with another satellite, it would have similar effects as the 2009 collision between Iridium and Cosmos, resulting in the destruction of both satellites and generating a substantial debris field. In 2022, China demonstrated its ability capacity to grapple a satellite and relocate it to another position in space. However, this capability could also be beneficial for repairing or relocating satellites—resembling a space tug—and for removing space debris in a novel mission category termed on-orbit servicing, assembly, and manufacturing (OSAM). These capabilities encompass dual-use technologies that could be used for both offensive military purposes and commercial utility. Discerning the specific dual-use capability being employed hinges on the ability to monitor and track. As commercial companies equipped with OSAM capabilities start operating in space, coordinating and communicating among satellite operators will be essential to forestall misinterpretations in the gray zone.

Another orbital threat involves shadowing or stalking a satellite, as demonstrated by Russia’s actions toward a first and second-generation satellite named the Luch/Olymp in GEO. Between 2014 and 2019, this Russian satellite snuggled up, called rendezvous and proximity operations, to 19 commercial satellites. This behavior is akin to a hazardous air-to-air intercept. As Rachael Zisk states, “It’s unusual for satellites in GEO to move around much. Usually, satellites maintain a position over a particular area of the Earth’s surface. Such
frequent movement is a red flag to US authorities and satellite operators.\textsuperscript{32}\ The primary concern is safety of flight, but there is also a concern regarding cyber surveillance and attack. Many speculate that Russia’s proximate satellites could potentially intercept the ground signals directed at the targeted satellite, though it remains unclear from the limited publicly available information whether this is happening.\textsuperscript{33} Numerous commercial communication satellites serve US government customers, meaning the data streams could encompass various mission traffic, ranging from unmanned aircraft video feeds to mobile ground unit communications.\textsuperscript{34} Consequently, encrypting the communication links is essential to secure the information. In gray-zone operations, anticipating this behavior is essential to eliminate operational surprise. Some commercial entities, such as Slingshot Aerospace, employ machine learning to determine the pattern of life of satellites like the Luch/Olymp, facilitating prediction.\textsuperscript{35}

The US military heavily relies on satellite communications to project power. Consequently, jamming these capabilities stands as the most widely employed counterspace effect to achieve temporary, reversible disruption. Jamming entails the use of radio frequency (RF) “noise” to interfere with communications to and from a satellite.\textsuperscript{36} Ground-based satellite jamming systems are inexpensive and don’t require much technological expertise to construct and operate. This means they are easily proliferated and can be used from land, sea, or air. Additionally, there are two forms of satellite jamming: uplink, the more challenging technique, which interferes with the signal going from a ground station to the satellite, and downlink jamming, which disrupts transmissions from the satellite to ground-based or airborne receivers.\textsuperscript{37} Russia is not the sole nation possessing substantial electronic warfare capability. According to John Plumb, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy, “China has already fielded ground-based counterspace weapons and

\textsuperscript{34} Michael Clonts, “Espionage in Orbit: Satellite or Spy?,” KRATOS Constellations, 17 April 2023, https://www.kratosdefense.com/.
\textsuperscript{35} Clarice Reid, “Russian Luch (Olymp) 2 Satellite Approaching Multiple GEO Spacecraft,” Slingshot Aerospace (blog), 4 October 2023, https://blog.slingshotaerospace.com/.
it continues to seek new methods to hold US satellites at risk.”\textsuperscript{38} The United States also maintains “an operational electronic warfare (EW) offensive countspace system, the Counter Communications System (CCS), which is deployed globally to provide uplink jamming capability against geostationary communications satellites.”\textsuperscript{39} There is growing concern that jammers, particularly those targeting GPS, provide an asymmetric capability and could be deployed nearer to the US homeland, impacting not only space launches but also air and sea ports, unmanned vehicles, and GPS-enabled air, maritime, and land transportation systems. This concern arises because the satellite-based GPS signal servicing these systems is relatively weak, rendering them vulnerable to catastrophic effects from RF jamming.

Attributing jamming to a specific actor is difficult whether deliberate or inadvertent. Attribution requires technical expertise to characterize the signals, discern interference, geolocate the source, and cancel interfering signals. According to Gen John Hyten, formerly the commander of the Air Force Space Command, US military personnel lack “awareness of what our own forces are doing in the spectrum, let alone of what an adversary might do.”\textsuperscript{40} While several countermeasures for jamming exist, the primary objective should be establishing redundant and diverse communication paths between military and commercial networks and terminals to ensure connectivity even if one path is jammed, with minimal or no disruption. Crafting policy responses is most difficult for this gray-zone threat to homeland security. However, when attribution can be ascertained, clear response strategies and consequences can, and should, be enforced.

The gray-zone aggressive behaviors exhibited by US adversaries have become somewhat routine, reshaping the perception of what is considered “normal.” To tackle the multifaceted challenges posed by space threats, collaboration between military and commercial entities will be paramount. Various stakeholders are endeavoring to establish rules and standards for space operations to mitigate risks in space, despite the absence of legal principles to deter aggressors from engaging in inappropriate behavior and escalating into conflict. As Robin Dickey states, “Norms, when done right, can be helpful for defense and deterrence, but it still takes effort and cooperation to strike the right balance.”\textsuperscript{41}

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Conclusion

Maintaining space domain awareness, which includes sharing information about orbital objects and coordinating responses, remains a fundamental aspect of mitigating threats in space and ensuring stability in the homelands. Many commercial and government operators share orbital information through a space situational awareness sharing agreement with the US government, facilitating conjunction screening. However, the current catalogue’s incompleteness underscores the importance of robust tracking. Additionally, the US government maintains an exclusion list for national security satellites, the details of which are not disclosed despite the ability to track and monitor them using commercial telescopes and radars.

To enhance space stability and eliminate potential misperceptions, the United States could cease this practice by sharing information with allies, partners, and ideally with a broader audience. As the US Space Command transitions to dynamic space operations, the need for transparency and international cooperation becomes even more critical to avoid misperceptions and catastrophic events in the gray zone. Whether one is a Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, Guardian, or policy expert, there is a shared responsibility to keep space safe and sustainable for all, for eternity.

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**Warming Arctic—Geopolitical Rivalries**

**Risks to Continental Defense for North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe**

**Dr. James L. Regens**

**John S. Beddows**

**Abstract**

This article examines why a warming Arctic in a changing climate is a formidable challenge to homeland defense and national security for both the United States and its allies on a continental scale encompassing North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe. With temperatures on the rise, polar ice is rapidly receding, rendering the Arctic Ocean navigable by surface vessels for an extended period during the summer months, independent of icebreaker assistance. This escalating trend amplifies the competition to assert influence over the Arctic’s trajectory, including its vital sea routes. Moreover, the ramifications of shifting sea levels on the delineation of international borders and exclusive economic zones, coupled with nations’ pursuit of new economic interests and preparedness for heightened activity, thrust the High North into the forefront of geopolitical contention and military engagements spanning maritime, air, space, and ground domains. This reality underscores an immediate imperative for a holistic strategy and command framework that seamlessly integrates the operational forces of the United States, Canada, and NATO Nordic member nations.

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Throughout the Cold War era, spanning from 1947 to 1989, the Arctic and its adjacent regions remained on the periphery of major flash points for conflict.¹ Metaphorically, the Arctic and near-Arctic can be conceptualized as the “attic or roof of the world,” extending across North America, Europe, and Asia. The term *Arctic* finds its roots in the Greek word *arctos*, meaning “bear,” referencing the northern territories beneath the Great Bear constellation. Referred to colloquially as the High North, this expanse encompasses the Earth’s northernmost reaches.² Geographically, it is delineated by the Arctic Circle, commencing at 66° 33’ North latitude. Furthermore, from a topographical standpoint, the

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Warming Arctic—Geopolitical Rivalries

Arctic and its adjacent regions, known as the near-Arctic, extend northward from the northernmost tree line, beginning at approximately 50.0° north latitude. Culturally, these territories serve as the ancestral homelands for Indigenous peoples, including the Aleut, Yupik, Inuit, First Nations, Métis, Saami, Nenets, Khanty, Evenk, and Chukchi communities, who have long inhabited these lands.³

Throughout the 1990s, the Arctic landscape remained predominantly the domain of polar scientists, the eight Arctic states with territorial claims, and indigenous communities residing within the Arctic Circle: the United States, Canada, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Russia. Principally centered on scientific pursuits such as polar exploration, these nations primarily relied on the Arctic Council, established by the 1996 Ottawa Declaration, as a prominent platform for fostering multilateral cooperation on Arctic matters. As an international body, decisions and statements issued by the Arctic Council beyond their territorial boundaries necessitate unanimous agreement among the eight Arctic states.⁴

However, concurrent with the resurgence of global power competitions, the warming of the Arctic due to climate change has emerged as a pivotal catalyst for its transformation into a central arena for geopolitical completion.⁵ Predictably, this shift has broadened the scope of the Arctic Council, transforming it into a hub for international deliberations on Arctic governance. Notably, commencing in 1998, non-Arctic nations were accorded formal observer status, with this trend accelerating since 2006.⁶

Demonstrating the growing strategic importance of the Arctic, the People’s Republic of China has proclaimed itself a near-Arctic state, despite its northernmost point lying nearly 1,500 kilometers south of the Arctic Circle.⁷ Considering the lack of proximity, the declaration was certainly a geographically and culturally audacious proclamation going far beyond formal observer state status.

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These developments underscore the growing salience of the Arctic and near-Arctic as priorities for the West in the twenty-first century. Consequently, this article delves into why a warming Arctic, amid a shifting climate, poses a significant homeland defense and national security challenge, presenting substantial risks for decision making by the United States and its allies on a continental scale encompassing North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe.

**Why the High North Is an Arena for Geopolitical Competition**

The warming of the Arctic has led to a profound change in the strategic importance of the High North, catalyzing heightened interest from non-Arctic nations, particularly over the past decade. Among NATO members, including the United States, Canada, Denmark, and Norway, control of the Arctic Ocean’s coastline is divided, with NATO nations overseeing 47 percent, while Russia commands the remaining 53 percent. Additionally, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden possess territories within the Arctic Circle.8

As global temperatures continue to rise due to climate change, the Arctic and the near-Arctic regions experience amplified warming.9 Elevated ambient air temperatures contribute to a rapid reduction in polar ice, accelerating the progression toward a seasonally ice-free Arctic Ocean and augmenting freshwater discharge into the North Atlantic.10 Concurrently, as climate-induced alterations reshape maritime pathways in the Indo-Pacific region, diminishing polar ice in the Arctic unveils the long-envisioned Northwest Passage, establishing a direct route between Europe and Asia via North America.11

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8 The Arctic Circle encompasses the Arctic Ocean and the territory of eight countries: US (Alaska), Canada (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut), Denmark (Greenland), Iceland (Grímsey), Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

9 Climate refers to long-term average weather patterns usually calculated for multiple decades (minimally ≥ 30 years or more) for a specific geographical location typically expressed on a local, regional, or global scale that may produce slow-onset or sudden-onset impacts. Climate is defined as the expected frequency of specific states of the atmosphere, land, or ocean indicated by physical parameters such as temperature, precipitation, wind speed and direction, and salinity.


This transformative phenomenon facilitates commercial and naval navigation, as vessels traverse the region’s increasingly accessible waters. Notably, ships can now navigate between Europe and northern Asia during the summer months via the Bering Sea and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, bypassing the need for icebreakers and elevating maritime activity within the Arctic.\textsuperscript{12}

The prolonged accessibility of the Arctic Ocean for unimpeded surface navigation has sparked intensified interest and competition among numerous stakeholders, each vying to influence the region’s trajectory. This heightened competition bears tangible direct and indirect implications for homeland defense and national security across North America and Europe on a continental scale. As this competition unfolds, swift action is imperative to discern the multifaceted dimensions of this rivalry, prioritize the attendant risks to continental defense and national security, and devise viable strategic and operational responses.

Of paramount importance is the cultivation of political resolve to sustain integrated action by the United States and its NATO allies over the long haul. This undertaking is formidable, given that the High North remains a remote locale characterized by harsh and unforgiving weather conditions, presenting distinct challenges for military operations.\textsuperscript{13} In essence, policy makers, operational forces, and their adversaries will grapple with the enduring time-space dilemma inherent in conducting military campaigns and fortifying resilience in this challenging environment.\textsuperscript{14}

First and foremost, the United States and its allies grapple with the enduring homeland defense challenge of simultaneously overseeing the Arctic’s sea routes to North America and traversing the Arctic Ocean via the top of the Scandinavian Peninsula in Northern Europe and the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom gap. This presents a substantial and longstanding risk, as safeguarding the western approaches from the North Atlantic to the United States and Canada constitutes a well-established mission.\textsuperscript{15} With a warming Arctic, they also need to control the southern Chukchi Sea, which is the major chokepoint for northern access to the Pacific Ocean via the Bering Strait.

\textsuperscript{12} Lawrence R. Mudryk, et al, “Impact of 1, 2, and 4°C of global warming on ship navigation in the Canadian Arctic,” \textit{Nature Climate Change} 11 (2021): 673–79, \url{https://doi.org/}.


\textsuperscript{14} James L. Regens and John S. Beddows, “Resilience and Success in Warfare,” \textit{Wavell Room}, 28 May 2021, \url{https://wavellroom.com/}.

\textsuperscript{15} Suzanne M. Holroyd, \textit{U.S. and Canadian Cooperative Approaches to Arctic Security} (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1990), \url{https://www.rand.org/}.
During World War II, the Battle of the Atlantic, spanning from 1939 to 1945, necessitated a concerted effort by the US Navy, US Coast Guard, UK Royal Navy, and Royal Canadian Navy to counter German submarines and surface vessels, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of vital sea lines of communication (SLOC) to sustain logistical operations throughout the European theater. Similarly, throughout the Cold War era, defending the United States and Canada from strategic (nuclear) threats while simultaneously securing the North Atlantic sea lanes and air corridors for extensive resupply efforts in the event of a Warsaw Pact incursion into Europe was imperative.

Nonetheless, the extension of ice-free navigation in the Arctic Ocean, both temporally and spatially for surface vessels, introduces complexities to maritime and air defense, amplifying the demand for dedicated command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) assets. Last year, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg underscored the existential threat to national security posed by the potential loss of control over SLOCs for North American continental defense and the defense of NATO’s Northern Flank by Nordic countries. He cautioned that Russia and China have pledged to enhance their cooperation in the Arctic, forging a “deepening strategic partnership that challenges our values and interests.”

This threat is palpable in the maritime domain, as evidenced by US Coast Guard patrols encountering multiple Russian and Chinese naval vessels operating off Alaska’s coast, indicative of close military collaboration between Moscow and Beijing in proximity to US waters. While this development may be disconcerting, it is not entirely unexpected.

Under Vladimir Putin’s leadership, Russia pursues three primary objectives in the Arctic: (1) create a staging ground to project military power, mirroring its efforts in the North Atlantic; (2) establish a forward line of defense against foreign incursion along the Northern Sea Route (NSR, Северный морской путь) as the Arctic attracts increased international investment; and (3) secure Russia’s economic future in the Arctic. Despite its ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia is committing substantial budgetary increases to maintain a dominant military position in the High North. By expanding its bases and military capabilities in the Arctic, Moscow is hedging on the region’s future economic and military significance.

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Likewise, the PRC harbors similar ambitions as Beijing attempts to expand its military presence in the region. Viewing the West as geopolitical adversaries, China and Russia currently align in their national interests concerning the Arctic.\footnote{Jim Sciutto, \textit{The Return of Great Powers: Russia, China, and the Next World War} (New York: Dutton, 2024); Atle Staalesen, “Arctic shipping and energy on Putin’s agenda with Xi Jinping,” \textit{Barents Observer}, 21 March 2023, https://thebarentsobserver.com/; and P. Whitney Lackenbauer et al., \textit{China’s Arctic ambitions and what they mean for Canada} (Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 2018).}

The changing climate in the Arctic poses a spectrum of risks to the United States, Canada, and the Nordic members of NATO. Beyond traditional homeland defense concerns related to sea approach control, these risks encompass broader national security issues, notably stemming from the impact of shifting sea levels on maritime extensions of international borders.\footnote{Franklyn Griffiths, Rob Huebert, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, \textit{Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security and Stewardship} (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011); and Andrea Charron, “The Northwest Passage: Is Canada’s Sovereignty Floating Away?” \textit{International Journal} 60, no. 3 (2005): 831–48, https://doi.org/}. The delineation and potential alterations in international boundaries, particularly between nations such as the United States and Canada or Russia and exclusive economic zones (EEZ), give rise to significant military, diplomatic, and economic apprehensions. These concerns collectively influence defense and national security and are an organic byproduct of technological advancements that facilitate natural resource extraction, including oil and gas hydrocarbons, polymetallic minerals, sand and gravel aggregates, placer deposits, and fisheries, thereby attracting economic interest from both Arctic and non-Arctic states.\footnote{Smruthi Nadig, “The nuclear icebreakers enabling drilling in Russia’s Arctic,” \textit{Mining Technology}, 15 August 2023, https://www.mining-technology.com/; and Roger Howard, \textit{The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow’s Natural Resources} (London: Continuum, 2009).}

For example, reflecting Russia’s enduring objective to develop its northern and eastern territories, a goal entrenched since its czarist and Soviet eras, the Russian polar expedition Arctic-2007 made a symbolic statement on 2 August 2007. Placing a titanium Russian Federation flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole, the expedition asserted Russia’s claim to undersea Arctic areas and the resources lying within the depths of the Arctic Ocean.\footnote{Elana Rowe, \textit{Russia and the North} (Toronto: University of Ottawa Press, 2009).}

China and India are increasingly active in pursuing economic development and investment opportunities in the Arctic, particularly focusing on the region’s abundant natural resources, including fisheries and hydrocarbons/minerals. This trend underscores the region’s burgeoning strategic importance. Reports indicate that Beijing is planning to build the world’s largest icebreaker and is allocating tens of billions of dollars toward energy initiatives, including investments in liquefied...
natural gas (LNG) projects in the Russian North, as well as infrastructure development and research projects in the Far North.\textsuperscript{23} Meanwhile, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, New Delhi has been actively promoting investment by Indian companies in Arctic energy and mineral resources, capitalizing on India’s rapidly expanding economy. Notably, in March 2018, India marked a significant milestone with its first shipment of LNG from the Russian Arctic.\textsuperscript{24}

\section*{A Framework for Crafting Military and Diplomatic Responses}

Having delineated current and plausible future risks to continental defense for North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe, attributable to the warming of the Arctic in a changing climate, it is important to detail actionable steps utilizing military and diplomatic resources to mitigate these risks or minimize their adverse effects. We present a multipronged approach aimed at crafting responses that address the interconnected military, economic, and environmental/natural resources dimensions of these risks.

The proposed framework for response planning is scalable and emphasizes key elements of military and diplomatic power available to the United States, Canada, and NATO’s Nordic member states, supplemented by other NATO allies with interests in the Arctic or near the Arctic. Implicit in the framework are two core assumptions grounded in the High North’s strategic importance and centrality as an arena of geopolitical competition:

- The evidence indicates that Russia’s and China’s military challenges in the Arctic and near-Arctic will remain constant and potentially escalate in the near- to mid-term future. The resultant friction will substantially heighten the tempo of Western surface and subsurface maritime, air, and ground operations.

- The weight of evidence suggests that efforts to extract commercially valuable natural resources, especially minerals, and exploit fisheries in the Arctic, particularly in the Arctic Ocean, will intensify. The resultant friction will exert considerable pressure on Western nations with Arctic territories to employ diplomatic and economic measures aimed at mitigating environmental degradation or resource depletion.

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\textsuperscript{24}“India,” Arctic Institute, 1 August 2022, https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/.
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Warming Arctic—Geopolitical Rivalries

The first, and perhaps politically most vexing question to answer is: which risks hold the utmost significance for policy makers and why? This knowledge is essential for establishing response priorities, but the answer invariably is fluid as new information emerges or the situation changes. Hence, flexibility and scalability are imperative attributes of both military and diplomatic responses, ideally integrated and coordinated rather than treated as disparate options for maintaining sovereignty, ensuring effective deterrence, conducting homeland defense activities, and informing strategy. Nonetheless, this approach would necessitate policy makers—particularly elected officials—to determine their commitment to implementing a strategy founded on genuinely actionable measures supported by the political will to confront the escalating great-power rivalries in the Arctic.

The next step in formulating responses necessitates acknowledging the challenges posed by the Arctic’s extreme weather conditions, rugged terrain, vast expanse, and geographical remoteness, which impede swift redeployment and present a classic time-space dilemma for military operations and resilience. The logistical hurdles in the Arctic are monumental, particularly in a changing climate scenario. Simply put, establishing a robust deterrent in the Arctic requires a substantial presence of military assets and accompanying infrastructure physically situated within the region.25

This underscores the imperative for a systematic, collaborative approach among the United States, Canada, and their NATO allies—particularly the Nordic countries—that explicitly prioritizes capabilities and investments aligned with desired outcomes. This entails making genuine trade-offs across various defense appropriations to address the homeland defense challenge, determining the necessary investments and types of Arctic military capabilities required to be stationed within the region rather than deployed from external sources during emergencies or in response to hostilities. Setting priorities inevitably necessitates making challenging decisions regarding basing and training personnel for potential cold-weather conflicts, allocating limited defense funding to initiatives such as revitalizing Canada’s deep-water Port of Churchill, and developing infrastructure to deepen the channel to a depth of 12.2 meters (40 feet) for a viable deep-water port in Nome, Alaska.

This port should be capable of accommodating large commercial vessels and naval warships, with the exception of aircraft carriers. Additionally, it involves maintaining or constructing new road networks and rail lines, ensuring reliable power supply infrastructure, acquiring equipment suitable for cold-weather operations, establishing redundant secure communications systems or satellite resources for C4ISR, and rationalizing command structures to ensure seamless force integration across the domains of warfare and among national partners. As a potential outcome, this could entail establishing joint US/Canadian Naval Bases and logistics hubs in Churchill, Manitoba, and Nome, Alaska. These installations would feature comprehensive air, rail, and land connections, complemented by parallel facilities in eastern North America, Greenland, Iceland, and the Scandinavian Peninsula to enhance resilience.

Similarly, the addition of Finland and Sweden to NATO could incentivize streamlining NATO’s command structure and consolidating the Nordic countries under a single military command rather than dispersing them among existing commands. This would explicitly designate the Arctic as a distinct theater of operations for NATO, with a dedicated command structure. In addition to maintaining ongoing surface and subsurface maritime presence, it is imperative to possess robust long-range precision fires and air defense capabilities, including advanced fighter aircraft, to ensure air defense and superiority as part of the Arctic military footprint.

From a practical perspective, a deliberate rationalization of the command structure for the continental defense of North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe warrants exploration to deliver an integrated capability facilitating a real-time common operating picture across the Arctic approaches to North America and the sovereign territory of NATO’s Nordic country members. A similar initiative led to the establishment of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). In the Arctic context, integrating elements and capabilities across all six domains—ground, maritime, air, space, information operations, and cyber—is essential to deliver an integrated capability facilitating a real-time common operating picture across the Arctic approaches to North America and the sovereign territory of NATO members.

Simultaneously, the Western members of the Nordic Council should harness their collective diplomatic resources, including economic policy, employing a whole-of-government approach to advance shared interests in the Arctic and near-Arctic.26 A logical initial step could involve the United States ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, thereby dispelling any ambigu-

26 P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Heather Nicol, eds., Whole of Government through an Arctic Lens (Antigonish, Canada: Mulroney Institute on Government, 2017), https://operationalhistories.ca/
ity regarding America’s entitlement to resources extending to the North Pole amid changing sea levels that impact maritime extensions of international borders. This action not only preemptively safeguards commercially valuable resources but also mitigates the risk of other nations exploiting vulnerable fisheries and endangering fragile Arctic ecosystems.

Additionally, the United States and its allies could utilize their existing state-of-the-art spatial analytical techniques and satellite monitoring to continuously update the delineation of maritime borders, EEZs, and national border extensions. This proactive measure serves to preemptively address future boundary disputes resulting from sea-level changes and shifting shorelines without necessitating involvement from third parties. Just as the PRC unilaterally declared near-Arctic state status, Western nations with genuine territorial interests in the region might collectively issue a formal statement asserting that there are no “near-Arctic” countries based on historical, geographical, and cultural grounds.

Conclusions

Against a backdrop of shifting international competition marked by strategic uncertainty and opportunity, the warming of the Arctic and near-Arctic inevitably amplifies the significance of the High North as a focal point for geopolitical rivalry and military operations spanning the maritime, air, space, and ground domains. The escalating challenges posed by a warming Arctic in a changing climate compel US and allied decision-makers to confront the imperative of formulating a cohesive and enduring strategy, bolstering investments in capabilities, and establishing an integrated command structure for what will persist as a remote and inhospitable region inherently hostile to military operations.27

Such proactive planning necessitates a coherent vision coupled with unequivocal political support to be viable, a task often fraught with challenges, particularly

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in a single democracy, let alone a coalition encompassing multiple NATO allies across North America and Northern Europe. To effectively deter or combat emerging threats, it is imperative to capitalize on the robust operational connections between and expanded roles spanning the maritime, air, space, and ground domains for organizations such as NORTHCOM, Canada Command, and the Nordic countries on NATO’s Northern Flank. These entities must be poised to address the homeland defense and national security challenges of the twenty-first century in the Arctic and near-Arctic.

The gravity of the risk posed to continental defense for North America and NATO’s Northern Flank in Europe, compounded by ongoing geopolitical rivalries unfolding in a warming Arctic, underscores the imperative for a proactive strategy grounded in integrated capabilities and sustained political will.

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Inside the Gates

Cultivating Cognitive Security to Defend the Homeland

Col Dr. William “Ox” Hersch, USAF, Retired
Lt Col Melissa “Sharpie” McLain, USAF

Abstract

In the twenty-first century, effective security strategies demand more than sophisticated military might. Social and information technologies have transformed the character of conflict, compelling democracies to expand their defenses beyond traditional military domains. Adversaries now wield unprecedented influence over the minds of individuals, leaders, and decision-makers across the security enterprise and society at large. The Chinese Communist Party wages a comprehensive and calculated political warfare campaign, exploiting cognitive weaknesses and harnessing social media platforms to subvert democratic values and advance its strategic aims. While Beijing poses an internal threat, democracies possess the means to fortify cognitive security within their societies and security frameworks. The United States and its allies must prioritize investment in and exploitation of the unique strengths of their diverse populations, while revitalizing the bedrock principles of free speech, free markets, and inherent human rights, which face renewed assault from totalitarian regimes.

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The digital revolution in social and information technology has triggered a profound shift in the landscape of Homeland Defense and Security, challenging traditional paradigms. Democracies must embrace a philosophy of “failing forward,” addressing historical shortcomings and reimagining security strategies to navigate the competitive and conflict-ridden terrain of the twenty-first century. With the ubiquity of smart devices, rival powers now possess direct access to almost every citizen, enabling nefarious actors like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to marshal national resources for information warfare campaigns often conducted clandestinely. In this era of information warfare, every individual becomes a potential combatant or target, exploiting historical vulnerabilities in the American way of war and capitalizing on the openness of democratic societies. As P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooker put it, “These new wars are not won by missiles and bombs, but by those able to shape the story lines.”¹

While maintaining high-end military capabilities remains paramount, this article argues that the transformation brought about by social and information technologies necessitates a broader perspective for deterring adversaries and safeguarding the homeland. Adversaries now wield unprecedented influence over the minds of individuals, leaders, and decision-makers within both the security enterprise and society as a whole. Democracies, recognizing their susceptibility, must take proactive measures to bolster their defenses. Accordingly, the article delves into an examination of the CCP’s political warfare strategy, introduces cognitive theory, draws insights from past conflicts, analyzes case studies, and proposes measures at the national, communal, and individual levels to enhance cognitive security (COGSEC).

The advent of the Internet era coincided with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a time when Francis Fukuyama famously proclaimed the triumph of democracy over rival ideologies such as fascism and communism. However, early optimism, buoyed by a fervent belief in the transformative potential of technology and liberal values, failed to anticipate the ways in which authoritarian regimes would harness information technologies for their own ends. President Bill Clinton’s 2000 observation likening China’s initial attempts to censor the Internet to “trying to nail Jell-O to the wall” now appears naïve in hindsight. Today, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) not only exercises strict censorship over its domestic Internet but also exploits the openness of democratic societies’ information infrastructure.

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2 Eric Rosenbach and Katherine Mansted, “Can Democracy Survive in the Information Age?,” Technology and National Security (Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs: Aspen Strategy Group, October 2018), https://www.belfercenter.org/. The Aspen Group’s year-long study identified four distinct vulnerabilities that democracies face: (1) weak mechanisms for distinguishing fact from fiction; (2) long, media-driven nature of elections; (3) the tech sector’s profit-oriented culture; and (4) the inability of the government to oversee and coordinate issues related to the information environment. This contrasts sharply with authoritarian regimes that have near total control over their industry and information domains.


5 Rosenbach and Mansted, “Can Democracy Survive,” 3. President Bill Clinton as quoted by Rosenbach and Mansted. For original speech, see “Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.” (Washington, 8 March 2000).
Beijing’s infiltration is evident, signaling a pressing challenge. Beijing is inside the gates.

**Cognitive Warfare and How We Think**

According to Eric Rosenbach and Katherine Mansted, cognitive warfare employs cyber tools to manipulate enemy cognitive processes, exploiting mental biases, inducing thought distortions, and influencing decision-making both at the individual and collective levels. This form of warfare serves as the foundation for political warfare, encompassing activities aimed at expanding a nation’s influence and legitimacy while undermining adversaries, all without resorting to conventional or nuclear conflict. Political warfare encompasses a broad spectrum of tactics, including public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and economic warfare, using all available resources at a nation’s disposal.

Cognition refers to how individuals mentally respond to stimuli, making an understanding of cognitive processes essential in comprehending cognitive warfare. According to Kenneth Boulding, an individual’s accumulation of knowledge and experience shapes their worldview, forming an image of the world and their role within it. This image, akin to a schema, dictates perceptions and behaviors, filters reality and influences reactions to new information. Robert Jervis’ *Perception*...
and Misperception in International Politics demonstrates how perceptions, including self-image and historical interpretations, give rise to biases that impact political decision making. Cognitive warfare exploits these biases to achieve desired effects and reshapes the individuals’ underlying images to manipulate their perceptions.

Groups that “share the same image of the world” are typically “exposed to much the same set of messages in building up images.” A shared image is like an anchor that grounds people to fundamental assumptions and values. If an adversary understands targets’ anchors and cognitive vulnerabilities, it can exploit emotionally charged predispositions and hack individuals and groups.

In psychology, the anchoring effect occurs when individuals rely on a specific value as a reference point when estimating an unknown quantity. These anchors subsequently influence choices, perspectives, and behaviors. Anchoring can occur rapidly or gradually over time, as individuals accumulate images and information, often without awareness of the anchoring process. Beijing’s efforts seek to destabilize free societies by undermining the anchoring narratives of democracy and imposing its own image.

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12 Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception in International Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976). 68, 172, 181–87. Jervis elucidates the concept of “Excessive and Premature Cognitive Closure,” where “actors are more apt to err on the side of being too wedded to an established view and too quick to reject discrepant information,” thus “closing” an image off. 188. Leaders establish a “dominant percept,” from an accumulation of experiences or by drawing analogies and lessons from history (which themselves can be skewed by bias) and then drive agendas and policies consistent with those percepts. For in-depth analysis of the role historical analogies play in influencing wartime decision making, see, Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decision of 1965 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).


14 Rand Waltzman, “The Weaponization of Information: The Need for Cognitive Security” (testimony, RAND Corporation, presented before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Cybersecurity on 27 April 2017), 2–3, https://www.rand.org/. In Waltzman’s testimony before the Armed Services Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, he cited an example from India, where a riot requiring 13,000 Indian troops to quell broke out as the result of a fake video circulated online. The Hindus and Muslims involved were already emotionally charged and inclined toward particular perspectives, rendering them susceptible to manipulation.

15 Daniel Kahneman, Thinking Fast and Slow (New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 119. Kahneman describes the “anchoring effect” as one of “the most reliable and robust results of experimental psychology.”
Inside the Gates

Beijing’s War

The CCP’s extensive political warfare against the United States and its allies has been extensively documented.16 The PRC wages a widespread campaign aimed at surveilling, harassing, and coercing residents of not only the United States but also other nations. Since 2014, it has been reported that the PRC has hacked and stolen data from approximately 80 percent of Americans.17 Influence operations play a central role in Beijing’s strategy, as highlighted by security expert Michael Pillsbury’s exposition of the “Hundred-Year Marathon” strategy, which aims to realize the “China Dream” by 2049, reshaping the international order according to traditional Chinese ideals.18

In 2014, leading CCP theorist Zeng Huafeng outlined the concept of “brain control in cognitive space,” emphasizing its importance in “future wars,” where nations must leverage various informational channels—including propaganda media, national languages, and cultural products—as weapons to infiltrate, influence, and potentially dominate public cognition, emotions, and consciousness, particularly among both the general populace and national leadership.19 President Xi Jinping has further asserted that the Chinese socioeconomic model presents a novel option for global modernization.20

The narratives propagated by the CCP encompass several key themes:

1. The portrayal of Beijing’s strategy, policies, and intentions in a positive light.

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17 Jones et al., “Competing Without Fighting,” 30, XI.

18 Michael Pillsbury, The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2022), 28. The China Dream, published in 2009, was written by People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Colonel Liu Mingfu when he was a professor at China’s National Defense University. The book is a bestseller in China and “featured in all the ‘recommended reading’ section[s] of all state-controlled bookstores.” 29. The book is not fully translated into English and describes how China will surpass and then replace the United States.

19 Huang Kunlun, “Seize the Brain Power of Future Wars: PLA Daily Journalist Huang Kunlun Interview with Professor Zeng Huafeng, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, National University of Defense Technology,” PLA Daily, 16 June 2014, http://www.81.cn/. At the time of the interview, Zeng Huafeng was dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, National University of Defense Technology, headquartered in Kaifu, Changsha, Hunan China.

2. Characterizations of the CCP’s governance model as superior, emphasizing collectivism over individualism.

3. Depiction of Western nations as imperialistic and colonial powers, often accused of hypocrisy, racism, and sexism. Notably, the CCP’s news agency released “Ameri-cracy” in 2022, a viral video critiquing the United States for election fraud, human rights violations, and attempts at global domination, set to a children’s song.\textsuperscript{21}

4. Promotion of “One China” themes that assert territorial claims over Taiwan and delegitimize ethnic minorities such as Tibetans, Uighurs, Mongols, and others.

The PRC has a history of employing cognitive warfare to further its strategic objectives. During China’s Warring States period (475–221 BCE), a strategic landscape emerged marked by prolonged and deceptive competition. Competitors sought to undermine hegemonic powers by fostering complacency and discord, resorting to military action only when the “emperor was too weak to resist.”\textsuperscript{22} Drawing inspiration from this historical context, Beijing’s “Hundred-Year Marathon” strategy is informed by insights gleaned from the *Stratagems of the Warring States*,\textsuperscript{23} a compilation of lessons that articulate nine fundamental principles.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} Jones et al., “Competing Without Fighting,” 45–46.

\textsuperscript{22} Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 38–45. Pillsbury is currently the director of the Center for Chinese Strategy at the Hudson Institute. His book details decades of his analysis of original Chinese documents and personal account from his time in China as an academic and as a security professional. He served in senior positions in the Department of Defense and for multiple presidential administration as a China expert. This work affords not only detailed insight into the PRC’s historic and contemporary strategy (and the deep connection between the two), but his generational perspective on Beijing’s ambition and the means and ways by which they are achieving it illuminates how he and the Western security enterprise were slow to recognize the CCP’s true aims.


\textsuperscript{24} The Chinese concept of *shi* is about “aligning all forces” and consists of two strategic elements: “deceiving others into doing your bidding and waiting for the point of maximum opportunity to strike.” Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 36, 42.
The Stratagems of the Warring States, also known as Zhan Guo Ce, is an ancient Chinese text filled with anecdotes of political manipulation and warfare during the Warring States period (fifth to third centuries BCE). It offers a fascinating glimpse into the strategies and political views of that era.

Paraphrasing one author stated from an official People’s Liberation Army (PLA) publication, warfare has transcended the physical realm and increasingly revolves around mass media, making cognitive warfare the focal point where information serves as the ammunition. In 2015, the PRC allocated USD 10 billion toward foreign propaganda, an amount that has certainly increased since then.

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26 Ko, “Taiwan on the Frontline.”
actively conducts “a concerted information operations (IO) campaign on a global scale . . . to influence governments and voters.”

A 2023 cyberthreat analysis identified 10 coordinated covert information operations promoting CCP narratives, with a noted acceleration in PRC efforts against the United States and its allies, exploiting “emerging conspiracy theories.”

The security enterprise inevitably experiences conceptual delays in adopting new technologies as it deliberates their implications. However, there comes a point when the profession can no longer ignore anomalies and must embark on the extraordinary investigations that lead to paradigm-shifting revolutions.

Authoritarian regimes adeptly exploit and adapt to new technologies, employing information as a potent tool in the “heart of great-power competition,” while democracies often find themselves lagging behind. Insights from past conflicts can guide adaptation to the evolving security landscape.

*Truth emerges more readily from error than from confusion.*

—Francis Bacon

**Lessons from Wars Past**

On 31 January 1968, North Vietnam launched the Tet Offensive, unleashing 70,000 Communist troops in a coordinated surprise attack from the 20th parallel to the southern tip of Vietnam. Vietcong sappers breached the American Embassy in Saigon, and the disturbing images permeated the airwaves. Up to that point,

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27 Hsiao, “Political Warfare Alert,” 1. “The PRC’s well-documented interference in [Taiwan’s] 2018 and 2020 elections underscore the growing challenge facing all democracies.” See also, Gershanek, Political Warfare, 51, 138. It is estimated that the PRC spends more than USD 337 million annually on United Front Work Department (UFWD) recruiting efforts in Taiwan. The UFWD serves as an intelligence gathering and social engineering arm of the CCP that is charged with gaining influence over elite individuals and organizations outside the mainland. See: Alexander Bowe, *China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States* (Washington: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 24 August 2018), https://www.uscc.gov/.

28 Insikt Group, *Empire Dragon Accelerates Covert Information Operations, Converges with Russian Narratives* (Somerville, MA: Recorded Future, 30 August 2023), 2, https://go.recordedfuture.com/. This study notes distinct convergence with Russian anti-Western narratives and that the CCP’s information warfare efforts are becoming more coordinated and tailored, leveraging metadata and emerging AI technologies to target individuals and exploit opportunities more surreptitiously at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.


Americans had consistently ingested realistic war coverage and become accustomed to a familiar pattern. However, Tet shattered this familiarity. The years of witnessing helicopters hovering, navigating dense jungles, and encountering booby traps had ingrained in the American psyche images of a distant war and elusive enemy.\(^{32}\) In stark contrast, the coverage of the Tet Offensive portrayed the North as bold and triumphant, challenging previous perceptions.\(^{33}\)

Tet proved to be a resounding military setback for the North. Despite initial gains, American and South Vietnamese forces swiftly regained control of most territory, repelled subsequent offensives, and inflicted significant losses on North Vietnam and the Vietcong.\(^{34}\) However, the objective reality of the situation paled in comparison to the prevailing perception. After years of conflicting messages and faltering narratives, compounded by a nation increasingly uncertain about the direction and purpose of the Vietnam War and America’s role in it, President Lyndon Johnson addressed the nation, acknowledging, “There is a division in the American house now. There is a divisiveness among us . . . I cannot disregard the peril . . . With America’s sons in the fields far away, with America’s future under challenge at home, with our hopes and the world’s hopes for peace in the balance . . . I shall not seek . . . the nomination of my party for another term as your President.”\(^{35}\)

The Tet-induced cognitive dissonance, while not the sole factor, played a significant role in the demise of Johnson’s presidency, just as conflicting perceptions

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\(^{34}\) George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975.*, 2d ed., America in Crisis Series (New York: Knopf, 1986). 189–92. It is estimated that between the two offensives, the United States lost 1,100 men, the South Vietnamese lost 2,300 troops, and the Vietcong and North Vietnamese suffered close to 40,000 deaths.

and shifting public opinion contributed to the war’s ultimate outcome.\textsuperscript{36} Though
not initially intended, the impact of Tet on the United States was deemed favorable
by the politburo’s official history, acknowledging, “We had struck a decisive blow
that bankrupted the ‘limited war’ strategy of the American imperialists.”\textsuperscript{37} The
images from Tet reshaped American perceptions of the war and their government,
effectively unmooring and re-anchoring them. As observed, “Tet contorted the
reality of American military achievements to a false perception of North Vietnam-
eses Victory. What mattered was not the reality of Tet but what the public perceived
to be true.”\textsuperscript{38}

Despite possessing military, economic, and technological superiority, the United
States encountered strategic failure in Vietnam. Similarly, more recent American
efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan also fell short despite similar advantages. In 1972,
President Richard Nixon contextualized the Vietnam War within the broader
framework of great-power competition, remarking, “We’re in a much bigger
game—we’re playing a Russia game, a China game, and an election game.”\textsuperscript{39} As
the United States once again shifts focus toward great-power competition, it must
heed the lessons learned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{40}

The three wars were marked by significant cultural, historical, and social com-
plexities that defied mere military prowess. When viewed through the lens of a

\textsuperscript{36} The Paris Peace Accords were signed under the Nixon administration in January 1973, calling for a
ceasefire, withdrawal of US troops (although Nixon did promise continued support from American airpower),
and for the North and South to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Despite the Accords, fighting con-
tinued, albeit without direct US involvement, and Saigon ultimately fell to North Vietnamese forces during
the Ford administration in April 1975. For more in-depth analysis on the relationship between the media,
policy, and the military during the Vietnam era, see William M. Hammond, \textit{Public Affairs: The Military and
reading on the arc of the Vietnam War and US policies see Karnow, \textit{Vietnam}; George C. Herring, \textit{America’s
and Brian VanDeMark, \textit{In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam} (New York: First Vintage Books,
1996).

\textsuperscript{37} Karnow, \textit{Vietnam}, 523; and Merle L. Pribbenow, trans., \textit{Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the
People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975}; \textit{The Military History Institute of Vietnam, Modern War Studies} (Law-

\textsuperscript{38} Hersch, \textit{Images of Inherited War}. 109.

\textsuperscript{39} “Conversation Between President Nixon and His Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),”

\textsuperscript{40} In 2011, the Obama administration announced the “pivot to Asia,” see, “Barrack Obama says Asia-Pacific
\textit{National Security Strategy} describes the current decade as “decisive . . . for America and the world . . . [when]
terms of geopolitical competition between . . . major powers will be set.” \textit{National Security Strategy} (Washington:
socio-technical system, war emerges as a dynamic interplay between hard systems and human elements, indivisible in their interaction. According to socio-technical systems theory, organizations consist of interconnected subsystems encompassing both social and technical dimensions, where individuals work toward common goals, adhere to established processes, use technology, and share cultural assumptions and norms. Failures within campaigns or organizations often stem from a narrow focus on isolated aspects of the system, neglecting to analyze the intricate interdependencies that exist within it.41

![Figure 2. Socio-technical systems theory. (Source: “Socio-technical systems theory,” Leeds University Business School, n.d., https://business.leeds.ac.uk/.)](image)

Past shortcomings in warfare can be partly attributed to the security enterprise’s failure to adequately consider critical cultural, social, and human subsystems. Colin Gray identifies eight characteristics of American strategic culture, including a disregard for historical context, a preference for technical solutions, a lack of appreciation for cultural nuances, and a tendency to resort to military force.42 Gray criticizes what he terms “a cult of modernity,” which often neglects the complexities of the human dimension when formulating and implementing security strategies.43

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42 Colin S. Gray, Explorations in Strategy (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 89–93. Gray explains that five interdependent factors of American strategic culture drive eight distinct characteristics that influence the country’s way of war: the engineering style and the technical fix; impatience; indifference to cultural distinctions; a continental outlook, maritime situation, airpower preference; indifference to strategy; the resort to force, belated but massive; and the evasion of politics. Gray’s elucidations are salient and offer useful insight into past wartime strategies and on America’s contemporary planning, engagements, and strategic thought.
43 Gray, Explorations In Strategy, 90.
Achieving growth necessitates recognizing both gaps and opportunities. Cyber-space comprises not only technology but also the individuals and processes that connect them. While technology undoubtedly plays a vital role, the human element remains indispensable. The security enterprise must accelerate its adaptability or risk losing an ongoing information-cyber war that threatens “social, economic, and political cohesion.” Past failures should be viewed as opportunities for improvement rather than condemnations, and democracy, despite its imperfections, must not be relegated to the dustbins of history. Nonetheless, democracy faces significant threats, necessitating security strategies that can effectively counter the evolving landscape of “psychological-social-technical warfare.”

The manipulation of perceptions occurs on unprecedented “scales of time, space, and intentionality,” constituting one of the most significant vulnerabilities we, both as individuals and as a society, confront. Metadata algorithms empower the PRC to surveil, define, and manipulate targets. Smart devices serve as homing beacons for cognitive “bombs” within the networked information ecosystem, pinpointing weaknesses with precision. Beijing adeptly exploits cognitive vulnerabilities, categorizing targets based on their image, and either leveraging existing anchoring narratives or subverting and reshaping them to align with Beijing’s worldview. This article presents four interrelated terms encapsulated by the acronym NIRV, delineating how the PRC generates cognitive effects:

- **Nudging**—involves subtly attaching new or minor changes to already accepted narratives to steer target images toward CCP-aligned views, likened to putting kale in a child’s chocolate milkshake to get them to consume vegetables.

- **Injection**—entails the rapid dissemination of flash messages, images, or narratives directly to the subconscious, often devoid of context.

- **Repetition**—refers to the frequency with which a particular narrative recurs across all mediums.

- **Volume**—encompasses the diversity of narratives directed at a target, encompassing a wide range of perspectives and themes.

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46 Claverie and Du Cluzel, “Cognitive Warfare,” 2-1.  
Inside the Gates

Case Studies

The PRC leverages Hollywood and social media platforms to exert influence over American populations. *Access* in this context refers to the capability to deploy effects into a specified operational domain with adequate freedom of action to achieve the intended objectives.

It’s Just a Panda

In their 2023 Kenney Paper, *Mapping Chinese Influence in Hollywood*, Morgan A. Martin and Clinton J. Williamson provide insights into PRC objectives, investment partnerships between the PRC and US film companies, and outline PRC-approved movie narratives.49 The evolution of narratives within the *Kung Fu Panda* franchise across its three films released between 2008 and 2016 is notable. Initially, the storyline followed the protagonist, Po, on his hero’s journey as he triumphed over his adversary, echoing classic Western individualistic themes. Chinese elites questioned why the film was solely an American production and invited DreamWorks staff to visit pandas in mainland China.

Subsequent sequels witnessed a shift in scenery from a blend of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean backgrounds to predominantly Chinese imagery, with Po adopting more traditional Chinese attributes. Notably, DreamWorks and China Film Production Group collaborated on *Kung Fu Panda 3*, wherein Po’s success depended on countering the potent *chi* of a long-deceased villain and rallying the townspeople (the collective) to save China. The seemingly harmless collaboration aimed to eliminate unfavorable narratives and suggest pro-China alterations.

These changes, which may seem inconsequential individually, collectively established numerous anchors in narratives and images. While some may dismiss the film as mere entertainment featuring a cartoon panda, the PRC’s stratagems, inducing complacency and employing *shi* (aligning all forces and deception), remain applicable. It is crucial to recognize that youths and young adults, being particularly susceptible to significant self-image influences, constitute the primary target audience for most such coproduced films.50 Notably, *Kung Fu Panda 4* released in 2024.

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The Guest Becomes the Owner

Smart devices have expanded users’ access to the world and vice versa. However, this interconnectedness has also led to information overload, creating ripe opportunities for exploitation. Users often find themselves inundated with torrents of information, compelling them to rely on biases, analogies, and emotions when making decision, and rendering them more susceptible to influence. In the emerging “attention economy,” truth takes a backseat to capturing interest. Algorithms meticulously curate personalized feeds, frequently featuring emotionally charged content that amplifies the NIRV effects. Despite the dubious reliability of social media, these platforms continue to rank among the top sources of news for many individuals.

The popularity of social media can largely be attributed to its personalized nature. Users either select interest groups themselves or have them suggested based on algorithms that gather demographic data to construct tailored interest ecosystems.

The PRC employs over one million individuals in the online censorship sector, while more than 730,000 American computers have been compromised, allowing PRC hackers to transform them into “slaves.” PRC operatives engage in trolling, amplification, and dissemination of discord and disinformation across social platforms to achieve strategic objectives. For instance, the PRC-based information operations group Empire Dragon targeted American and Taiwanese populations with more than 1,800 posts disparaging democratic elections, democracy itself, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, her family, and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen during Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in 2022.

ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, is owned by the PRC, exerting significant influence over Chinese domestic opinion and conducting surveillance on citizens through a suite of mobile entertainment and e-commerce applications. Despite being perceived as innocuous entertainment, TikTok boasts 150 million users.

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51 Proverb from the Thirty-Six Stratagems, as quoted by Pillsbury, The Hundred-Year Marathon, 177.
53 Singer and Brooker, LikeWar, 21–23.
57 Timothy Snyder, The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America (New York: Crown, 2018).
58 Insikt Group, Empire Dragon. Empire Dragon is “a coordinated inauthentic network with exhaustive breadth in its social media presences” with content “on over 180 platforms, blogs, forums, and websites in over 20 languages,” 3.
monthly active users in the United States alone, contributing to its estimated global user base of 1.218 billion individuals, which accounts for approximately 25 percent of social media users worldwide—these figures only consider users aged 18 and above.\(^6^0\) However, beneath TikTok’s façade of ostensibly harmless amusement lies an intelligence apparatus that systematically collects, analyzes, and furnishes copious amounts of data to the CCP. Beijing actively monitors, censors—referred to as harmonizing by the CCP—and exploits this data to serve its strategic interests.\(^6^1\)

China’s domestic counterpart to TikTok, Douyin, bears a striking resemblance in appearance but operates under a vastly different framework. On Douyin, user-generated content takes a backseat, replaced instead by the dissemination of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and other educational videos, carefully crafted to propagate approved narratives and educate China’s populace. The stark contrast between ByteDance’s domestic and international platforms speaks volumes about the company’s objectives. Equally telling is the genesis of TikTok.

In 2017, ByteDance made headlines with its acquisition of Musical.ly, a US-owned karaoke application centered on user-generated content, for a staggering USD 1 billion. By merging the data-collection infrastructure of Musical.ly with that of Douyin, ByteDance birthed TikTok.\(^6^2\)

In 2022, the US Department of Defense passed the No TikTok on Government Devices Act, two years after it was initially proposed by then-President Donald Trump.\(^6^3\) While the bill provides scant context for the ban, media coverage highlighted TikTok’s use of location tracking and data collection, particularly against Forbes journalists probing the app’s ties to the PRC.\(^6^4\) Notably, a recent poll revealed that 32 percent of individuals aged 18-29 in the United States regularly consume “news” from TikTok (see fig. 3).\(^6^5\) Additionally, ByteDance owns Jinri Toutiao, an exclusively domestic news application that delivers curated news content to Chinese citizens.\(^6^6\) With ByteDance controlling the algorithms that govern content cura-

\(^6^1\) Singer and Brooker, LikeWar.
\(^6^6\) ChatGPT, “Response to ‘What Services Do the Other Companies ByteDance Owns Provide?’,” conversation with the authors, 6 February 2024, https://chat.openai.com.
tion for millions of Americans (see fig. 4), concerns about information manipulation and censorship loom large.

Figure 3. US consumption of TikTok “news.” (Source: Pew Research Center)
Inside the Gates

Two discernible themes surface from the analysis of access points. Firstly, the PRC strategically establishes footholds within the US system, cultivates dependencies on funding, and fosters habitual relationships. Democratic institutions and free-market societies often prioritize short-term gains and only later realize they have become ensnared in a far-reaching strategic web. Secondly, the CCP adeptly conceals nefarious intentions within seemingly innocuous and enticing ventures. Indeed, we find ourselves embroiled in a broader geopolitical contest.

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68 Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 45. Pillsbury correlates this strategy to the Chinese game of Wei qi, or “encirclement board,” where players win by deceiving opponents into complacency.
Figure 5. The new “Great Game”

**Recommendations**

At the national level, it is crucial to increase public awareness regarding the national security threat posed by products and services originating from the PRC. National leaders should actively disseminate the PRC’s openly shared strategies concerning lawfare, media warfare, and psychological warfare to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced. Moreover, following the US Congress’s passage of legislation banning TikTok from government devices, a national statement should have been issued to elucidate the reasons behind this decision and to empower citizens to take proactive measures to raise awareness and safeguard freedoms.

Additionally, there is a pressing need to address the significant gap between existing US data privacy legislation and the evolving threats to citizens’ data security and exposure to manipulative narratives. Enhancing data privacy laws to provide more comprehensive coverage, particularly concerning metadata collection, is essential. Drawing insights from the European Union’s General Data Protection

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69 Singer and Brooker, *LikeWar*. 86.
Regulation (GDPR), implemented in 2018, could inform potential US policies in this regard.\textsuperscript{70}

Weather forecasts serve as valuable tools, prompting individuals to take precautionary measures regardless of the forecast’s accuracy. Similarly, forecasting heightened adversarial information campaigns could effectively alert populations to anticipated adversarial narratives correlated with specific platforms and time horizons. By delivering forecasts akin to the air quality index, awareness of information operations could be raised, identifying groups most likely to be targeted and offering recommendations for media consumption practices (see table 1). One potential name for such an index could be the \textit{Adversarial Influence Index} (AI2).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|p{5in}|}
\hline
\textbf{Daily AQI Color} & \textbf{Levels of Concern} & \textbf{Values of Index} & \textbf{Description of Air Quality} \\
\hline
Green & Good & 0 to 50 & Air quality is satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk. \\
\hline
Yellow & Moderate & 51 to 100 & Air quality is acceptable. However, there may be a risk for some people, particularly those who are unusually sensitive to air pollution. \\
\hline
Orange & Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups & 101 to 150 & Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is less likely to be affected. \\
\hline
Red & Unhealthy & 151 to 200 & Some members of the general public may experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects. \\
\hline
Purple & Very Unhealthy & 201 to 300 & Health alert: The risk of health effects is increased for everyone. \\
\hline
Maroon & Hazardous & 301 and higher & Health warning of emergency conditions: everyone is more likely to be affected. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

In 2024, major elections are taking place around the world, including the United States, with those in Russia and Taiwan already having taken place. Despite the conclusion of the latter two elections, the need for tailored forecasts remains relevant as future elections approach. These forecasts could be customized for specific regions, communities, and interest groups. Social media companies could play a significant role in generating these predictions through trend analysis. Subsequently, a separate entity could analyze trends across platforms to identify information operations campaigns and provide forecasts accordingly. It is worth noting that

\textsuperscript{70} Pellaeon, “TikTok Vs Douyin.”
this proposed model diverges from the existing information operations condition (INFOCON) threat level system, which primarily concentrates on providing system status updates for computer network attack defense.\textsuperscript{71}

At the personal level, social media inundates users with vast amounts of information, often devoid of context, thereby providing adversaries with opportunities to sow and exploit internal divisions.\textsuperscript{72} Individuals struggle to adequately process the sheer volume of media content. Compounding this challenge, social media platforms were intentionally crafted based on principles of social engineering and influence. The chart presented below illustrates the correlation between some of Robert Cialdini’s seven foundational influence principles and common social media practices (see table 2).\textsuperscript{73}


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence Principle</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Media Feature Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Making something familiar through repetition generates belief</td>
<td>Algorithm curated content generating echo chambers, auto-play based on previous video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Proof</td>
<td>Behavior is deemed correct in a given situation if we see other performing it (i.e., laughter tracks in 1990s sitcoms)</td>
<td>Like buttons, sharing, demonstrating behavior on video, number of views counter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>People prefer to say yes to individuals they know, share similarities with, and like</td>
<td>Interest groups, like buttons, connection recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity</td>
<td>Opportunities seen as more valuable when they are less available</td>
<td>Number of views counter, endless scrolling, 24/7 news cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automaticity</td>
<td>Avalanche of information and choice (cognitive overload) require shortcuts to function in the modern world</td>
<td>Endless scrolling, billions of content generators, “short” format videos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Platforms strategically optimize design features, such as delaying the release of “likes” until a specific time, to trigger fixed-action subconscious responses. These features provide users with a series of calculated dopamine hits—a neurotransmitter associated with instant gratification.\textsuperscript{74} Additionally, applications capitalize on

\textsuperscript{71}“Information Operations Condition (INFOCON),” Public Intelligence, 25 June 2009, https://publicintelligence.net/.
\textsuperscript{72}Jones et al., “Competing Without Fighting,” 34.
the four stages of the habit development cycle: cue, craving, response, and reward.\textsuperscript{75} This cycle habituates users toward behaviors that are favorable to platform providers. \textit{You are being targeted anytime you use social media.} Designed to exploit cognitive vulnerabilities, social media is optimized for political warfare.

\textit{How to recognize if you are being targeted with disinformation?} One key indicator is the emotional response elicited by the content. If a piece of content triggers a strong emotional reaction, individuals should pause and question the credibility of the content or evaluate their own response. Developing emotional intelligence (EQ) skills can enhance self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. By improving EQ, individuals can become more attuned to their social media habits and better regulate their responses to various types of content.\textsuperscript{76} This heightened self-awareness facilitates improved self-management, which in turn can lead to reduced consumption of disinformation and significantly limit adversarial access.

In addition to EQ, critical thinking skills are indispensable for navigating the cognitive battlespace. Critical thinking enables users to identify logical fallacies, recognize biases (including their own), and seek out additional sources of information for verification. Digital literacy education is also crucial, as it empowers users to recognize and resist addictive design features (such as infinite scroll) and avoid harmful content. Democracies should prioritize the normalization of digital literacy as part of their K–12 curricula to ensure citizens are equipped to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape. Organizations like NATO’s Strategic Communication Center of Excellence and Taiwan’s counterinfluence strategy offer valuable reports and initiatives to aid in this endeavor.\textsuperscript{77}

EQ, complemented with critical thinking and digital literacy skills, forms an indispensable toolkit for combating adversarial narratives. This multifaceted approach harnesses the adaptive and innovative potential of a democracy’s diverse population, thereby capitalizing on one of its greatest strengths.

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\textsuperscript{75} James Clear, \textit{Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results} (New York: Avery, 2018), 15.

\textsuperscript{76} Travis Bradberry, \textit{Emotional Intelligence 2.0} (San Diego: TalentSmart, 2009), 23–27.

Conclusion

The evolution of conflict demands that nations expand their focus beyond traditional military domains to safeguard their homelands. This article has provided a glimpse into essential concepts necessary for dissecting the security challenges presented by contemporary socio-technical systems. Key themes explored include political warfare, cognitive warfare, PRC anchoring narratives and stratagems, COGSEC, the image, US historical blind spots, and the NIRV acronym. Through case study analysis, we have observed the patterns of CCP access and data collection techniques aimed at propagating PRC narratives, underscoring how such access grants Beijing strategic footholds within the gates of democracy.

It is imperative for free nations to unite and implement strategies that bolster COGSEC at the national, communal, and personal levels. By safeguarding democracy’s foundational image, enshrined in documents like the American Constitution and exemplified by the values upheld by democratic nations worldwide, we can fortify against external threats. As Pillsbury astutely observes, military confrontation represents only the culmination of a broader narrative. Today’s
competition unfolds predominantly in the information environment—a story still in the making, where democracies undoubtedly wield significant influence. As we navigate this evolving landscape, it is clear that democracies not only have a stake but also possess the agency to shape the course of events to come.\textsuperscript{78}

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\textsuperscript{78} Pillsbury, \textit{The Hundred-Year Marathon}, 195.
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The Implications of Climate Change for US National Security

DR. KELSEY A. FRAZIER

Abstract

This article examines the multifaceted implications of changing environmental conditions in the Arctic, particularly for US national security. It highlights both the challenges and opportunities these transformations present. As diminishing sea ice, altered wave dynamics, increased wind speeds, and emerging weather phenomena such as rogue waves and intensified lightning reshape the Arctic landscape, the need for adaptive strategies, enhanced surveillance, and robust infrastructure resilience becomes paramount. The analysis underscores the importance of leveraging technological advancements and fostering international collaboration to navigate the operational risks and strategic complexities resulting from the Arctic’s evolving climate. It also explores the economic potentials unlocked by new maritime routes and the access to untapped natural resources, advocating for sustainable and cooperative approaches to regional development and security. Through a comprehensive examination of the dynamic Arctic environment, this article emphasizes the United States’ pivotal role in promoting security, stability, and prosperity in the region, advocating for a proactive, informed, and collaborative approach to ensure a resilient, sustainable, and beneficial future for the Arctic and its stakeholders.

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The acquisition of Alaska from Russia in 1867 positioned the United States as a key player in the Arctic region, making it one of eight Arctic nations and one of five with coastlines along the Arctic Ocean. However, it was not until the 1970s that the United States began to formalize its Arctic strategy within national policy, initiated by President Richard Nixon’s National Security Decision Memorandum 144. This seminal document highlighted the Arctic’s strategic, economic, scientific, and environmental significance, stressing the need to enhance US capabilities for operations and understanding in the region.¹

Over the ensuing five decades, the United States has engaged in extensive research to deepen the understanding of the Arctic, leveraging partnerships among

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federal and state agencies, academia, and the private sector. This collective endeavor has yielded notable advancements, spanning from construction guidelines for permafrost regions to sophisticated Arctic equipment and improved weather prediction models. Despite these achievements, our current knowledge does not fully equip us to predict the Arctic’s future conditions accurately, a situation with significant homeland defense implications. Absent improvements to forecasting capabilities, the homeland defense ramifications loom large.

Arctic temperatures are rising at a rate four times faster than the global average, precipitating significant ecological transformations and challenging existing knowledge. This warming is uneven across regions, with areas like Northern Russia experiencing particularly rapid temperature increases, while others, like Northern Canada and Greenland, witness more gradual warming. These climate changes exert profound effects on construction, food sources, and the potential exploitation of the region’s resources.

The article aims to explore prospective climate scenarios in the Arctic and their strategic implications, particularly for US security interests. Drawing upon the latest academic research from leading institutions in North America and Europe, it analyzes historical data to forecast potential trends. This analysis aims to elucidate the implications of climatic shifts for inhabitants and operators in the Arctic, providing guidance for preparing for forthcoming challenges.

Strategic Context

Sea Ice

In the contemporary Arctic, the well-documented retreat of sea ice is characterized by the dominance of first-year ice, with multiyear ice observed in limited regions. This transformation sets the stage for a fundamental shift in the Arctic’s ice dynamics, particularly within the Arctic sea marginal ice zone (MIZ). Historically, the MIZ constituted a relatively modest portion, accounting for approximately 14–20 percent of the overall Arctic ice cover (fig. 1).
Figure 1. Chart of sea ice concentration produced by US National Ice Center (USNIC), 2 August 2023. Yellow indicates the current marginal ice zone and red indicates pack ice. In future decades, more yellow, and less red is predicted to appear on such charts. Figure is in the public domain.

However, recent climate models indicate a significant change on the horizon. By 2040, projections suggest a substantial expansion of the MIZ, encompassing more than 90 percent of the Arctic’s sea ice. This evolving MIZ landscape carries far-reaching security implications, notably the escalation in the mobility of sea ice. With a larger portion of the ice cover now falling within the MIZ, the once stable central ice pack is diminishing, ushering in a more dynamic and rapidly shifting

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sea ice environment. These transformations hold critical significance for Arctic operators and planners, prompting adaptations in navigation, resource utilization, and strategic planning to address the evolving conditions.

As sea ice undergoes changes, the dynamics of wave attenuation are also experiencing a discernible transformation. Ice and waves have a complex interaction. While sea ice suppresses waves by dissipating their energy, waves simultaneously break up sea ice at the leading (outermost) edge. The dominance of either ice or waves in this interplay hinges on ice thickness. Historically, when sea ice thickness surpassed a threshold of 0.5 meters or more, wave attenuation rates were observed to be twice as high.\(^4\) Comparisons between observed wave attenuation rates and models of future conditions suggest that when wave height and period are closely matched, older and thicker ice facilitates more rapid wave attenuation.

However, with the Arctic experiencing a reduction in ice coverage and thickness across the region, a shift in attenuation rates is occurring. The diminishing and thinning ice no longer acts as an effective barrier to dampen wave energy. This development carries substantial consequences, considering the increased mobility of sea ice and the expanding Arctic MIZ. This transformation will result in amplified waves within the region, impacting shorelines by accelerating erosion and block collapse along bluff faces. These changes necessitate strategic adaptations for operators and planners navigating the evolving Arctic seascape.

Surface Waves

Wave behavior in the Arctic is undergoing a transformation in response to the diminishing sea ice cover. As the expanse of pack ice recedes and the Arctic’s sea MIZ expands, the behavior of surface waves is gaining prominence. This shift stems from the increased availability of open water, allowing for more extensive interactions between the wind and the water’s surface. Supported by empirical observations, satellite data, and wave models, this phenomenon underscores the growing fetch in the Arctic Ocean due to diminished ice coverage.\(^5\)

In 2012, one of the earliest fall storms was documented in the central Beaufort Sea, yielding wave heights of five meters primarily due to the absence of sea ice.

\(^4\) Bing Qing Huang and Xiao-Ming Li, “Wave Attenuation by Sea Ice in the Arctic Marginal Ice Zone Observed by Spaceborne SAR,” *Geophysical Research Letters* 50, no. 21 (8 November 2023), https://doi.org/.

Utilizing this data, Jim Thomson and W. Erick Rogers generated hindcast models illustrating the impact of storms on ice-free regions of the Arctic.\textsuperscript{6}

With a larger surface area of open water and the wind acting over greater distances, regional wave heights are on the rise. Projections from modeling efforts indicate that by 2100, significant wave heights will exhibit a two-to-three-meter increase compared to current averages across much of the Arctic Ocean.\textsuperscript{7} This heightened surface variability increases risk for maritime surface operations, thus bearing significant homeland security implications, particularly for search-and-rescue (SAR) operations, emergency response, and general security activities. Moreover, the upsurge in wave heights, when coupled with rising sea levels, may pose additional threats to coastal communities in the region.

Another factor contributing to the increasing fetch and anticipated wave conditions in the future stems from the northward migration of polar lows (PL), which are transient weather systems that manifest over open water or in the vicinity of the MIZ when air temperatures reach a critical cold threshold. These weather phenomena are characterized by their relatively small scale, spanning from 200-km to 1,000-km in diameter, and their intense yet relatively short-lived nature, persisting for periods ranging from six hours to a few days.\textsuperscript{8}

As the sea ice diminishes, climate models suggest a potential decline in the observed frequency of PLs at lower latitudes, partly attributed to the retreat of sea ice. However, as this transition unfolds, the significance of these atmospheric phenomena should not be underestimated. PLs have the capacity to generate substantial wave heights, often exceeding 10 meters, along with extended wave periods. The result of these evolving climatic shifts is an increased variability in surface wave heights and unpredictability in regional weather patterns. These changes add to the challenge of maritime air and surface operations given the difficulties US weather models have accurately predicting PLs.

In the context of climate change and its ramifications for both Arctic shipping and maritime patrol operations, recent simulations conducted by George Mason University reveal a noteworthy shift in wave hazards within the region. As pack ice continues its retreat and opens the Northwest Passage (NWP), their findings

\textsuperscript{6} Thomson and Rogers, “Swell and Sea in the Emerging Arctic Ocean.”
indicate a prospective extension of the shipping season, with a projected five-month period of reduced sea ice risk for maritime activities by the year 2070. As the reduction in ice cover permits increased shipping activity, it also extends the seasonal period during which wave hazards are present. Historically, sea ice begins to develop in late September. If models are correct, and freeze-up shifts toward November, then extreme wave heights will coincide with freezing temperatures. The combination of these factors raises concerns about the threat of rime icing on marine vessels during this extended shipping period. This emerging hazard underscores the need for adaptive strategies and heightened vigilance by Arctic mariners and airmen to safely and effectively navigate the evolving Arctic seascape.

**Wind Speed**

Surface winds in the Arctic are also experiencing noteworthy changes. A study conducted by Stephen J. Vavrus and Ramdane Alkama employed 28 models from 17 nations within the Collaborative Model Intercomparison Project Phase 5 (CMIP5) to predict the mean surface wind conditions in the Arctic through the year 2100. Initially, they examined a reference period of known sea ice concentrations and mean wind speeds from 2006 to 2015. Past data clearly showed an anticorrelation between sea ice concentration and surface speeds. In sum, as the extent of ice covering the ocean diminished, the wind speeds increased. Subsequently, the researchers utilized various models and numerous future scenarios to predict future changes. Their findings indicate an overall strengthening of wind speeds, within the range of 0.4 to 0.8 meters per second, and an approximate 13 percent overall increase in windiness across the entire Arctic region.

Seasonally, this research indicates that the Arctic will experience its most significant winds during the winter months, accompanied by notable increases in wind strength during the fall. Regions projected to experience substantial increases include the Chukchi–East Siberian Seas, Franz Josef Land, and Hudson Bay. A particularly striking observation is the predicted peak in mean wind speeds, reflecting a 23-percent increase in the vicinity of Wrangel Island, northwest of the Bering Strait. This heightened wind activity, especially during the winter season, is expected to result in a 1.5 meters per second (m/s) increase, carrying considerable implications for communities in Siberia and Alaska.

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Similar conclusions were reached by Mirseid Akperov and colleagues, albeit employing a different ensemble of climate models.\textsuperscript{11} Looking at future periods of 2020–2049 and 2070–2099, these researchers’ findings also indicated an overall increase in wind speeds across the Arctic Ocean, with regional peaks in the Bering and Chukchi Seas and around Greenland. One curious finding was a modeled outcome showing significant decreases in wind speeds in both the Barents Sea and around Norway, despite predictions of diminished sea ice in the area.

Of importance to maritime industries are the predicted regional differences in mean wind speeds along the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the NWP. Both routes are undergoing increased scrutiny as shipping lanes and are likely to see more traffic in the coming years due to diminished sea ice. The models indicate that the NSR is poised to experience a more gradual increase in wind conditions when compared to the NWP. This discrepancy stems from variances in sea ice depletion, characterized by accelerated ice loss along the northern coast of Russia and more gradual losses along North America, and the intricate interplay of wind patterns across diverse Arctic regions.

These findings hold profound implications for homeland security in the Arctic region. Foremost is the need for accurate and timely regional Arctic weather forecasts. With the Arctic experiencing elevated average windiness and increasing variability in conditions, the necessity for precise and localized weather predictions is paramount. Additionally, the regional changes will provide some Arctic nations with calmer coastal waters, while others will contend with seas that are more challenging to navigate. Increasing hazardous conditions will impact coastal infrastructure, settlements, and commercial interests—notably oil, gas, and critical mineral extraction. The actual impact of these conditions on regional economics and geopolitics remains to be seen.

\textbf{Rogue Waves}

In January 2024, a rogue wave hit the US Army Garrison–Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.\textsuperscript{12} Large waves are classified as \textit{rogue} when the wave height is greater than twice the local significant wave height. For the Marshall Islands,


the significant (severe) wave height is 2.91-m; the January rogue wave was 4.57-m.\textsuperscript{13} Given that the surrounding area of Roi-Namur Island, where the base is situated, has an elevation of only 4 meters above sea level, the devastation wrought by the wave comes as no surprise. Yet, the term rogue may be somewhat misleading; while these wave types might be less frequent, they occur all around the world on a daily basis, including in the Arctic.

For years, rogue waves were dismissed as mere folklore until the advent of modern oceanographic technology. As recently as 1995, the scientific community largely disregarded these extreme waves. However, this perception changed with the discovery of radar data from the Goma oilfield in the North Sea provided evidence of 466 rogue waves over a 12-year period. This empirical evidence refuted the assumption that rogue waves were exceedingly rare events occurring once in every 10,000 years.\textsuperscript{14}

In the Arctic, public sources of data on rogue waves are scarce, with most recorded instances near the Arctic originating from the North Sea. Untranslated research by Russian scientists at the Marine Hydrophysical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as summarized in English by Aleksej Kudenko, suggests that they possess relevant information; however, current geopolitical circumstances hinder efforts to ascertain the exact source of such data.\textsuperscript{15} Still, the English-language article mentions that their scientists have models predicting 4-meter waves occurring at least six times a year, 8-meter waves occurring two to three times annually, and 10-meter waves occurring about once a year. Furthermore, the article mentions that 15-meter waves in the Arctic are an event occurring once a decade.

The locations where such rogue waves occur remain a subject of ongoing study. Scientists are still investigating their development and identifying areas prone to experiencing large wave events. However, the trends of reduced sea ice, heightened wave activity, and increased wind in the Arctic signal a future environment more susceptible to significant waves. Coupled with the relatively low elevation along coastal areas of the Arctic, rogue waves are likely to pose geophysical, safety, and livelihood security concerns for both terrestrial communities and future Arctic mariners.


Arctic Cyclones

The distinction between hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons lies in their geographical naming conventions; however, all represent the same meteorological phenomenon: a rotating, organized system of clouds and thunderstorms. Typically, these storms form in mid-latitudes when the temperature of ocean water in the upper 50 meters reaches at least 27°C (80°F), creating atmospheric instability from the heat exchange between the ocean and air, which fuels the convective process and storm intensification. Arctic cyclones, distinct with their “cold cores,” depend on factors such as sea ice concentration (SIC), turbulent heat flux, static stability, and vertical wind shear. Unlike equatorial hurricanes, Arctic storm intensification results from the convergence of two disparate air masses with varying temperatures.

The presence of sea ice significantly influences Arctic cyclones. Abundant sea ice restricts the turbulent heat flux between the ocean and the atmosphere, whereas minimal ice allows for unrestrained energy transfer. Recent research by Alex D. Crawford and colleagues has shown that Arctic cyclones intensify in areas with reduced sea ice, particularly during fall and winter, and are associated with increased precipitation. Furthermore, the distribution of sea ice is affected, with an increase on the western edge of a cyclone and a decrease on the eastern edge due to wind rotation around the storm’s core.

Coastal Arctic communities face mounting vulnerability to the impacts of these storms as sea ice cover diminishes. In September 2022, Typhoon Merbok made landfall on Alaska’s western coast, unleashing storm surges and high winds. Without the sea ice that historically mitigated the impact of such storms, the region experienced substantial flooding and water damage. These storms can also bring warm winds and heavy rainfall, exacerbating geophysical security concerns by hastening permafrost thaw and damaging critical infrastructure.

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17 Alex D. Crawford et al., “Reduced Sea Ice Enhances Intensification of Winter Storms over the Arctic Ocean,” *Journal of Climate* 35, no. 11 (June 1, 2022): 3353–70, https://doi.org/.
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Figure 2. The remnants of Typhoon Merbok hover over Western Alaska bringing significant rain and storm surge to the region. (Source: NOAA/NESDES/STAR.)

With ongoing Arctic warming and diminishing sea ice, more intense winter storms may become the norm. This underscores the importance of improving regional weather models and response strategies. In contrast to the southern United States, where communities and government agencies collaborate on storm preparedness, Alaska’s response mechanisms are less developed. As the Arctic environment evolves, weaker static stability and stronger wind shear are expected to promote the development of more cyclones, highlighting the need for enhanced preparedness and response capabilities in the region.

Polar Lows

PLs are distinct meteorological phenomena that occur near the poles, resembling tropical cyclones in their formation due to the interaction between cold, dry air
and the warmer ocean surface. Classified as mesoscale, or intermediate-sized, events, they typically span approximately 300 kilometers in diameter and last for 12 to 32 hours.\textsuperscript{20} Known for their rapid development and severe local weather conditions, PLs can generate strong winds, heavy snowfall, and turbulent seas, with wave heights sometimes exceeding six meters, including occurrences of rogue waves.\textsuperscript{21} The North Atlantic is notably the most frequent host of these systems.\textsuperscript{22}

With the ongoing shifts in global climate, the formation sites and frequency of PLs are evolving. In the Arctic, they are increasingly forming near the MIZs and over areas with higher sea surface temperatures, prompted by the retreating ice. Climate models predict a northward shift in the formation regions of future PLs,\textsuperscript{23} accompanied by an anticipated 15-percent decrease in their average occurrence.\textsuperscript{24} In specific regions like the Nordic Sea, the frequency of PLs is expected to decline during the winter months, albeit with a slight increase in March. The scientific community remains divided over how these changes will affect the intensity of such systems.

The potential decrease in PLs might reduce weather-related risks for Arctic maritime activities, but it also signals broader climatic implications. Such a reduction in mesoscale storms is linked to diminished large-scale ocean circulation, notably affecting the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC).\textsuperscript{25} The pivotal role of AMOC in redistributing heat across latitudes implies that weakening the Atlantic Ocean’s capacity to modulate temperature conditions could profoundly affect marine ecosystems, weather patterns, and global food security. Moreover, such alterations may significantly influence human migration, as changing conditions render certain regions less habitable.

**Lightning**

Recent observations have highlighted an increasing threat from thunderstorms in the Arctic, a region where such phenomena were historically rare. A notable event occurred in 2019 with the first recorded thunderstorm in the Central Arctic, ap-


\textsuperscript{21}Moreno-Ibáñez, Laprise, and Gachon, “Recent Advances in Polar Low Research.”

\textsuperscript{22}Stoll, “A Global Climatology of Polar Lows.”

\textsuperscript{23}Moreno-Ibáñez, Laprise, and Gachon, “Recent Advances in Polar Low Research.”


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proximately 300 miles from the North Pole, marking a significant shift in climatic patterns. The year 2021 saw a striking 91-percent increase in lightning activity above 80° north compared to the total detections from 2012 to 2020. \(^{26}\) Research by Robert H. Holzworth and colleagues identified a linear correlation between the fraction of global lightning occurring above 65° north and regional temperature rises. \(^{27}\) This trend suggests that a further global temperature increase of 0.5° C could potentially double the rate of lightning strikes in the Arctic from the levels recorded in 2020.

The year 2021 also witnessed lightning strikes on sea ice, a phenomenon of considerable environmental significance. \(^{28}\) Although such events are rare, the changing climate conditions, marked by warmer Arctic summers, create uncertainties about the future frequency and distribution of lightning in the region. These thunderstorms, especially those near the central Arctic Ocean, affect a wide range of stakeholders, including mariners, SAR teams, and operators of offshore infrastructure like oil and gas platforms. Beyond the direct threat to human safety—impacting researchers, expedition participants, and indigenous populations in remote areas—lightning poses risks to critical infrastructure. It can disrupt communication systems, scientific equipment, and navigation tools, complicating both research and maritime activities. This situation emphasizes the need for effective risk management and preparedness to address the emerging challenges of lightning hazards in the Arctic.

Discussion

The diminishing sea ice in the Arctic, along with changes in wave attenuation, poses multifaceted challenges for US security interests. The reduction in sea ice thickness and coverage diminishes the ice’s capacity to dampen wave energy, leading to increased wave action. This development jeopardizes naval and commercial navigability and amplifies operational risks. Furthermore, the resulting erosion and geological instability threatens infrastructure, including military installations and civilian communities, necessitating strategic adaptations and enhanced resilience. The expanding MIZ also impacts strategic mobility and access, highlighting both opportunities and challenges for military and Coast Guard operations in a region of increasing geopolitical interest.


As the Arctic becomes more accessible yet unpredictable, the United States must adapt its security posture, infrastructure planning, and operational protocols. Enhanced surveillance and situational awareness are essential for anticipating and mitigating the risks associated with these environmental changes. The national security implications extend to maritime operations, Arctic domain awareness, and coastal community resilience, as modeling efforts predict significant increases in wave heights and wind speeds by the year 2100. The northward migration of PLs and the increasing occurrence of rogue waves further complicate surface conditions, challenging both navigation and infrastructure planning. Additionally, the extension of the shipping season through the NWP introduces new hazards, such as extreme wave conditions and rime icing on vessels and infrastructure, necessitating adaptive strategies for safer surface navigation, commercial activities, and SAR operations.

The observed and projected increases in surface wind speeds, particularly around strategic locations such as Wrangel Island, Hudson Bay, and western Alaska, significantly impact Arctic operations. These changes demand enhanced weather forecasting capabilities and a sophisticated understanding of regional weather dynamics. The variability in sea ice loss and wind patterns across the Arctic underscores the need for precise, localized weather predictions to inform decision making, operations, and strategic planning.

Moreover, the convergence of increasing Arctic cyclones, the northward migration of PLs, intensified lightning activity, and the advent of Arctic rogue waves introduces a complex array of challenges. These environmental shifts necessitate a re-evaluation of operational strategies and the development of robust risk-mitigation practices. Prioritizing advancements in technology and geophysical intelligence to navigate the unpredictable Arctic environment is crucial for ensuring the safety of personnel and the security of assets. Collectively, these changes underscore the imperative for the United States to remain agile and informed in the face of the Arctic’s evolving landscape, safeguarding national security interests while supporting Indigenous communities and maintaining regional stability.

**Conclusion**

The evolving environmental conditions in the Arctic, highlighted by diminishing sea ice, changing wave dynamics, increased wind speeds, and the emergence of new weather phenomena such as rogue waves and intensified lightning, present a complex tableau of challenges and opportunities for US security interests. These changes undoubtedly introduce heightened operational risks and necessitate a re-evaluation of strategic and infrastructural resilience. Yet, they also open avenues
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for enhanced collaboration, innovation, and leadership in addressing the multifaceted implications of climate change in the Arctic region.

The United States, as a key player in Arctic affairs, has the opportunity to lead efforts in developing advanced surveillance, weather prediction models, and risk-mitigation strategies. Such initiatives not only safeguard national security interests but also contribute to the safety and well-being of the broader Arctic community. By embracing adaptive strategies and leveraging technological advancements, the United States can confidently and foresightedly navigate the uncertainties of the Arctic’s changing landscape.

The shifting conditions in the Arctic also offer potential for expanded maritime routes, like the NSR and the NWP, presenting economic opportunities and the prospect of shorter global shipping paths. Coupled with the possibility of accessing untapped natural resources, these developments underscore the importance of sustainable and cooperative approaches to exploration, shared security, and development in the Arctic.

The challenges presented by the changing Arctic environment can catalyze international collaboration and foster dialogue and partnerships among Arctic nations to address shared concerns related to security, environmental protection, and sustainable development. In this context, the United States can play a pivotal role in promoting research, enhancing regional governance, and advocating for responsible stewardship of the Arctic’s unique and fragile ecosystem.

Embracing the dual nature of the challenges and opportunities presented by the Arctic’s climate transformation will allow the United States to demonstrate leadership in promoting security, stability, and prosperity in the region. Through a proactive, informed, and collaborative approach, the United States can shape a future for the Arctic that is resilient, sustainable, and beneficial for all stakeholders involved. This vision ensures a peaceful, stable, and thriving Arctic for generations to come, highlighting the positive and hopeful outlook amid the region’s ongoing changes.

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Dr. Frazier serves as the acting associate director for research and analysis at the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies. With a PhD in mechanical engineering, her pioneering work encompasses Arctic maritime safety, oil spill mitigation, and sea ice modeling, alongside her significant contributions through authoritative publications and leadership at international defense and security conferences. As a dedicated Alaskan, Dr. Frazier’s commitment extends beyond research to mentoring the next generation of STEM professionals in areas critical to national defense and strategic interests.
Vulnerabilities and Hybrid Threats in the North American Arctic

Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché

Abstract

The North American Arctic presents unique geographical, social, political, economic, and military conditions that constitute significant drivers of vulnerability. This article examines some key vulnerabilities in Alaska and the Canadian Arctic and how they interact, providing opportunities for China and Russia to advance their interests in the region at the expense of Canada and the United States. Hybrid threats tend to manifest at the gaps and seams of those vulnerabilities, undermining both Arctic security and North American strategic interests. Resilience is the greatest defense against hybrid threats and is best achieved upstream through a whole-of-society approach to eliminate or mitigate vulnerabilities before they can be exploited, or to reduce potential harm resulting from their exploitation.

The North American Arctic has long been neglected by the national security and defense establishments in Washington, DC, and Ottawa, owing to its inaccessibility, austerity, and remoteness. Discussions on homeland defense have tended to focus on conventional and strategic threats passing through the Arctic. However, as the region becomes more accessible due to climate change, a growing number of countries are showing interest in the region, its resources, and sea routes. China, in particular, has shown keen interest in the North American Arctic. In 2023, two Chinese high-altitude balloons flying over North America were shot down by US fighter jets, one over Yukon and the other off the coast of North Carolina in the Atlantic Ocean. These incidents attracted substantial public attention and raised concerns for national security and continental defense in both Canada and the United States.

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1 The North American Arctic is defined here as comprising Alaska’s and Canada’s Arctic and northern regions. The latter includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, as well as portions of northern Quebec and Labrador that are part of the homeland of Inuit peoples, Inuit Nunangat.

2 On distinguishing threats in, to and through the Arctic, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Threats Through, To, and In the Arctic: A Framework for Analysis,” NAADSN Policy Brief, 23 March 2021, https://www.naadsn.ca/.
While US conventional and strategic deterrence remains robust, North America is no longer the geographic sanctuary it once was. Thanks to technological advancements and the emergence of new domains such as cyber and information warfare, adversaries—especially China and Russia—are employing alternative tactics to undermine Canadian and US interests without engaging in direct conflict. These hybrid threats blend military and nonmilitary means to achieve the adversary’s strategic objectives at the expense of both nations.3

Despite the evident risks, the national defense community continues to overlook hybrid threats to North America and its Arctic domain. To gain a deeper understanding of how hybrid threats could manifest in the North American Arctic and undermine homeland defense, it is crucial to understand how unique geographical, economic, social, and political conditions contribute to vulnerability in the region. Accordingly, this article examines vulnerabilities across the North American Arctic and how adversaries might exploit them to undermine the defense of Canada and the United States. It concludes by discussing the critical importance of resilience and integrated deterrence to counter hybrid threats in the North American Arctic.

Understanding Vulnerabilities

*Vulnerabilities* are factors that heighten susceptibility to harm. In the Arctic, Canada and the United States are most vulnerable due to the range of vulnerabilities and how those vulnerabilities interact and overlap.4 From a military perspective, significant vulnerabilities for national and continental defense arise from gaps in situational awareness, limited military infrastructure, and lack of government presence across the North American Arctic.5 Nonmilitary factors—particularly socioeconomic disparities, inadequate critical infrastructure, and complex governance structures governing land and resources—further expose the region to hostile actions. The region’s challenging geography and climate, along with the rapid and profound impacts of climate change, compound these vulnerabilities.

Social-Economic Discrepancies

Indigenous peoples across Northern Canada and Alaska struggle significant socioeconomic disparities compared to the rest of the region’s inhabitants and the

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5 Rivard Piché and Sylvestre, *Vulnerabilities and Hybrid Threats in the Canadian Arctic*, 7.
general Canadian and US populations. In Canada, Inuit communities contend with elevated infant mortality rates and heightened food insecurity. In Alaska, Native populations face increased risks of cardiovascular disease, homicide, alcoholism, and domestic violence. Moreover, Indigenous communities across the region confront a heightened risk of suicide, with Inuit populations experiencing some of the highest rates in the world.

These populations also bear a disproportionate burden of economic hardship. In Canada, the median individual income for Inuit individuals stands at a striking 75 percent lower than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts residing in Inuit Nunangat.6 The growth of the formal wage economy, coupled with the effects of climate change, is transforming traditional ways of life, encroaching upon subsistence and nonwage-based activities.7 In Alaska, despite being one of the wealthiest states per capita in the United States, a quarter of Native Alaskans find themselves living below the poverty line.8

Of notable significance are the disparities between urban and rural Alaskan Natives; rural Native communities often lack access to public services, essential infrastructure, and tangible economic opportunities.9 These disparities exacerbate long-standing grievances among Indigenous peoples, eroding trust and legitimacy in their interactions with provincial, state, and federal authorities.

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6 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) delineates the land, water, and ice that form the ancestral homeland of the Inuit in Canada. This expanse encompasses four key northern Canadian regions: the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, the territory of Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec, and Nunatsiavut in Newfoundland and Labrador. Translated from Inuktitut, the term signifies “the place where Inuit live,” underscoring the fundamental role of the land, water, and ice in Inuit culture. The concept of Inuit Nunangat holds pivotal significance in grasping the geographical and cultural milieu of the Inuit people. It not only delineates their physical territory but also encapsulates their profound connection to the environment and asserts their sovereignty over this terrain. See: Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (Ottawa: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019), 23, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/.


9 Berman, “Resource rents, universal basic income.”
Vulnerabilities and Hybrid Threats in the North American Arctic

Sparse Critical Infrastructure

Critical infrastructure encompasses the array of “processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of [a country’s population] and the effective functioning of government.”\(^\text{10}\) Compared to other parts of the continent, the North American Arctic suffers from a glaring deficiency in critical infrastructure, further compounded by its heightened vulnerability to environmental stressors and damage. Shortcomings in redundancy, maintenance deficiencies, and the impact of climate change on permafrost and ice layers exacerbate this challenge, jeopardizing the safety and wellbeing of local populations and impeding resilience in the face of disasters and emergencies.

For example, the lack of roads and the ongoing challenge of maintaining existing ones as the permafrost shifts severely restricts access to isolated communities. In Iqaluit, the largest population center in Nunavut, insufficient access to potable water required the intervention of the Canadian Armed Forces in 2022.\(^\text{11}\) Additionally, limited telecommunications and internet connectivity across the region creates significant hurdles for local communities, as well as government and military operations.\(^\text{12}\) While the gradual installation of sub-sea optical cables across the region enhances internet accessibility, recent incidents highlight the need for redundancy through satellite-based services.\(^\text{13}\)

In Alaska, where the energy sector generates 80 percent of the state government’s revenues, concerns loom large over the durability and safety of the Trans-Alaska pipeline and associated infrastructure amid permafrost thawing.\(^\text{14}\) Any incident would disproportionately impact Native communities and their land, exacerbating the situation due to constrained disaster response and search-and-rescue capabilities.


\(^{11}\) Kaylia Little, “Iqaluit’s water crisis highlights deeper issues with Arctic infrastructure,” Arctic Institute, 2 May 2022, https://www.theartcinstitute.org/.


Land and Resources Governance

The region presents a complex governance landscape due to the presence of multiple stakeholders with often divergent interests, goals, and authorities. Relationships among these entities are often fraught with conflict and discord, rooted deeply in enduring colonial legacies. Central to this governance conundrum are issues of land and resource ownership and management spanning the region.

In Canada, the reconciliation process between the federal government and Indigenous peoples led to unique governance arrangements with Indigenous communities, pivotal for resource management and development. In Alaska, the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act facilitated the transfer of land to Alaska Native corporations, granting them freehold land and subsurface resource rights.

Nonetheless, these arrangements are far from flawless, and tensions occasionally flare. At times, federal entities have disregarded established agreements in favor of pro-development interests. For examples, Alaskan tribes have expressed serious concerns over potential rollbacks of protections over federally managed land, which could pave the way for resource extraction and exploitation on land Alaskan Natives consider part of their traditional landscape. Such actions could significantly impact ecosystems already fragile due to the effects of climate change.

Projects like the Willow oil development on the North Slope, have received mixed support from Native Alaskans and face legal challenges. On the one hand, some welcoming the promised economic benefits while others fear the environmental and health consequences on their communities. While some groups embrace these projects for their potential to bolster local economies and reduce

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dependence on state and federal funding, others residing closer to the sites harbor concerns over the environmental and health impacts on their communities. Similar dynamics exist in Canada, exemplified by the protracted hiatus in the expansion of the Mary River mine on Baffin Island.23 Here, diverse factions engage in a tug-of-war for influence via governance and review mechanisms, with questions of Indigenous group representation and legitimacy at the heart of the saga.

Socioeconomic disparities, insufficient critical infrastructure, and complex land and resource management systems are but a few examples of conditions rendering the North American Arctic vulnerable to hybrid threats. These vulnerabilities intertwine in ways that magnify their effects, potentially fostering rifts and contentious issues ripe for exploitation by hostile actors, thereby undermining homeland defense.

**Hybrid Threats**

One of the biggest challenges associated with hybrid and subthreshold threats lies in their elusive nature, often cloaked in plausible deniability by their sponsors. Legitimate, overt activities can serve as cover for concurrent or future nefarious actions. Even when hostile activities are detected within North American borders, gauging their scope, intent, and impact on homeland defense proves arduous. Incidents occurring in or targeting the Arctic can also have consequences outside the region, undermining public trust, sowing disagreements and resentment between northerners and southerners, or influencing public debate and agenda setting through disinformation campaigns.

While the threat posed by China and Russia to—rather than through—the North American Arctic should not be overstated, both nations have demonstrated their ability to exploit gaps and seams in the region to undermine Canadian and US interests, and potentially, homeland defense. Nevertheless, it is important to not conflate Russian and Chinese posture and interests in the region. Russia is the biggest Arctic nation by both population and territory, and thus holds sovereign rights in the region, whereas China is battling for influence and secure access.

**China**

China’s interest in the circumpolar Arctic is growing, but its current presence and influence remains fairly limited.24 Beijing’s primary focus revolves around issues closer to its homeland, including Taiwan and the South China Sea. Nonethe-

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23 Rivard Piché and Sylvestre, *Vulnerabilities and Hybrid Threats in the Canadian Arctic.*
24 Rivard Piché and Sylvestre, *Vulnerabilities and Hybrid Threats in the Canadian Arctic.*
less, the circumpolar North has emerged as a theater for great power competition, with the North American Arctic being no exception. Unlike the United States and Russia, China lacks territorial holdings above the Arctic Circle. Consequently, Beijing relies on scientific and economic endeavors to stake a claim in the region. However, operating under the principle of civil-military fusion, Chinese civilian activities, technology, and infrastructure can be leveraged for military purposes. This permeability between the civilian and military contributes to China’s rapid military development and raises serious concerns in the North American Arctic where needs for economic development, critical infrastructure, and financial investment are acute and but also susceptible to exploitation by Beijing.25

China frames its scientific expeditions in the Arctic as efforts to better understand climate change, support sustainable resource exploitation, and map commercial sea routes. 26 In recent years, the Xue Long II icebreaker has traversed the Northwest Passage and conducted research expeditions in the Beaufort Sea and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Chinese monitoring buoys have also been deployed in Canadian Arctic waters. 27 These scientific expeditions and monitoring devices facilitate a deeper understanding of sea ice dynamics, underwater acoustics, and the Arctic seabed. 28 Such research also holds significant implications for underwater operations and maritime capabilities development, potentially paving the way for the deployment of nuclear submarines to the Arctic or the creation of technology capable of monitoring US submarine activities.

Furthermore, within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is developing infrastructure projects encompassing satellite receiver stations, offshore platforms, cables, pipelines, and deep-sea ports that could enable future military applications. While Beijing initially envisioned the Polar Silk Road as part of the BRI, Russia is the sole Arctic nation to join the initiative, while others have worked to thwart Chinese investments. Nonetheless, Chinese companies persist in expressing keen interest in investing across the mining, energy, and infrastructure sectors.


27 David Fraser, “Canadian military says it has tracked, stopped China surveillance in Arctic waters,” CBC, 22 February 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/.

On its Canadian website, Huawei strategically exploits the internet and telecommunications deficiencies experienced by northern communities, coupled with their strained relationship with Ottawa, to promote Chinese services and technology. Chinese firms have also attempted to acquire a gold mine and a hangar near North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) installations in Inuvik, Nunavut, although Ottawa blocked both transactions on national security grounds.

China has faced repeated accusations of employing “cooperative state-to-state, multilateral, and environmental narratives to disguise aggressive and assertive ambitions.” A recent report by Mandiant shed light on China’s intentions in the rare earth sector, with potentially serious implications for resource development in the Arctic. In 2022, Mandiant uncovered an ongoing pro-China covert influence campaign targeting rare earth mining companies, offering concerning insights into China’s readiness to leverage cyber means to advance its economic and geostrategic interests at the expense of the United States and Canada. Dubbed “Operation Dragonbridge,” the campaign aimed to derail new rare earth mining projects by inciting local public opposition through social media, targeting potential sites and associated companies in Texas and northern Saskatchewan. Similar tactics could be used to impede the exploration and exploitation of important critical mineral deposits in the Arctic, where operational costs are prohibitive and the lack of infrastructure, coupled with intricate regulations, already pose significant challenges.

China currently dominates the global rare earth mining and processing sector that is key to technological and military advancement. Activities such as Dragonbridge

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29 “We also believe that every Canadian deserves access to a fast, reliable network, no matter which part of Canada they call home. Huawei Canada is proud to help our partners connect those living in rural and remote communities, bringing people together from coast to coast to coast.” Huawei, “Connecting Canada’s North,” 2024, https://www.huawei.com/.


32 “Pro-PRC DRAGONBRIDGE Influence Campaign Targets Rare Earths Mining Companies in Attempt to Thwart Rivalry to PRC Market Dominance,” Mandiant Threat Intelligence (blog), 28 June 2022, https://www.mandiant.com/.

33 “Pro-PRC DRAGONBRIDGE Influence Campaign.”

seek to undermine Canadian and US efforts to reduce their dependency on Chinese rare earth materials and expertise.

Growing Chinese tourism in the Arctic also raises concerns. In a recent incident in Alaska, Chinese nationals were arrested for trying to access military facilities while carrying a drone in their vehicle. Ultimately, China’s conduct both within and outside the confines of the North American Arctic point to Beijing’s willingness to employ coercive means and subterfuge in pursuit of its economic and strategic goals. While the current threat posed by China in the North American Arctic remains manageable for the time being, the PRC remains the long-term pacing challenge to homeland defense in the long term. North American policy makers must implement measures to deter and counter China’s growing influence and nefarious activities in the region while they remain within manageable bounds.

Russia

In the short term, Russia poses the most pressing conventional and strategic threat to homeland defense in the circumpolar Arctic. However, Moscow’s inclination to employ hybrid tactics in targeting the North American Arctic appears less pronounced. Nevertheless, in the European High North, Russia has demonstrated its ability and willingness to use hybrid means to advance its interests both within and outside the region. These tactics encompass cyberattacks, sabotage of undersea cables, and the exploitation of migrant populations to overwhelm Finnish border security services.

Instances of Russia successfully targeting the Canadian North and Alaska remain scarce. Nonetheless, Moscow could exploit vulnerabilities in the Arctic through cyber operations and disinformation campaigns to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of government entities and decision-makers in Ottawa and Washington. As evidenced in 2017, Russian media misrepresented a statement by an Alaskan state official, implying that “Alaska would be better off under Russian leadership.” Furthermore, in scenarios escalating to conventional or strategic attacks on North

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America, Moscow could target northern military and civilian infrastructure through cyberattacks to undermine warning and defense systems in the region.

Currently, Russia exhibits scant interest in meddling in North American Arctic affairs. Russian hybrid threats in the European High North should be understood in the context of the war in Ukraine, as well as Finland and Sweden’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Additionally, Moscow places significant importance on preserving its maritime access to the North Atlantic for global naval projection through bastion defense strategies. In the circumpolar north, it is still in Russia’s interest to abide by international rules and norms given its Arctic status and enduring interests in the region.

**Resilience against Hybrid Threats**

While some experts argue that the Arctic is relatively less vulnerable to undue foreign influence compared to other regions, the examples provided above illustrate how the North American Arctic has evolved into an arena of strategic competition. Here, China—and Russia to a lesser extent—endeavor to further their interests at the expense of Canada and the United States. Resilience is the best defense against hybrid threats. By identifying vulnerabilities across the North American Arctic and proactively addressing them, North American leaders can deter adversaries from exploiting these vulnerabilities, thus fortifying the region against adversarial actions.

Efforts to counter hybrid threats should focus first and foremost on addressing vulnerabilities at their source whenever possible. Investments in critical infrastructure, with a focus on enhancing service provision and ensuring the safety of Arctic communities, alongside initiatives promoting sustainable socioeconomic development led by northern communities and Indigenous peoples in collaboration with all levels of government, are paramount. Moreover, fostering dialogue around security risks pertaining to economic security, social cohesion, and democratic values should be central to any strategy to safeguard the North American Arctic.

To that end, the government of Yukon announced in January 2024 the creation of an Arctic Security Advisory Council to “study risks across the Yukon security landscape, determine what assets and infrastructure require additional protection and identify opportunities for the Government of Yukon to work with the Gov-

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38 “The Arctic presents strong factors of resilience that make it unlikely that Chinese investments in infrastructure could present the negative security, political, economic, social, and environmental outcomes that other regions of the world have experienced.” Stephanie Pezard et al., *China’s Strategy and Activities in the Arctic: Implications for North American and Transatlantic Security* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation): vi, https://www.rand.org/.

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ernment of Canada to enhance security across the territory.”

This initiative is expected to enhance transparency, promote dialogue, and enhance security literacy among Yukon stakeholders, ultimately leading to more informed decision making that safeguards both homeland defense and the safety and security of Yukon residents. Furthermore, valuable insights can be drawn from the Norwegian concept of total defense, which emphasizes the pivotal role of individuals and communities in defending their country.

Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché

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Operation Noble Eagle–Pacific

Integrated Air and Missile Defense for America’s Pacific Homeland

CAPT JOSH TAYLOR, US NAVY

Abstract

The US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) is tasked with deterring and preparing for a potential conflict with China, while also facing a clear threat from North Korea (DPRK) against the American Pacific homeland. To address mounting cooperation among adversaries, the US should establish a designated homeland defense operation, enabling USINDOPACOM to activate Joint Task Force–Homeland Defense, augment its forces with Reserve component units, and enhance regional defense capabilities. These measures would mitigate risk in a China scenario and reaffirm US sovereignty in the Pacific. With further DPRK missile and nuclear tests expected, launching this operation would be a proportionate response. The Secretary of Defense must now direct planning for Operation Noble Eagle–Pacific.

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Since 1898, Guam has stood as the westernmost sovereign territory of the United States. Known as “Where America’s day begins,” this island is home to approximately 170,000 voting citizens and 6,400 active-duty US service members. Positioned within the reach of North Korean (DPRK) and Chinese (PRC) conventional and nuclear missiles, Guam is deemed a prime target in any conflict scenario, serving as the joint force’s primary logistics hub in the western Pacific. Recognizing its vulnerability, US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) has called for significant investment in Guam’s defenses. Congress answers this call through the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), supplementing traditional service acquisitions, operations and maintenance, and military construction appropriations. However, while the PDI allocates necessary investments across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) to deter the PRC, it fails to provide resources swiftly enough to counter the imminent threat posed to Guam by the DPRK’s unrestrained missile test program and escalating hostility.

In light of this pressing concern, this article advocates for the Secretary of Defense to establish a named operation aimed at bolstering Guam’s defense through the mobilization of Reserve component forces and manpower. Additionally, it proposes the formation of an international coalition dedicated to pursuing a globally integrated layered defense strategy. Such initiatives serve to convey to all potential adversaries that the American Pacific homeland is inseparable from our sovereignty and will be vigorously defended as such.

**America’s Pacific Homeland**

Despite the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) persistent efforts to depict the United States as an external entity meddling in Asian affairs, the fact remains that Guam has been a US territory for more than 126 years—significantly longer than the existence of the PRC. Operating as an unincorporated organized territory, Guam shares a status akin to that of Puerto Rico. Governed under the Guam Organic Act of 1950, Guamanians were conferred American citizenship and are represented by a delegate in the US House of Representatives. Although the delegate cannot participate in floor votes, they possess full rights and privileges within committees, including the ability to sponsor bills and question witnesses.

Adjacent to Guam lies the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Emerging from the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in the aftermath of World War II, the Northern Mariana Islands opted to become an unincorporated organized territory of the United States in 1986. With a population of roughly 56,000 residents, they too hold US citizenship and are represented by a delegate in Congress, like Puerto Rico and Guam.\(^3\)

The 2022 *Missile Defense Review* unequivocally asserts, “Within the context of homeland defense, an attack on Guam or any other U.S. territory by any adversary will be considered a direct attack on the United States, and will be met with an appropriate response.”\(^4\) However, it is essential to recognize that USINDOPACOM also bears the responsibility of safeguarding the domestic population and critical infrastructure of the sovereign nations comprising the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau, collectively

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known as freely associated states (FAS), as outlined in the Compact of Free Association (COFA). 

Under the COFA, the United States maintains the authority to establish military bases within the FAS and make decisions concerning their external security. A notable instance is the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site situated at US Army Garrison–Kwajalein Atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which serves as a hub for missile testing and launches, as well as space reconnaissance and surveillance operations for the Department of Defense (DOD) and various other government agencies.

In return for this partnership, the FAS benefit from US security assurances and economic assistance. While not American citizens, FAS citizens hold the privilege to work in the United States as “habitual residents” and are eligible to enlist in the US military. Through the COFA, the United States undertakes the responsibility of defending an additional 200,000 individuals and more than 1,000 islands and atolls as if they were American sovereign territory. Consequently, Guam, the CNMI, and the FAS collectively constitute America’s “Pacific Homeland.”

A Clear and Present Danger

Home to Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base Guam, Guam finds itself closer to Pyongyang and Beijing than to Hawai‘i. With assured access to US soil, Guam and the CNMI emerge as pivotal logistics and operational hubs in any crisis or conflict scenario unfolding in the western Pacific.

Approximately 25 percent of Guam’s land is under the ownership of the DOD, hosting a contingent of 6,400 active-duty service members. This military presence is poised for significant expansion later this year, as the first of approximately 5,000 Marines and their families prepare to transfer from Okinawa, Japan, under the provisions of the Defense Policy Realignment Initiative (DPRI).

The strategic significance of Guam does not elude our adversaries. In 2017, Kim Jong-un issued a threat to “interdict the enemy forces on major military bases on Guam and to signal a crucial warning to the U.S.” by proposing to create “enveloping fire” through the launch of four mid-range ballistic missiles over Japan, intend-
ing for them to land within 18 to 24 miles of Guam.\textsuperscript{9} While Pyongyang has not reiterated this explicit threat, the DPRK persists in testing missiles at an unprecedented rate, conducting at least 36 tests in 2023 alone. Additionally, the regime is in the process of rewriting its constitution, designating South Korea as its principal enemy, thereby ushering in a period of renewed tension on the Korean Peninsula.\textsuperscript{10}

While not an immediate threat, Beijing comprehends the pivotal role Guam plays in America’s forward posture and its capacity to project power into the western Pacific, particularly in a Taiwan scenario. Introduced in 2016, the Dong Feng-26, dubbed the “Guam Killer,” marked the PRC’s inaugural conventionally armed ballistic missile capable of targeting Guam.\textsuperscript{11} Presently, Beijing possesses more than 400 ballistic missiles with the capability to reach Guam, in addition to showcases supplementary bomber-launched cruise missiles.\textsuperscript{12}

Beyond possessing the capability to strike Guam, it appears to be an operational imperative for Beijing in a Taiwan scenario. In a war game conducted in 2023 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the PRC targeted Andersen AFB in Guam across all 24 iterations.\textsuperscript{13} Consequently, nearly a quarter million US citizens find themselves under the looming threat of potential missile strikes from either North Korea or China.

\textbf{Not Enough Nor Fast Enough}

Currently, Battery E-3 of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), boasting 48 ready missiles, operates under the tactical command of the 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command at Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam in Hawai‘i, overseeing the integrated air and missile defense–homeland defense (IAMD–HD) of Guam.\textsuperscript{14} As needed, an AEGIS-capable cruiser or destroyer supplements these defenses. Notably, the THAAD and AEGIS systems operate independently without integration. Andersen AFB does not have any fighters permanently or rota-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} “Missile Threat: DF-26” (fact sheet, CSIS Missile Defense Project, 23 April 2024), https://missilethreat.csis.org/.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Tilghman, \textit{Guam}, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, \textit{The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan} (Washington: CSIS, 2023), 87, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/.
\end{itemize}
Operation Noble Eagle–Pacific
tionally assigned to it by the Air Force, although it frequently hosts rotational tanker task forces.15

The foremost priority outlined in the 2022 National Defense Strategy is to protect the homeland, with the secondary objective being to deter strategic attacks against the United States and our allies and partners. The 2022 Missile Defense Review further underscores this commitment, stating, “The Department will continue to deter [North Korean] attacks through forward posture; integrated air and missile defense; close coordination and interoperability with our [Republic of Korea] ROK ally; nuclear deterrence; resilience initiatives; and the potential for direct cost imposition approaches that come from globally deployable Joint Forces.” Consequently, the DOD allocates significant resources to bolster the IAMD–HD of Guam.

Financed substantially through the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and spearheaded by the Missile Defense Agency, the Enhanced Integrated Air and Missile Defense (EIAMD) system on Guam constitutes a USD 1.7-billion endeavor aimed at furnishing 360-degree layered defenses against all ballistic missile, cruise missile, and hypersonic glide threats. Recognized as USINDOPACOM’s foremost priority for homeland defense, EIAMD will amalgamate THAAD, Patriot, and AEGIS systems ashore while furnishing redundant command-and-control nodes. Engineering and testing are slated to commence by the conclusion of 2024, with initial operational capability anticipated until late 2027.16

Despite its necessity, EIAMD alone falls short in fortifying Guam’s defense in the near term and makes minimal contributions to enhancing the homeland defense of the CNMI and the COFA states. Apart from the moral obligation to defend this sovereign territory, there exists an operational imperative. In its pursuit of Agile Combat Employment and distributed resilient basing, the US Air Force is actively pursuing the reactivation of Tinian North Airfield.17 Similarly, the construction of the Tactical Multi-Mission Over-the-Horizon Radar (TACMOR) system in Palau aims to address surveillance gaps.18 Consequently, as the United States bolsters its posture in its Pacific homeland and FAS partners, a commensurate reinforcement of IAMD forces in the theater becomes imperative.

This objective cannot be achieved solely through assigned forces, already stretched thin by the operational demands of the world’s largest geographic component. What

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15 Tilghman, Guam, 15.
16 Tilghman, Guam, 19–20.
is imperative is an augmentation of rotational presence, manpower, allied and partner support, and unequivocal messaging to our adversaries that an assault on our Pacific homeland equates to an assault on US sovereign territory. Fortunately, a proven strategy exists to advance all these objectives: establishing a named homeland defense operation.

**Operation Noble Eagle**

Operation Noble Eagle (ONE) stands as the Secretary of Defense–approved execution order (EXORD) initiated in direct response to the events of 9/11. Activating up to 35,000 Guardsmen and Reservists, ONE’s mission was to safeguard the United States against airborne threats, maintain air sovereignty, and protect critical US facilities from potential hostile actions, resulting in over 61,000 sorties flown to date. As of December 2023, ONE remains active, authorizing the commander of USINDOPACOM to oversee air defense operations within the command’s area of responsibility.¹⁹

The FY22 Presidential Budget allocated USD 60.8 million for ONE, covering the mobilization costs of National Guard and Reserve Component personnel, as well as the operation and maintenance expenses of the National Capitol Region–integrated air defense system (NCR–IADS) and deployable integrated air defense system (D–IADS) missions. These missions aim to safeguard critical national assets and respond to national special security events. However, no funds were designated for Pacific missile defense.²⁰

Concurrently with ONE, the United States invoked Article 5 of the NATO charter, leading to the establishment of Operation Eagle Assist (OEA). Operating from 9 October 2001 to 16 May 2002, OEA saw NATO airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft augmenting the United States’ air domain awareness through nearly 4,300 flying hours over 360 operational sorties.²¹ This initiative aligns with the guidance provided in Joint Publication 3–27, *Homeland Defense*, that “to conduct HD operations across the competition continuum, combatant commanders (CCDR) with an HD mission should consider relevant multinational and nonmilitary organizations.”²² When gearing up to defend the outer reaches of the homeland, it is prudent to seek assistance from allies and partners.

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²² JP 3–27, x.
While primarily oriented toward the enduring counterterrorism mission, the ONE EXORD remains active and could potentially empower USINDOPACOM to strategize, allocate resources, and conduct its homeland missile defense responsibilities. However, to underscore its emphasis on missile defense rather than solely air defense and to clearly convey that Guam and the CNMI are sovereign US territories deserving of protection, the Secretary of Defense should instigate Operation Noble Eagle–Pacific (ONE–P) as a successor to the original operation.

What Is in a Name?

Currently, USINDOPACOM relies on assigned active-duty forces to fulfill its homeland defense mission. Despite being designated as the “priority theater,” the command faces challenges in securing additional resources through the Global Force Management Allocation Plan (GFMAP), as other combatant commands—such as US Central Command, US European Command (USEUCOM), US Africa Command, and US Southern Command—have their own designated contingency operations. Designating USINDOPACOM as the supported commander for Pacific homeland defense within a ONE–P EXORD would elevate the command’s consideration for receiving additional allocated forces.

An even more compelling opportunity would be the mobilization of additional Reserve component units and manpower. In the US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) area of responsibility, the Reserve component plays a pivotal role in homeland defense by providing alert forces ready to execute IAMD operations. Unfortunately, this option is not feasible for USINDOPACOM, as the Guam Army National Guard lacks air defense units, and the Guam Air National Guard comprises solely an air base support group without air domain awareness or fighter capabilities. Additionally, the CNMI does not possess a National Guard at all. While there is potential to realign state National Guard missions, which should be pursued, an immediate need exists for increased homeland defense capability. Therefore, to generate additional forces, USINDOPACOM should consider specifically mobilizing Reserve component elements.

Under the Preplanned Mobilization Support authority, service secretaries hold the ability to direct up to 60,000 Guard and Reserve members of the Selected Reserve to active duty for a maximum of 365 consecutive days, either as units or as individual mobilization augmentees (IMA), without the members’ consent, if necessary to bolster the active forces for a preplanned mission in support of a combatant command. The only requirement is that the associated costs must be

\[23\] JP 3-27, II-2.
clearly identified in the defense budget materials for the fiscal year.²⁴ Interestingly, the FY24 PDI submission seems to lack any funding requests for additional Reserve component man-years to facilitate National Guard or Reserve support for ONE or other missions. This contrasts sharply with the European Defense Initiative (EDI), which explicitly seeks and allocates funds for Guard and Reserve support for exercises, capacity-building efforts, and rotational forces.²⁵

By establishing a named homeland defense operation, such as ONE–P, USINDOPACOM could potentially access up to 200,000 Selected Reserves for a duration of up to 365 days under the authority of the Presidential Reserve Call-up. This authority enables the fulfillment of operational mission requirements, excluding disaster relief or suppression of insurrection.²⁶ Notably, on 13 July 2023, the president used this authority to deploy up to 3,000 additional personnel to support Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR), the USEUCOM initiative aimed at reassuring and bolstering the NATO alliance amid Russia’s military actions in Ukraine. Subsequently, in August 2023, the US Secretary of Defense designated OAR as an overseas contingency operation following the activation of Reserve forces.²⁷ If the White House is willing to activate forces under the Presidential Reserve Call-up authority to assist in defending Europe from Russian aggression, it stands to reason that it may also be inclined to do so to safeguard American sovereign territory and the FAS from the threat posed by North Korean nuclear missiles. The pertinent question then arises: what missions, functions, and tasks would the additional forces undertake in support of ONE–P?

To Do What?

The primary objective would entail activating a joint task force (JTF) headquarters to oversee and coordinate the defense of Guam, the CNMI, and the FAS. The commander, Joint Region Marianas, assumes the role of commander, Task Force West–Guam, under the purview of the theater Joint Force Land Component Commander (JFLCC)/United States Army Pacific (USARPAC). However, this task force primarily focuses on critical infrastructure protection and disaster re-

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response, necessitating a distinct staffing and equipment configuration to effectively execute IAMD operations within the Pacific homeland joint operating area (JOA).

In accordance with JP 3-27, the “Commander, US Indo-Pacific Command establishes JTF-HD [Joint Task Force-Homeland Defense] as the HQ responsible for land HD operations on all bases and in all US territories within its AOR. Commander, JTF-HD, receives ready forces in support of security operations, from military engagement to warfighting. These forces promote regional stability and provide crisis response.”

Indeed, JTF–HD operated from 2006 to 2013 until its disestablishment, a move driven by headquarters streamlining directives issued by the Secretary of Defense.

This initiative also led to the dissolution of JTF-519, the Pacific Fleet–led theater standing joint force headquarters, capable of planning and orchestrating a spectrum of contingencies, from noncombatant evacuations to major theater conflicts. Additionally, it resulted in a 20 percent reduction in the staffs of USINDOPACOM and its service component commands. This reduction in manpower funding, subsequently increased to 25 percent by Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work in 2015, has left all major USINDOPACOM headquarters severely understaffed to effectively plan and execute homeland defense operations, let alone prepare to deter and, if necessary, engage in conflict with the PRC.

To mitigate this shortfall, USINDOPACOM can access US Transportation Command’s Joint Enabling Capabilities Command’s joint planning support element to periodically augment its planning capacity. Furthermore, USINDOPACOM has sought funds for additional permanent civilian billets within its headquarters through the PDI. However, relying solely on part-time planning support and civilian staff in Hawai’i has its limitations in enhancing command and control of forward-deployed forces. Hence, the activation of Reserve component units and IMAs will be indispensable in establishing JTF–HD and augmenting the staffs of USINDOPACOM and its service components.

Units such as the California National Guard’s 40th Division Headquarters and South Carolina’s 263rd Army Air and Missile Defense Command appear well-suited to provide a rotational presence for the core command element of JTF–HD.

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28 JP 4-05, III-7.
ditionally, IMAs from all services could complement the joint duty assignment list of the JTF, further enhancing its operational capabilities.

The secondary mission for activated Reserve component forces would be to expedite military construction efforts in Guam and the CNMI, with a specific focus on enhancing basic infrastructure and passive defenses. Both the commander, USINDOPACOM, and the director of the Missile Defense Agency have highlighted the availability of skilled construction workers as a key limiting factor in achieving the necessary upgrades to Guam’s civilian infrastructure within the ambitious timeline set forth by the EIAMD and DPRI programs.32

Substantial progress in expanding power generation and distribution, water treatment and wastewater removal facilities, as well as housing infrastructure, could be hastened through the rotational deployment of Reserve component Army engineer battalions, Air Force rapid engineer deployable heavy operational repair squadrons, Navy Seabees, and the Marine Corps’ 6th Engineer Support Battalion. These forces could also undertake critical tasks such as systems hardening and protective construction, including the construction of hardened aircraft shelters, and resilience capabilities such as rapid airfield and port repair, as outlined in the Homeland Defense Operational Framework.33 Additionally, rotational Reserve component engineering forces could contribute to the construction of homeland defense infrastructure at Tinian North Airfield and other posture initiatives across the joint operating area.

While the mobilization of additional Reserve component forces is crucial for the planning and execution of ONE–P, it is equally imperative to establish an international coalition to bolster homeland defense efforts.

Building the Away Team

The 2022 National Defense Strategy specifies two mutually supporting priorities that advocate for a multinational force (MNF) approach to IAMD of the Pacific homeland: “Defending the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC; Deterring strategic attacks against the United States, Allies, and partners.”34 Furthermore, the 2022 Missile Defense Review underscores the need for an MNF construct, stating, “The pacing challenge posed by the PRC, as well as the growing North Korean missile threat, have magnified the importance of collaborative regional air and missile defense efforts in the Indo-Pacific region.

32 Tilghman, Guam, 26-28.
33 JP 4-05, I-13.
To counter these threats, the U.S. conducts missile defense cooperation with allies and partners throughout the region, which is strongest with Japan, Australia, and the Republic of Korea (ROK).”35

Joint Pub 3-27, Homeland Defense, and Joint Pub 3-01, Countering Air and Missile Threats, similarly advocate for integration with allies and partners in forward regions as part of a globally integrated layered defense. The primary objective of a coalition designated by a ONE–P EXORD would be to enhance information and intelligence sharing and expand combined IAMD exercises.

Information sharing involving classified information with multinational partners adheres to the National Disclosure Policy (NDP). During routine competition operations, the release of classified military information (CMI) varies depending on the nation and the category of information involved. Each document and piece of information undergoes an extensive, complex, and time-consuming foreign disclosure and release process, which must become more responsive to meet the demands of IAMD–HD.36 Establishing an official coalition significantly streamlines the information-sharing process by enabling the joint force commander to tailor policy and procedures for a specific operation based on theater guidance and national policy outlined in the NDP. A notable example of successful information sharing is the Five Eyes Agreement, which allows intelligence and plans to be shared among its members—the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—from inception.

In urgent circumstances, combatant commanders or their designated representatives may disclose CMI to actively participating allied or coalition forces when such information is urgently required to support ongoing or imminent military, combat, or other contingency operations.37 Enhanced information sharing will improve shared early warning of strategic and theater threats and facilitate coordinated response planning.

To enhance interoperability and foster unified action, a designated coalition would enable JTF–HD to host liaison teams from participating nations. These teams would play a crucial role in assisting JTF–HD by providing insights into partner nation missions and tactics, facilitating the integration and synchronization of operations, aiding in the exchange of vital information, fostering mutual trust, addressing national

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35 Missile Defense Review, 10.
caveats, and fostering a heightened level of teamwork.\textsuperscript{38} In line with the direction outlined in the \textit{Missile Defense Review}, the initial coalition members should include Japan, Australia, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Additionally, consideration should be given to including Canada due to its partnership with the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), France due to the threat posed by DPRK missiles to its Pacific territories (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia), and the United Kingdom due to its involvement in the AUKUS (Australia–United Kingdom–United States) and Five Eyes partnerships.

The participation of allied and partner operational forces in a real-world IAMD-HD scenario will hinge upon sovereign political considerations at the time. Article 6 of the NATO charter confines collective defense provisions to Europe, North America, Turkey, and Atlantic Ocean islands north of the Tropic of Cancer.\textsuperscript{39} Consequently, the Pacific Ocean territories, states, and departments of member nations are excluded from automatic NATO protection, including Hawai‘i. To ensure that JTF–HD provides decision-makers with a credible deterrence and response option, it must validate its capabilities and interoperability with designated coalition partners through exercises before any crisis arises. While focused security cooperation investments promote technical system compatibility, true interoperability is cultivated through combined field exercises. Fortunately, an existing exercise could readily serve as JTF–HD’s certifying event.

Exercise Pacific Dragon is a biennial event aimed at enhancing tactical and technical coordination and interoperability in regional air and missile defense capabilities.\textsuperscript{40} In 2022, participants included the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, and the ROK. Currently organized as a USINDOPACOM Navy service component exercise, Pacific Dragon has the potential to evolve by incorporating THAAD on Guam, deployable Patriot systems, space and cyber components, and constructive elements. This transformation would enable it to transition into a combined/joint IAMD exercise under the command and control of JTF–HD. While the exercise would primarily involve the core coalition members, additional nations like the United Kingdom and France could be invited to participate. This inclusion could serve to encourage their future consideration for joining ONE–P.

**Two for One**

While the DPRK presents an immediate “most likely” ballistic missile threat to the Pacific homeland, the PRC poses the long-term “most dangerous” full-spectrum

\textsuperscript{38} JP 3-16: \textit{Multinational Operations} (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 12 February 2021), II-9, https://www.jcs.mil/.
\textsuperscript{40} “Pacific Dragon 2022 Concludes,” US 3rd Fleet, 16 August 2022, https://www.pacom.mil/.
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air and missile threat. As previously mentioned, the PRC is anticipated to target military installations on Guam in any Western Pacific conflict scenario.\textsuperscript{41} Serendipitously, Kim Jung-un’s escalating aggression provides an opportunity to establish ONE–P in a manner that can simultaneously defend against and deter attacks from both the DPRK and PRC. Regardless of the aggressor or the specific scenario, JTF–HD and its assigned forces will undertake the crucial mission of IAMD–HD of existing and planned posture sites.

Considering potential scenarios involving China, the Reserve component could provide significant additional capacity in fifth-generation fighters, tankers, and air defense units to counter crewed aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and cruise missile threats. Activating JTF–HD under ONE–P would enable USINDOPACOM to transition some of its forces to their wartime roles and reduce risk during the early phases of operational plans related to Taiwan or the South China Sea. While the PRC would likely object to the establishment of ONE–P as an escalatory action, it would bear sole responsibility for failing to deter the DPRK’s aggressive behavior.

Changing the Narrative

As critical as the operational considerations are, what’s even more crucial is the strategic impact of ONE–P, predominantly manned by National Guard units and personnel, in our competition with the PRC. Despite Beijing’s assertions, the United States has been inherently a Pacific nation for 50 years longer than the existence of the PRC. It is imperative to underscore in our communications with CCP leadership and through our actions that the Pacific homeland is unequivocally regarded as sovereign US territory, and any assault on it will be met with resolute response. Guam and the CNMI are territories, analogous to how Hawai’i and Alaska were when Japan attacked them in December 1941 and June 1942, respectively.

Considering the political dynamics of a given scenario, the president may or may not opt to intervene in defense of Taiwan. However, there is not a commander-in-chief, regardless of party affiliation, who could overlook an assault on sovereign American soil or the loss of American lives. If the CCP elects to seize Taiwan by force, it would be prudent for them to refrain from targeting the Pacific homeland, lest they “awaken a sleeping giant.”

Establishing ONE–P as a named operation would reshape the strategic narrative with the CCP and resonate with the American people. The United States no longer declares war; it designates named contingency operations. Introducing ONE–P would reinforce to the populace that the United States is inherently a Pacific

\textsuperscript{41} Cancian, Cancian, and Heginbotham, \textit{First Battle}, 87.
nation and remind them of the imminent threat posed by the DPRK and PRC. Rotational National Guard deployments will prompt heightened congressional interest and action on Indo-Pacific security affairs. While the Pacific homeland might be distant from the thoughts of many in Congress, National Guard rotations have the potential to impact every state and congressional district. Constituents facing potential threats will significantly influence legislators in Washington, DC.

The Time is Now

Presently, the USINDOPACOM faces the dual challenge of deterring potential conflict with the PRC and countering the clear and present threat posed by the DPRK with peacetime funding, forces, and command-and-control structures. Against the backdrop of heightened collaboration among adversaries of the rules-based international order—including the DPRK, the PRC, Russia, and Iran—the United States must proactively prepare for IAMD–HD by establishing ONE–P.

This operation would enable USINDOPACOM to activate JTF–HD, bolster its operational forces and staff with Reserve component units and personnel, and form a coalition to enhance information sharing, operational coordination, and regional defense capabilities. Such measures would enable USINDOPACOM to mitigate risk in a potential conflict scenario involving the PRC while reshaping the strategic narrative surrounding the United States’ sovereignty as a Pacific nation.

Considering the inevitable increase in intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear tests, launching a named homeland defense operation would constitute a proportionate and strategic response. The time is ripe for the Secretary of Defense to direct the planning and execution of ONE–P.

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At 156°W

The Alaska Territorial Guard as a Solution to Arctic Capacity and Domain Awareness

LTC JEFF HAYES, US ARMY

Abstract

Despite the rapidly growing importance of the Arctic in economic, defense, and environmental sectors, the United States, though an Arctic nation, lacks meaningful defense capacity in the Arctic region. This article provides a brief history of the critical role that Alaska Natives played in the Arctic during World War II, first as the Alaska Territorial Guard and later as formally incorporated units of the Alaska Army National Guard, and how these units addressed in their time the same capability gaps facing the United States today. However, Army reorganization during the Global War on Terror has had the unintended effect of making National Guard service nearly impossible for this critical population. The article further proposes that the Canadian Ranger program could serve as a model for restoring military service as a possibility for Alaska Natives while providing a cost-effective means of addressing domain awareness and other shortfalls confronting the United States.

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War plagues Europe. The ironically named “Pacific” (for peaceful) is fast becoming the playground of an Asian competitor with Arctic ambitions and scant deterrence. Most of America’s active-duty forces are ill-equipped for service in the far north, and few in uniform have visited, much less conducted military operations, above the Arctic Circle or west of Anchorage. Politicians agree that Alaska is strategically important, yet the criticality fades to niche-interest status when prioritized against more pressing, more visible demands. The United States military in Alaska lacks essential capabilities, capacities, interoperability, and domain awareness. This scene unfolded in September 1942.

Three months prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the lone battalion comprising the entire Alaska National Guard, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, was federalized and dispatched to the “lower 48” in anticipation of the war that was sure to come.1 Suddenly bereft of any means of self-defense, the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG), known colloquially as the “Eskimo Scouts” and the “Tundra Army,” emerged as a stopgap measure authorized by the War Depart-

ment at the behest of territorial governor Ernest Gruening, and under the enthusiastic direction of Maj Marvin “Muktuk” Marston, US Army Air Corps. From 1942 to 1947, a cadre of 3,000 civilian volunteers, predominantly comprised of Alaska Natives, constituted a steadfast, reliable paramilitary presence in their traditional lands. These isolated areas contained few non-Natives, and federal troops were largely unknown to Indigenous residents. Their accepted mission was simple: “Defend the land west of the 156th parallel (sic)”.

They were specifically charged with reporting any instances of enemy espionage or unusual occurrences. Additionally, the men and women of the ATG served as liaisons to the military forces beginning to expand north and west as the nation gained its war footing. They also provided search-and-rescue services to lend-lease pilots, augmented military maps with unparalleled detail, and ensured consistent military communication through the utilization of traditional dog sled teams and amateur radio. They elected their own leaders, possessed unmatched expertise in their immediate geographical locales, and provided an enduring presence regardless of outside circumstances or shifting federal priorities. In essence, this Indigenous-based organization, the ATG of World War II, addressed nearly every capability gap that still confronts the United States in the Arctic today. If the ATG were to be reconstituted, it is not unreasonable to postulate that it could perform the same functions as it did then.

The Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) at RAND Corporation, in its Report on the Arctic Capabilities of the U.S. Armed Forces, reported that the “United States has important arctic capability and capacity shortfalls.” This is unsurprising news to anyone familiar with the Arctic. An important distinction is made in the report’s opening paragraphs, however: “[A] primary limitation for the United States is capacity, rather than capability, to operate in the Arctic. In other words, there is no evidence of other Arctic actors being able to access parts of the Arctic that the United States fundamentally cannot, based on the inventory of U.S. capabilities that are either currently available or planned for in the near term.” With regard to specific urgent needs, the study highlighted six categories for immediate consideration:

- assets with proximity to support response
- multidomain awareness and communications

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2 Necrason, “Epilogue.”
6 Tingstad et al., Report on the Arctic Capabilities, vi.
• infrastructure for response and logistics

• sufficient cadres of personnel who are trained, current, and proficient with the skills to operate in this harsh environment

• tactics and equipment for low-probability, high-impact incidents

• the ability to scale presence.\(^7\)

In practical terms, this conveys that the United States has insufficient “polar-capable assets and trained personnel to ensure enduring presence across the region at scale.”\(^8\) While this is an accurate military assessment, the report’s observations are too narrowly focused. A search within the document reveals that over the course of 104 pages of otherwise excellent analysis and recommendations, there are no direct references to the traditional inhabitants of this geographic region, the Alaska Natives. Neither is there a notable absence of references to any of the 229 federally recognized Alaska Tribes and their Tribal governments. Additionally, there is a lack of culturally appropriate recognition of any of the distinct cultural groups that comprise Alaska Natives and their more than 20 distinct languages. Words and phrases including the following are not found within the document: Iñupiat, Athabascan/Athabaskan, Yup’ik/Central Yup’ik (Cup’ik), nor Unanga搜狐, Alutiiq, Tlingit, Haida, Eyak, or Tsimshian. Put in context, this report fails to acknowledge the enduring presence of 39,000 Alaska Natives who live across the 147,000 square mile combined landmass of the federally recognized Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS) and the newly formed Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Tribal Government (YK-RTG)—the very areas at issue in the RAND study. These two regional tribal governments alone account for roughly 25 percent of Alaska’s land surface, half its contiguous coastline, and a total of 65 individual federally recognized tribes.\(^9\) Without being pedantic, there is likely no more polar-capable asset than the Indigenous men and women who have lived and thrived in the Arctic for millennia. They are climatically native personnel with an enduring presence that outdates our nation’s very existence.

So critical are these communities to our national interests that their involvement rightly constitutes one of the five guiding principles undergirding the 2022 US National Strategy for the Arctic Region. This document directs federal agencies to consult, coordinate, and comanage operations, activities, and policies in the Arctic.

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\(^7\) Tingstad et al., *Report on the Arctic Capabilities*, vi.

\(^8\) Tingstad et al., *Report on the Arctic Capabilities*, vi.


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with federal recognition. The United States is committed to regular, meaningful, and robust consultation, coordination, and, as appropriate, co-management with Alaska Tribes and their communities, their post-Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations, and their corresponding tribal organizations—all to ensure inclusion as partners. In effect, this entails involving them in decision-making processes regarding potential actions affecting them, not only out of recognition and respect for the Alaska Native experience and ways of knowing but also because these are essential to the success of the Arctic strategy. The United States has committed to supporting an equitable partnership with Alaska Natives by integrating the co-production of and knowledge into federal processes while supporting and at times enhancing Tribal self-determination and opportunities.\textsuperscript{10}

One must ask, then, how the extraordinary capabilities and capacities of Alaska Natives could be completely overlooked by a comprehensive study of US defense gaps in the region? It is not unreasonable to presume the shortcoming falls on American predilection for technological solutions, industrial efficiencies, and perhaps unrecognized, underlying cultural biases. It is a problem worth exploring.

Today, both the Alaska National Guard and Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF) claim to be the modern incarnations of the original Alaska Territorial Guard.\textsuperscript{11} The ATG’s provisional nature was formalized and extended in 1947 through its incorporation as two additional scout battalions of the Alaska Army National Guard (AK ARNG), one along the western coast and one in the north, establishing the “Eskimo Scouts” along the Arctic frontier in presumed perpetuity. Twenty years later, in 1967, Maj Gen C.F. Necrason, the commander of Alaskan Air Command, testified to the success of the project: “Federally owned Armory buildings are now centered in all of the principal villages dotting the north and western coastline of Alaska. . . . Ships, aircraft, fishermen, both friendly and foreign, are all under constant surveillance. . . . The eyes and ears of the Guardsmen are augmented by 37,000 others in the native population along the coast.”\textsuperscript{12}

This rural presence endured, in largely the same form, for many decades. However, as part of Army modernization efforts in the early 2000s, owing much to guidance in the 2006 \textit{Quadrennial Defense Review} to develop an Army National Guard force that was more flexible, more capable, and more rapidly deployable,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{10} National Strategy for the Arctic Region \textit{(Washington: The White House, October 2022), 7, https://www.whitehouse.gov/}.
\bibitem{12} Necrason, “Epilogue,” 215.
\end{thebibliography}
the AKARNG evolved into a force optimized for counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, at the expense of capabilities optimized for defending Alaska and operations in the Arctic.\textsuperscript{13}

The argument was made that the Army’s traditional force structure model—i.e., brigades, divisions, and corps, designed for conventional land warfare against peer and near-peer armies—was too complex and ill-suited to the demands of multiple counterinsurgency campaigns around the globe. Rebalancing the ARNG offered the unique opportunity to station complete units (as much as possible) within the borders of a single state. The Alaska-based 207th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) for example consisted of subordinate battalions from not only Alaska but also from Arizona, Guam, Nebraska, and New Mexico. Some of these units even had subordinate companies stationed in other states. The IBCT’s conversion to a Battlefield Surveillance Brigade enabled the Army to realign the entire brigade in Alaska, concentrated largely in Anchorage and Fairbanks, under the command of the Alaska Adjutant General.\textsuperscript{14}

Where the reorganization fell short was that, organized as it was for efficiency of command and control, it now regarded more than 60 rural community armories as unnecessary complexities in the ARFORGEN (Army Force Generation) cycle. In a huge, mostly underdeveloped state, where more than 75 percent of armories were not accessible by road, the conclusion was inevitable: unit training assemblies (UTA) became increasingly concentrated in the larger towns and metropolitan areas, travel expenses for individual Guardsmen rose, and attendance and then enlistments slowly fell off.\textsuperscript{15} By way of context, the distance between Utqiaġvik (formerly Barrow) and Anchorage is more than 700 miles, roughly the distance between Boston, Massachusetts, and Raleigh, North Carolina—but without a road to connect them.

Over the subsequent years, units underwent consolidation, reorganization, renaming, and further consolidation. Soldiers in remote villages found it difficult to travel to the monthly unit training assemblies that used to be held locally or at least within reasonable traveling distances. Since the end of the Cold War, Alaska Natives have gone from having some of the highest rates of military representation to some of the lowest.\textsuperscript{16} Today, nearly all of the more than 60 National Guard


\textsuperscript{14} “The Rebalance of the Army National Guard.”


armories in Alaska’s Arctic north and west have been turned over to their rural communities for public use, in large part because the units and Soldiers those armories used to support no longer exist.\textsuperscript{17} Even the facilities still remaining at Nome, Kotzebue, and Utqiagvik are underutilized and support far fewer Soldiers than they once did.\textsuperscript{18}

This shortage of local ARNG units and Soldiers is not a problem entirely created by the AKARNG command structure, but it is one for the AKARNG to confront and address. One National Guardsman put the issue into sharp focus: “A kid who signs a contract may do their entire enlistment and never even make it to drill. With units consolidated in the urban centers, it is expensive and difficult for him to physically get there—in many cases the cost of travel exceeds drill pay. Therefore, they don’t show and thus they don’t get paid. But they’re still paying into SGLI (servicemember’s group life insurance) every month, so it is entirely plausible that this Soldier could actually end their term indebted to the government.”\textsuperscript{19}

On the other hand, it would also be naïve to think that some did not take full advantage, deliberately concentrating many sought-after jobs closer to the state’s largest city. To the best of my research, there is only one Alaska Native officer remaining in service in the AKARNG, and his current billet at Fort Greely, while a position of meaningful trust and responsibility, can hardly be said to make use of his cultural heritage or tremendous potential for Alaska Native outreach.

In 2020, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs stated that “the Army must continue to acquire and retain exceptional talent to support its national security role and enhance the total force. As an inclusive organization focused on elite performance, the Army will improve its position as an employer of choice for potential Soldiers and Civilians, and reach untapped communities and agencies where recruiting is less than optimal.”\textsuperscript{20} With 21.9 percent of the state’s population identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, it seems there is an opportunity for the Army to demonstrate real commitment to diversity here in the Arctic by setting achievable, meaningful recruitment goals.\textsuperscript{21}

Then too, the requirements imposed by the modern National Guard Bureau are real barriers to service for many rural Alaskans even were they able to travel freely.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Demer, “In Rural Alaska a Plan Takes Shape.”
\item[19] Alaska National Guard Soldier, interview with the author, Fairbanks, Alaska, February 2024.
\end{footnotes}
Multiweek annual training can be devastating to subsistence lifestyle communities that rely on narrow opportunities for hunting-and-fishing opportunities that pay no heed to modern calendars but obey only the dictates of nature. This devastation is multiplied exponentially with the monthslong or yearlong activations that became so common during the Global War on Terror. High school diplomas, once waived for Alaska Natives, are now a firm requirement. Medical requirements like hearing tests and immunizations are also disqualifying.\textsuperscript{22}

The ASDF, under the authority of the state governor as an organized militia, has attempted to provide workarounds to these cultural and physical obstacles. However, despite herculean efforts to gain momentum as a movement, the ASDF’s total enrollment today is roughly 240 individuals statewide, and even this represents a major increase over recent years. The force has gubernatorial authorization to grow to 500 people, and in areas where strong relationships count for more than advertising dollars, growth of 1–2 volunteers per month is a resounding success for a community-based initiative.\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, with almost zero funding and a role that is unclear or unheard of by most citizens, it is still a far cry from the high point of the ATG days.

More to the point, even were the ASDF suddenly infused with money, additional personnel, and political clout, it is unlikely to recover those characteristics that marked the ATG as a unique, critical, and cost-effective means of assuring the United States’ sovereignty and presence in Alaska’s remote coastlines and wilderness. And even were impediments to service reduced or removed, the injured relationship between the Alaska National Guard and some Alaska Native Communities might take a generation or more to repair, under even the best conditions.\textsuperscript{24} While there are legitimate, objective reasons the Eskimo Scout Battalions were deactivated from the AKARNG, some of these affected communities contain families who have multiple generations of proud military service in their blood. The loss of the privilege to serve can contribute substantially to a loss of identity in many ways. It is, in short, a betrayal of those most able to help the nation in its hour of Arctic need.

Why is the inclusion of Alaska Natives in Alaska’s defense such a necessary component of Arctic defense? Because as recognized in early WWII, “the native people have already proved themselves to be both enthusiastic and capable. They

\textsuperscript{22} Demer, “In Rural Alaska, a Plan Takes Shape.”
\textsuperscript{23} BG Simon Brown, commander, ASDF; telephone interview with the author, 6 February 2024.
have first-hand knowledge of the terrain and elements. They can shoot or move with astonishing speed in summer or winter. They are courageous, inherently disciplined, and loyal. . . . We can greatly add to the protection of our country without seriously depleting our military commitments elsewhere.”

Active-duty Soldiers arriving in Alaska from “outside” either on assignment or for training exercises, have steep learning curves to acclimate and gain skills critical to survival and tactical success in the Arctic. Who better than a cadre of Native Alaskans to provide lived-experience instruction to newly arrived troops? The 11th Division (Airborne) commander, MG Brian Eifler, US Army, recently made remarks to this effect,

NWTC [the Northern Warfare Training Center] is the Army’s premier cold weather school, and provides individual and small unit level, cold weather and mountain warfare training. While it is steeped in history and staffed with some of the best Soldier instructors in the nation, the division wants to incorporate Alaska Native SMEs into our cold weather courses to help refine our tactics, techniques and procedures. This will go a long way in deepening our understanding of the environment and improving our ability to withstand extreme cold and its effects across the warfighting functions.

A constructive and modern model for such a concept currently exists and could facilitate such an initiative—the Canadian Rangers. This military organization had a similar mission, structure, and heritage as the ATG and endured bureaucratic ups and downs over the decades. Today, the Canadian Rangers continue to provide an outstanding example of how local and Indigenous expertise in a paramilitary role affords Native populations the opportunity to serve while maintaining their traditional cultures and lifestyle, “successfully integrating national security and sovereignty agendas with community-based activities and local stewardship.”

Over time, the Canadian Rangers, too, have struggled with relevance in a nation whose citizens are rarely focused on purely Arctic concerns. As Rob Huebert states, “Canadians and Americans do not like to think about the North American Arctic in strategic terms. Canadians prefer to think of it in terms of their national psyche; of its stark beauty; of the experience of its northern indigenous peoples; and in

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terms of both its economic potential and its environmental fragility. . . . But most of the time Canadians and Americans simply do not think about this region.”

As a result, the Canadian Rangers have also had to contend with massive funding cuts and periodic crises of identity and mission. Yet today they are the cornerstone of “two central elements of Canada’s Defense mission: surveillance and control of Canada’s territory, airspace, and maritime areas; and helping the Federal government achieve national goals . . . despite demographic changes over the previous half century, the Rangers remain the only military presence in some of the least populated parts of North America.”

Falling somewhere between the professional Soldiers of the AKARNG and the paramilitary volunteers of the ASDF, the Canadian Rangers model is a unique subset of the Canadian Reserve Forces and offers a reasonable, attainable, and cost effective opportunity for restoring the capabilities and capacities lost when the Eskimo Scout Battalions were disbanded.

Questions, then, arise as to whether federal or state governments have an appetite to undertake a similar Alaskan Rangers program, what level of support might be presumed by various villages and tribal and regional governments, and to what extent might Alaska Native Corporations invest in support of such a project. The possible secondary gains from such investments far exceed the military capacity increase and are limited only by the imagination. The ATG, after all, was largely a grassroots effort, if only with a small outside encouragement and leadership. Such an organization could breathe new life into defense-service opportunities in rural communities without being imposed from “the outside.”

In their military capacity, members of such an organization could serve as liaisons or ombudsmen to statewide military training exercises, provide a ready built, locally proposed leadership framework for a wide array of disaster responses, and serve as a continuous sovereign presence across thousands of miles of coast and wilderness. They could conceivably safeguard and maintain critical infrastructure, provide environmental data collection, facilitate search-and-rescue response, or teach and enhance Arctic-specific skills to any number of civilian or governmental agencies. Most importantly, they would begin to heal the fractured relationship between the military and many of our Alaska Native communities and serve as a bulwark against a generation of young people leaving the villages to seek opportunities elsewhere.

With each passing year, despite the heroic efforts of a few diehard believers trying to keep the links intact, and with rural recruiting efforts that seem to go in

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fits and starts, our military and Alaska Native communities grow further apart. Perhaps the real tragedy is that while the immediate challenges are replete with local nuance and are strategic in impact, the disconnect is highly reflective of a similar growing disconnect between the military and the rest of American society as well. This is not solely an Alaska problem. But in Alaska it is a problem for Alaskans to solve. Despite the high-profile ceremonies, conferences, and discussions between senior leaders of military and Native communities which are sure to continue and sure to generate amicable-yet-unremarkable headlines, there is no substitute for the multigenerational service that once was the pride of 111 small villages and hamlets across the Arctic, and that now remain only in the memories of elders who grow fewer with each passing day.  

The founding characteristics of the ATG and Canadian Rangers are in urgent need in Alaska, particularly along the west and northern coastal regions where the ATG served most prominently. Highly localized units, decentralized leadership, informal, flexible, and self-sufficient in the extreme, the grassroots and internal creation of an organization with these characteristics is not only appropriate but also necessary given the US capability gaps in the Arctic at present. That such an organization could be based on a modern example of real success, embrace its legitimate heritage, and avoid the pitfalls that prevent the ARNG and ASDF from effectively recruiting and maintaining rural community members, and whose benefits could conceivably be indirectly monetized to the benefit of the Alaska Native Community they represent should appeal to many. That the same organization could present innovative solutions that augment current capabilities of the Alaska Organized Militia and active-duty defense partners without duplicating efforts, threatening legitimacy, or consuming scarce funding, should silence most opposition.  

Alaska’s defense problems can never be completely solved in Washington, DC, because few there have spent time here. And Alaskans have never cared much for the solutions of outsiders anyway. The objections that may be raised to the concerns and ideas voiced in this article are exactly the same as those raised by establishment officers and politicians generations ago when Major Marston pitched his idea to train and equip Alaska Natives in a legitimate defense role outside the National Guard. There are always those with objections about why a difficult undertaking should be avoided. There will be legal hurdles and funding challenges, questions of roles, responsibilities, and authorities. They are legitimate concerns, but they are also not unsolvable, nor should they distract or discourage us from addressing the problem. The fundamental issue at hand, what lacks most centrally in our Arctic

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defense strategy is the inclusion of “the original, authentic Alaskans, who have lived here since pre-history, and have adapted themselves to climate, latitude, and environment.”

Failing to meaningfully include them is to ignore our most precious advantage and disregards a proud history of service that many may desire to reclaim. They are still here; they never left. We have a duty to ask them with honor, as equal partners, and they may again answer as did their parents and grandparents before them.

Lt Col Jeff Hayes, US Army

Colonel Hayes is an 18-year Army officer and senior Army aviator rated in the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior and AH-64D Apache Longbow. He has multiple combat deployments to Afghanistan as a Scout/Light Attack Helicopter Pilot and has served three tours at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, in various capacities, including air cavalry troop commander, battalion operations officer, and battalion executive officer. His educational credentials include a BA in history from Norwich University and an MA in military operational art and science from the Air Command and Staff College. He is currently pursuing a graduate certificate in Arctic security through the University of Alaska Fairbanks where he is assigned as the professor of military science for Army ROTC.

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Seize the Gender Inclusion Era
to Enhance Homeland
Defense and Security

DR. CATHERINE LANTIGUA

Abstract

This article examines experiences implementing a Women, Peace, and Security strategy in diverse cultural contexts, focusing on underutilized tools for promoting gender equity. It explores opportunities for Mexican and Latin American women in regional defense and security. Emphasizing cultural awareness, it advocates for culturally sensitive leadership to strengthen international alliances prioritizing homeland defense. It also underscores leveraging gender differences for organizational effectiveness. Despite advancements, global gender discrimination persists, highlighting the need for continued progress. Upholding human rights and inclusion values enhances homeland defense efficacy. Leadership, gender inclusion research, and financial resources are crucial for successful homeland security strategies.

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The 2023 Department of Defense Women, Peace, and Security Strategy underscored the indispensable role of gender inclusion in homeland defense, positioning it as a vital tool for force management.\(^1\) However, true inclusivity extends beyond gender to encompass the broader spectrum of human dynamics, forming the bedrock for fostering cultural understanding and ensuring a robust foundation for security measures. Delving into the intricacies of culture and human behavior in foreign contexts is both intellectually stimulating and ambitious. A comprehensive, 360-degree perspective is imperative for effective homeland defense and security strategies, yet such a viewpoint remains elusive if it overlooks half of the population.

Gender disparities hold pivotal significance for leaders, planners, and decision makers, as they shape individuals’ values, preferences, and personality traits, thereby influencing organizational dynamics and outcomes.\(^2\) According to social roles theory, these differences stem from societal attributions placed upon women and men,

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dictating various aspects of human interaction, including labor division. The attributions of groups carry statistical weight, shaping perceptions and affecting outcomes.

Throughout history, women have often been relegated to roles perceived as delicate or unsuitable for certain tasks. Societal expectations for women vary across countries and intersect with factors such as age, gender, and race. The entrenched power of these roles poses formidable challenges to their disruption. Despite evidence demonstrating women’s proficiency in areas such as discipline, motivation, and marksmanship—even outperforming men—cultural norms and perceptions still hinder their acceptance into roles traditionally associated with male identity, such as combat positions. The barriers to women’s integration into society are predominantly rooted in cultural norms and perceptions rather than grounded in empirical reality.

Society’s assignment of gender roles reflects cultural norms and significantly shapes individuals’ daily behaviors and responses to crises and violence. The models of individual and group cultural identity permeate societal structures, influencing business interactions and organizational ethos. As individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, their perceptions of gender roles become deeply ingrained in their personalities, serving as both conscious and unconscious reference points for decision-making processes.

Moreover, the sense of security fostered by cultural familiarity becomes paramount during times of crisis, as individuals find solace in familiar environments. This familiarity aids in navigating situations of insecurity, providing a semblance of stability.

Within the US military, women have highlighted the arduous task of overcoming stereotypes regarding their physical capabilities and grappling with gender-related mental health challenges as the most formidable hurdles in their careers. Stereotypes portraying women as mentally inferior to men persist, hindering their acceptance into nontraditional roles. These culturally perceived physical disparities between genders not only impede women’s integration but also deter leaders from recognizing the benefits of fostering gender diversity within their teams, which could enrich organizational dynamics and mirror broader societal inclusivity. Ad-

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5 Lisa Worthy, Trisha Lavigne, and Fernando Romero, Culture and Psychology: How People Shape and are Shaped by Culture (Phoenix: Maricopa County Community College District, 2020), https://open.maricopa.edu/.
dressing cultural bias emerges as a formidable challenge, requiring individual commitment and concerted effort.

Oftentimes, I have observed the underrepresentation of women in my capacity as a security cooperation professional. When reviewing images from security cooperation events worldwide, including those from my tenure at the Security Cooperation Office in Mexico, I often find myself amidst a predominantly male cohort. While this realization underscores my privilege, it is also a testament to “how broadly invisible are women faces”—not only within fields like security cooperation, traditionally male-dominated professions, or contexts of organized crime but also in social gatherings. Many other women have echoed similar sentiments of privilege, particularly when labeled as pioneers in their respective roles. This phenomenon underscores a stark reality: as long as society continues to designate “first women,” progress in gender inclusion efforts remains insufficient.

The influential role of women in shaping children’s education is indisputable. As mothers, women actively contribute to molding children’s worldviews while also playing key roles in household economies and stability. However, women also hold significant potential as contributors to defense and security efforts. Researcher Marie O’Reilly’s findings in 2015 underscored women’s overwhelmingly positive impact on violence prevention, societal strengthening, and peace facilitation. O’Reilly observed that women possess inherent qualities conducive to negotiation and violence prevention, serving as natural mediators who promote dialogue and trust. Their involvement in legislative and political spheres further bolsters efforts to prevent international conflicts, thus offering substantial advantages when designing programs, processes, and strategies for homeland defense and security.

Gender roles serve as pivotal factors in defining power dynamics within authoritarian regimes. Within the United States’ homeland defense and security communities, there exists a staunch advocacy for power equilibrium. Incorporating a gendered perspective into US defense and security frameworks will prove instrumental in evaluating national security threats, devising strategic competition initiatives, and countering the sway of authoritarian regimes on the global stage. Despite the profound intersectionality of gender and authoritarianism, leveraging gender as a competitive advantage against adversaries remains underutilized.

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Security cooperation stands as a potent instrument through which the United States cultivates enduring partnerships with foreign nations, thereby advancing defense and security objectives worldwide. Given the noble endeavor of security cooperation, it becomes imperative to recognize the paramount importance of fostering diverse participation within its leadership ranks. Inclusivity not only ensures representation, ownership, and empowerment but also serves as a true reflection of the broader community.

Moreover, embracing diverse participation and accessibility can elevate the prominence and efficacy of security cooperation initiatives, provided leaders acknowledge the contributions of all stakeholders and confront challenges with a comprehensive perspective rather than a narrow focus. With women constituting a majority of the global population, their increasing involvement as active participants in terrorist groups, criminal networks, and armed factions cannot be overlooked. Deborah Bonello’s work in *Narcas: The Secret Rise of Women in Latin America’s Cartels* offers compelling narratives illustrating the evolving roles of women in criminal enterprises. Gender disparities and roles, alongside other forms of diversity, must be meticulously documented to effectively inform leadership decisions. A steadfast commitment to fostering individual participation and opportunities within groups, promoting inclusivity across all team members, and nurturing a culture of healthy relationships stands as an essential leadership imperative.

Leadership skills serve as potent instruments, imbuing leaders with a social responsibility to wield these tools to foster inclusion and positively influence those around them.\(^{10}\) Within Latino culture, where relationships are rooted in trust, the imperative for inclusive leadership becomes even more pronounced.\(^{11}\) Leaders bear an implicit duty to cultivate an environment conducive to individuals realizing their full potential and fostering growth. The impact of leadership extends far beyond mere directives, as leaders serve as role models whose influence permeates throughout the organization.

Active engagement in leadership is pivotal to advancing societal inclusion. Culture operates subtly, necessitating ongoing observation and guidance from leaders to redirect cultural biases and champion inclusivity. In social spheres, gender neutrality is a myth, yet leaders often fail to capitalize on opportunities to cultivate a diverse workforce and underscore the gender dimensions within all facets of security cooperation.\(^{12}\) It is incumbent upon leaders to commit to analyzing issues

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through a gendered lens and integrating these insights into strategic initiatives, thereby enhancing the efficacy and acceptance of homeland defense and security strategies.

Increasingly, global conflicts and security challenges bear the face of women. Gender considerations are particularly salient in discussions surrounding the root causes and repercussions of voluntary or forced migration, where women and children are disproportionately affected by insecurity and physical risks, often falling victim to physical, sexual, and gender-based violence. While statistics reveal more men succumb to violent conflicts, women disproportionately endure sexual abuse.\textsuperscript{13}

Moreover, as cartels wield significant influence on social development, it becomes imperative to approach the issue through a gendered lens, evaluating the surge in crime and violence as women assume various roles, including producers, suppliers, traffickers, recruiters, couriers, consumers, and supporters of drug lords and gangs across South and North America, notably in Mexico. However, homeland defense and security professionals have been slow to adapt to these evolving trends, failing to view them through the perspective of women. This dearth of women’s insights hampers the ability of leaders, planners, and decision-makers to formulate informed strategies. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in security and defense spheres undermines efforts to realistically observe and address matters, hindering progress in safeguarding essential resources such as health, education, and finances through effective social policies.

Gender-disaggregated data on immigrants between 2019 and 2020 revealed a higher proportion of male immigrants compared to female immigrants in Latin America and the Caribbean. Globally, out of a total of 280.6 million immigrants, 51.9 percent were men, while the remainder were women. However, women constituted 51 percent of the global refugee population.\textsuperscript{14} Failure of homeland defense and security professionals to consider gender as a crucial variable can impede their ability to discern the nuances of different initiatives and effectively address associated challenges.

An illustrative case lies in the fight against drug trafficking, where emphasizing a gendered approach holds potential benefits. The international framework of drug control, largely premised on prohibition, inadvertently fuels illicit drug markets and empowers drug trafficking organizations. These organizations often mirror and perpetuate hegemonic gender systems, treating women and children as dispos-


Seize the Gender Inclusion Erato Enhance Homeland Defense and Security

able commodities. This perpetuates sexist structures, fostering the exploitation of women’s labor by male counterparts, reinforcing patriarchal relations within illicit labor markets, and perpetuating cycles of patriarchal violence and cultural norms.\textsuperscript{15}

The realm of drug trafficking is fraught with various forms of organized crime, including human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, and migrant smuggling, alongside pervasive violence, corruption, gender-based violence, and income disparities. This intricate network of criminal activities ensnares both victims and perpetrators, leaving them vulnerable to legal prosecution, financial exploitation, sexual abuse, and forced labor. Such realities pose significant threats to defense and security, undercutting efforts towards gender equality and female empowerment.

Another illustrative case lies within the realm of humanitarian response. Humanitarian crises precipitate extreme vulnerability and economic strain, pushing individuals outside of established healthcare systems and depriving them of fundamental necessities such as shelter, sustenance, and clothing. Amid such crises, women often find themselves grappling with the burdens of securing housing, food, and care for their families, rendering them susceptible to sexual violence, recruitment by drug cartels, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation. A nuanced understanding of the gender dynamics at play in such circumstances is imperative for effectively addressing the associated challenges. Enhancing the representation of women in significant leadership capacities, such as within emergency management groups, first responder teams, and medical and healthcare organizations, empowers them to develop and implement inclusive solutions tailored to the needs of diverse communities.

Gender inequality and power dynamics present multifaceted challenges for leaders, necessitating the identification and cultivation of individuals capable of embracing and operationalizing inclusive and diverse visions within organizations marked by racial, cultural, and gender diversity. Additionally, leaders must discern how educational interventions can shape organizational culture, individual behavior, and the interplay between various components of organizational systems to enhance or sustain performance at requisite levels.\textsuperscript{16}

Mentorship programs play a pivotal role in nurturing and guiding junior leaders through various stages of professional development. Meaningful mentorship experiences facilitated by the security cooperation program in Mexico yielded positive outcomes, as evidenced by a successful medical evacuation exercise con-


ducted between Mexico and the United States. In this instance, Mexico appointed a female leader to spearhead the air evacuation, thereby underscoring the significance of female medical professionals within the Mexican Armed Forces and promoting best practices. Moreover, during a women in defense panel in Mexico, military women had the opportunity to discuss the pivotal role of early education in fostering leadership skills and were affirmed by senior colleagues regarding the importance of empowering junior leaders—both women and men—through targeted value-building approaches.

Individuals are driven when they experience fairness, receive recognition and opportunities for growth, and are inspired to make meaningful contributions. It is worth noting that within organizations where the mission is traditionally associated with masculinity, such as the military, women’s performance may suffer due to the pervasive perception that many roles are tailored primarily for men.\textsuperscript{17} Correspondingly, it is crucial to acknowledge that the WPS agenda, from the perspective of homeland defense, transcends gender lines and concerns everyone, as it fundamentally revolves around maximizing human potential and motivation.

Organizations that prioritize diversity and equity in their environments are better equipped to excel in the global environment.\textsuperscript{18} Women within the security and defense sectors consistently shatter barriers, exhibit exceptional preparedness to seize opportunities, and repeatedly achieve success. Young women embarking on their careers are poised not only to meet but to surpass established standards, showcasing unparalleled dedication and performance. By placing greater emphasis on the inclusion of women and acknowledging their invaluable contributions, the potential to witness tangible advancements in democracy and the nation’s security and defense remains within reach.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Diversity and inclusion exert significant influence on organizational culture. Given the dearth of research on methodologies for integrating these facets into homeland defense and security, it becomes imperative to develop solutions that bridge this gap, empowering security cooperation professionals to effectively navigate the intricate dynamics of human differences. Adopting a stance of apparent neutrality regarding factors such as race, gender, and religious affiliation, and fostering a culture where gender distinctions are minimized in organizational


culture and decision-making, fails to address the complexities of modern defense challenges. Instead, it is essential to shed outdated social paradigms and acknowledge gender differences with the explicit aim of harnessing the benefits of effectively managing individual divergences as organizational assets rather than liabilities.¹⁹

Navigating the intricate balance between individual interests and organizational imperatives within rapidly evolving environments poses significant challenges for leaders and security professionals. To facilitate conditions where individuals feel accepted and respected while fulfilling mission objectives, leaders can implement policies and structures conducive to fostering inclusivity.²⁰ WPS national action plans (NAP) emerge as pivotal tools for shaping such policies and structures. While more than 90 percent of nations in the Western Hemisphere have initiatives addressing WPS, not all countries have NAPs for integrating gender perspectives into the security and defense sectors. Such plans are indispensable for supporting, formalizing, and guiding objectives in this critical domain.

Effective homeland defense organizations prioritize the advancement of knowledge and the seamless integration of their workforce. Such integration serves as a linchpin for robust knowledge management and operational excellence, as individuals enrich organizational systems with their diverse perspectives and leverage their intersectional characteristics—including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and disability—to optimize processes and achieve desired outcomes.

Despite the compelling evidence supporting the importance of mentorship programs, there remains a notable dearth of initiatives extended to international partners that facilitate cross-gender mentorship, enabling both women and men to glean insights from each other’s strengths. Additionally, it is incumbent upon successful women within these organizations to embrace their leadership roles and leverage their experiences and soft skills to mentor and empower other women to advance professionally.

Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive gender data on women’s participation across various domains, as well as a clear understanding of their involvement in illicit activities, poses a significant challenge. Rigorous data collection and research on gender issues within security and defense are indispensable for fostering critical reflection on existing practices and identifying viable solutions to evolving challenges.

Urgent action is warranted to achieve equal gender representation within homeland defense and security realms. This entails promoting inclusive measures, allocating financial resources to invest in comprehensive inclusion programs, and supporting initiatives aimed at collecting gender-disaggregated data for research purposes. Such efforts will contribute to cultivating a clearer understanding of homeland defense threats and opportunities, thereby guiding strategic advancements in this critical domain.

Dr. Catherine Lantigua

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Protecting the Corridor of Freedom to America’s Asian Border

Cleo Paskal

Abstract

Guam and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)—constituent parts of the United States—sit in such proximity to the Asian coast that the CNMI shares a maritime border with Japan. Stretching between them and Hawai’i are three independent countries—Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands—which have voluntarily granted the United States exclusive and extensive defense and security rights. This “corridor of freedom” across the central Pacific, earned through the blood of Americans during the island-hopping campaign of World War II and the goodwill of locals, is what enables the United States to extend its defense perimeter to Taiwan as well as to treaty allies Japan and the Philippines. The corridor of freedom is the bedrock of US defense strategy in the Pacific. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) perceives this relationship as a threat to its own power projection goals and has diligently worked to undermine the United States’ position in the region. If the United States is to maintain this Pacific buffer with Asia and keep Americans on Asia’s coast secure without again resorting to kinetic conflict, it will require a new “block-and-build” approach.

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Where does America’s western boundary lie? Many Americans might instinctively point to Hawai’i or perhaps the westernmost Aleutian Island, Attu. However, the correct answer extends more than 3,000 miles farther west, crossing the International Date Line, to Guam (making it, technically, America’s easternmost boundary). Guam lies west of New Zealand and is closer to Darwin, Australia, than to Honolulu. Just north of Guam lies the American archipelago of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), which extends about 300 miles further north until its exclusive economic zone meets that of Japan.

Approximately 50,000 people reside in the CNMI, with the largest population center located on Saipan. That island, positioned just more than 1,600 miles east of Taiwan and roughly 1,400 miles southeast of Okinawa, Japan, has found itself at the forefront of global geopolitics for more than a century due to its proximity to Asia. Understanding a bit of this historical context—knowledge that local policy makers are well-versed in and that influences their present decision making—is instrumental in comprehending the ongoing dynamics in America’s Pacific homeland and what potential futures may unfold there.
Back to the Future

During the mid-seventeenth century, Spain colonized large sections of the western and central Pacific, including what is now the CNMI and Guam. Today, Spanish surnames and Roman Catholicism are strongly represented across the region. After the Spanish-American War (1898), Spain ceded Guam to the United States, with President William McKinley subsequently tasking the US Navy with governing the territory.¹

Military-Civil Fusion, German Style

What is now the CNMI, along with several other Spanish possessions—parts of which now comprise Palau and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—were sold by Spain to Germany in 1899.² Germany subsequently initiated more targeted economic development efforts across the region. Engaging in a military-civil fusion, a practice frequently observed in the area, the German-Netherlands Telegraph Company laid submarine telegraph cables in 1906, connecting Yap to Manado, Yap to Guam, and Yap to Shanghai, thus circumventing the existing British-controlled Pacific telegraph cables. Consequently, Yap, located in what is now the FSM, emerged as a significant German naval communications hub prior to the outbreak of World War I.³

In 1914, Japan seized Germany’s western and central Pacific island territories. Following the war, the League of Nations officially awarded Tokyo the South Seas Mandate, consisting of what is now the CNMI and the countries of Palau, the FSM, and the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI).

¹ Treaty of Peace Between the United States and Spain, 10 December 1898, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/.
² German-Spanish Treaty, 12 February 1899, https://history.state.gov/.
Protecting the Corridor of Freedom to America’s Asian Border

Figure 1. Sovereignty and mandate boundary lines in 1921 of the islands of the Pacific.
(Source: National Geographic Society, Wikimedia Commons, 18 December 2014, https://en.wikipedia.org/)

Military-Civil Fusion, Imperial Japanese Style

Over a span of three decades, Japan exerted colonial influence in the region including through the establishment of schools, clinics, and businesses. Japanese migrants, hailing from various regions including Okinawa, relocated to the islands under the Mandate. Koror, in what is now Palau, served as the administrative hub, with periods during the interwar era witnessing a greater Japanese population in Koror than indigenous Palauans. Despite the predominantly civilian nature of the Japanese presence, particularly in the initial stages, apprehensions soon surfaced.

In 1921, Maj Earl “Pete” Ellis, USMC, wrote *Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*, describing the likely need to fight Imperial Japan in the Pacific and de-
lining the requisite strategies and tactics for victory.\textsuperscript{4} He wrote, “Japan is a World Power, and her army and navy will doubtless be up to date as to training and materiel. Considering our consistent policy of non-aggression, she will probably initiate the war; which will indicate that, in her own mind, she believes that, considering her natural defensive position, she has sufficient military strength to defeat our fleet.”\textsuperscript{5} Pete Ellis died in Koror, where Japanese officials had him under watch, in 1923.\textsuperscript{6}

Less than two decades later, Imperial Japan had entrenched itself in the central Pacific islands of the South Seas Mandate. Some industries in the region covertly transitioned to wartime production, and military infrastructure underwent development. For instance, in the CNMI, a local business on Saipan purportedly claimed to be clearing ground for a baseball field, when in reality, it was constructing an airfield runway.

By the time of the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan thought that many pieces were in place. Following the assault on Hawaii, Japan invaded Guam, thereby asserting complete control over the central Pacific.\textsuperscript{7} Consequently, two decades after Ellis’ initial writings, the US military revived his island-hopping strategy to navigate through this “veritable ‘cloud’ of islands and reefs,” where, as Ellis observed, “Perhaps there is no other area in the world where navigation is more difficult than in that under consideration.”\textsuperscript{8}

To reach mainland Japan, the United States had to circumvent the most heavily fortified islands of the Mandate, steering south and west before positioning itself to head north into the central Pacific. This strategic maneuvering necessitated major battles in locales such as Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and Tarawa (Kiribati) before advancing to the Mandate proper, where battles were fought in Kwajalein (RMI), then onward to Truk Lagoon (FSM), Peleliu (Palau), and elsewhere in the region.

Finally, in 1944, US forces seized Saipan and Tinian in what is now the CNMI. Tinian swiftly transformed into the world’s busiest airport as waves of B-29s took off to bombard Japan, including the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} Earl Hancock Ellis, “Advanced Based Operations in Micronesia,” US Department of the Navy, 23 July 1921, https://www.ibiblio.org/.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ellis, “Advanced Based Operations in Micronesia,” 37.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Brett Friedman, 21st Century Ellis: Operational Art and Strategic Prophesy for the Modern Era (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2015).
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ellis, “Advanced Based Operations in Micronesia,” 31.
\end{itemize}
Nagasaki in August 1945. By the war’s conclusion, more than 100,000 Americans had perished in the Pacific Theater.

**What Now?**

Following the war, the fate of the Pacific islands, where so many Americans had fought and died, was decided by the Allied Powers. While the islands in the southern Pacific were predominantly entrusted to regional colonial powers—Britain, France, Australia, and New Zealand—for governance, those in the central Pacific had demonstrated their paramount importance to US security. Geographical considerations positioned them as either Asia’s potential threat to the United States or America’s bulwark against Asian aggression.

Ultimately, the United Nations bestowed upon the United States the administration of the central Pacific region—the same territory that had formerly comprised the Japanese South Sea Mandate—designating it as the world’s sole Strategic Trust Territory.9 This expansive area, stretching from west of Hawai‘i to the Philippines and north toward Japan, was roughly the continental United States in size, encompassing what is now the CNMI, Palau, the FSM, and the RMI.

In the 1960s, amid the waning era of colonialism and the burgeoning global push for independence, the Congress of Micronesia was established on Saipan, comprising delegates from across the Trust Territories.10 Through deliberations and ballots, the region eventually fragmented into the CNMI, Palau, the FSM, and the RMI. The CNMI entertained but ultimately dismissed the notion of independence, formally aligning with the United States as a commonwealth in 1986.

The memory of World War II sacrifices and apprehensions regarding Soviet activities in the Pacific motivated many US political leaders during the Cold War to diligently foster enduring and robust relations with the region. This endeavor culminated in Palau, the FSM, and the RMI being offered a distinctive relationship with the United States through Compacts of Free Association (COFA). In 1986, the United States forged separate COFAs with the RMI and the FSM; Palau consented to a COFA in 1994.11

Under their respective COFAs with the United States, the three Freely Associated States (FAS) voluntarily extended uniquely extensive defense and security

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access to the United States within their sovereign territories. As articulated in the COFAs, “The Government of the United States has full authority and responsibility for security and defense matters in or relating to the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia [and Palau].”

This includes control over key aspects of strategic decision making, such as the prerogative for the United States to establish and operate US military bases within these countries and to wield veto over other countries’ military access to the region. In broader terms, apart from defense and security provisions, the COFAs also afford citizens of the FAS the right to work in the United States, serve in the US military, and receive financial support and services (such as the postal service) from the US government. The financial and service provisions undergo renegotiation every 20 years and were formally renewed in 2024.

There was a recognition that America’s Pacific islands bore a heavy burden as the nation’s veritable Pacific “coast.” For example, when President Ronald Reagan, a key advocate for the COFAs, visited Guam in 1984, he remarked, “[Guam] may be nearly 9,000 miles from our nation’s capital, but it’s a real pleasure to know that we’re among fellow Americans. . . . In times of crisis, few Americans have been more steadfast in the defense of our shared values and few have made more sacrifices to preserve them.” Additionally, it is noteworthy that Chinese media often refers to China’s DF-26 missile as the “Guam killer.”

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, some within the US defense and strategic circles appear to have lost sight of the significance of the FAS in homeland defense. There has been a noticeable emphasis, particularly within the Department of Defense, on nations situated along the western periphery of the Pacific, notably Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and others. This emphasis is evident in treaties such as AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Australia, Japan, India, and United States), and a renewed focus on longstanding bilateral defense agreements with Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea. Implicitly, there has been an assumption that the central Pacific corridor of freedom, which has facilitated unhindered movement for the United States from North America to the western Pacific, would endure in perpetuity.

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At the same time, akin to Imperial Japan’s understanding, the PRC recognizes that asserting control over the central Pacific would severely impede the United States’ capacity to resupply its partners and its own possessions and bases. Consequently, Beijing has dedicated significant efforts over numerous years to undermine the enduring bonds forged in blood between the United States and the people of the central Pacific 80 years ago. Of the three, Palau and the RMI additionally maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan, rendering them even higher priority targets for the PRC.

**China’s Braided Approach to Influence**

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wields an arsenal of political warfare weapons aimed at infiltrating and exerting influence over target countries, including the FAS and the CNMI. Through a combination of public and private loans, bribery, blackmail, coercion, investment, and influence, the CCP and its proxies seek to undermine support for the United States. These various tools are strategically intertwined to present Washington with complex security dilemmas. Efforts are intensified upon identifying vulnerabilities, while simultaneous endeavors persist across other fronts. Major operations are usually “braided,” with three mutually reinforcing strands: commercial, strategic, and criminal activities.\(^\text{16}\)

**Marshall Islands: Attempt To Set Up a “Country-Within-a-Country”**

One example of Beijing’s braided approach involved a case featuring two individuals of Chinese origin attempting to subvert the government of the Marshall Islands. The RMI hosts a pivotal US military base at Kwajalein, and the Marshallese have made substantial sacrifices to bolster America’s defense, enduring the fallout of 67 nuclear tests conducted by the United States while under its administration.

In 2016, Chinese citizens Cary Yan and Gina Zhou obtained Marshall Islands passports and embarked on a campaign to undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the Marshall Islands. They engaged with RMI officials in both New York City and the RMI itself, proposing the establishment of a semi-autonomous region within the RMI. By around April 2018, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) controlled by Yan and Zhou convened a conference in Hong Kong, attended by select members of the RMI legislature. The NGO financed the travel, accommoda-

tions, and entertainment of the RMI officials. During the conference, with the backing of the legislators, the NGO publicly launched an initiative to establish the Rongelap Atoll Special Administrative Region (RASAR). Rongelap Atoll had endured the consequences of radioactive fallout from US nuclear testing during the Cold War, and locals were enticed by the prospect of economic development. If implemented, RASAR would have brought about substantial changes to the laws governing Rongelap Atoll, including the relaxation of immigration regulations.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency characterized RASAR as “a multi-year scheme that included establishing a non-governmental organization and allegedly bribing officials in the Republic of the Marshall Islands with the intention of establishing a semi-autonomous region, akin to Hong Kong, in the US-defended Marshall Islands.” It was only through the convergence of the pandemic and US law enforcement efforts that the plan was thwarted.

In November 2020, Yan and Zhou were arrested in Thailand and subsequently extradited to the United States to face charges of conspiring to violate the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), violating the FCPA, conspiring to commit money laundering, and committing money laundering.” Yan and Zhou each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to breach the antibribery provisions of the FCPA, resulting in Yan receiving a 42-month sentence and Zhou a 31-month sentence. As part of the plea bargain, the United States relinquished the opportunity to pursue the case at trial, which could have served as a potent deterrent. This also meant that, by the spring of 2024, both Yan and Zhou had completed their sentences and had been deported back to the RMI, where they are currently at liberty.

These events in the RMI epitomized a classic braided attack. Initially, the approach appeared ostensibly commercial, with the creation of an autonomous economic zone, RASAR, in an area yearning for development. Secondly, the commercial aspect aimed to achieve the strategic objective of establishing a “country-within-a-country,” providing the PRC with a platform to undermine

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18 Mike Koehler, “Yan Sentenced To 3.5 Years for Marshall Islands Bribery Scheme,” FCPA Professor (blog), 17 May 2023, https://fcpaprofessor.com/.


Marshallese sovereignty, influence its ties with Taiwan and the United States, and execute other operations. Lastly, the braid was completed through criminal activities, exemplified by the bribery of government officials in the case of RASAR. All these maneuvers were cloaked in layers of protective information operations, leveraging traditional news media, social media, social gatherings, trips to China, and more. These efforts were bolstered by a robust intelligence network that furnished China with valuable insights into whom to target and how best to do so.

**The CNMI—China’s Backdoor into the United States**

Similar activities are unfolding within America’s Pacific homeland. In the CNMI, since 2009, PRC nationals have been granted entry into the islands without visas, entering as tourists under a “discretionary parole” system. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese tourists constituted approximately 40 percent of all visitors, with some high rollers also visiting CNMI’s PRC-affiliated casinos.

According to CNMI Governor Arnold Palacios, due to the need for economic development,

> We turned to Chinese gambling, legalizing casino gaming on Saipan even after the venture previously failed on Tinian. An exclusive license was nevertheless awarded to a Chinese casino operation that has been mired in litigation and criminal investigation practically from the start...The Chinese casino on Saipan at its peak raked in billions of US dollars in monthly rolling chip volumes from just 16 VIP tables, outdoing even the glitziest casinos in Macau.21

This boosted the economy but also, according to Palacios, “was fraught with controversy—from human trafficking to birth tourism, labour abuse, money laundering, and public corruption.”22

Chinese individuals have been discovered attempting to illicitly reach Guam by boat, utilizing the US postal service to distribute illegal drugs, and illegally buying US driver’s licenses.23 Chinese organized crime constitutes an integral part of the

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22 Paskal, “Northern Mariana.”

PRC’s operations, engaging in bribery, enforcement, smuggling, blackmail, and various other illicit activities. While afforded a degree of autonomy in generating income and establishing networks, Chinese criminals operate under the implicit understanding that they must be of utility to Beijing when called upon. In accordance with China’s 2017 National Intelligence Law, every Chinese citizen and organization is legally mandated to support the government’s intelligence operations.24

Consequently, the emergence of PRC-linked businesses in strategic locations lacking commercial justification warrants scrutiny. For example, the US Air Force recently disclosed plans to invest more than USD 400 million on the CNMI island of Tinian. Meanwhile, a Chinese-linked casino has just opened on Tinian’s dual-use harbor, prompting inquiries into the choice of location and timing. Governor Palacios has requested federal government aid in probing corruption in the CNMI. However, progress has been slow, despite the potential for a handful of proficient investigators and assertive attorneys to furnish the CNMI with greater security than any number of C-130 transports could.

What To Do?

What is needed is a “block-and-build” approach, where malign Chinese influence is blocked while simultaneously building domestic economic and legal security. The United States must deter and defend against the PRC’s political warfare with equal determination and intensity as it dedicates to preparing for potential kinetic conflicts. Neglecting to confront Chinese aggression in America’s Pacific homeland, particularly in what can be deemed the crisis phase of the conflict spectrum, heightens the risk of succumbing to a fait accompli. This, in turn, would render any subsequent confrontation with the PRC more difficult and costly.

Given the advanced stage of the PRC’s malign influence and gray-zone aggression in the western Pacific, it is prudent to assume that any major projects aimed at enhancing economic, political, or security autonomy (build)—particularly those reducing the island territories’ and COFA nations’ dependence on China—will be targeted by PRC agents and impeded through various tactics. Unless such targeting is blocked, it will be very hard to build.

One way to block Chinese coercion, influence, and bullying is to target the strand of the “braid” that bolsters their commercial and strategic leverage and grants the CCP an unjust advantage: corruption. Currently, there is seldom significant repercussions for accepting Chinese funding. Typically, there is no financial loss, forfei-

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ture of assets, loss of status, or visa restrictions to the United States, among other consequences. The longer honest leaders and citizens remain unsupported, the more they are worn down, and their numbers dwindle. Furthermore, local investigators and prosecutors often encounter difficulties in prosecuting high-profile cases due to the close-knit nature of local societies.

Several measures warrant consideration, including conducting public investigations into CCP corruption and criminal activities in the FAS, Guam, and the CNMI by relevant US agencies and departments. This may involve endorsing the appointment of special prosecutors with specific mandates to investigate corruption. Additionally, there should be bolstered support for local institutions, such as Palau’s National Security Coordination office, which play a pivotal role in domestic security coordination and enhancing security and defense collaboration with international partners, particularly the United States.

Overall, maintaining vibrant, robust, and comprehensively understood relations with the FAS is imperative, rather than treating them as periodic crises to be managed. The COFAs stand apart from any other relationship the United States maintains and serve as a gauge of the importance the US attaches to the Pacific Islands region as a whole.

**Block and Build: Fisheries as a Case Study**

Fisheries represent a sector where implementing a block-and-build strategy would yield mutual benefits for both the mainland United States and the Pacific Island territories and the FAS. China possesses a sizable fishing fleet, showcasing its dual-use capabilities, evident in how the fleet has been utilized to assert China’s territorial claims in the Philippines and Japan. Furthermore, the PRC holds the notorious distinction of being the world’s foremost offender for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing every year since 2019. As explained by President Surangel Whipps, Jr., of Palau, stopping Chinese IUU fishing is “very important because we know that—yeah, they fish, they may be interested in other activities . . . The type of fishing they do is so destructive . . . they’ll just destroy ecosystems.”

China will not stop cease such activities voluntarily and may already be leveraging its influence with Pacific Islands governments to undermine patrols and enforcement efforts. US Coast Guard (USCG) vessels conducting IUU patrols have

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encountered challenges regarding permission to access ports in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, hampering their operational effectiveness. In 2022, the Solomon Islands blocked all US and other naval visits to the country, with the exception of the politically expedient visit by the American hospital ship USNS Mercy. Beyond maritime enforcement, the United States must devise a strategy to safeguard the implementation of any enforcement policies, including addressing local corruption and providing support to local governments resisting pressure from Beijing. This necessitates active involvement and support from the US government, involving intelligence sharing regarding corruption within local leadership and a comprehensive political warfare campaign, complemented by substantial economic measures, aimed at fostering an environment where IUU fishing operations are untenable.

Few countries, if any, can confront China unilaterally. Pacific Island territories and nations recognize the urgency of addressing IUU fishing, and they require practical assistance rather than mere reminders of the issue. Their limited resources hinder their ability to confront Chinese maritime aggression. However, even in America’s corridor of freedom, the primary tool for countering PRC gray-zone aggression, the USCG, faces significant challenges. To illustrate the disparity, while the USCG is endeavoring to patrol the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean west of Hawai‘i, it possesses only approximately three medium-endurance cutters—with the possibility of deploying another one within the next year. Additionally, it operates three fast-response cutters with shorter ranges—with the potential for four more to be received and deployed soon. In essence, there are at most seven USCG vessels tasked with covering the entire western Pacific. This constitutes a formidable task for such a limited fleet, especially considering that some ships will inevitably be in port at any given time. To put it into perspective, it is akin to patrolling the entire United States with just seven police cars, each traveling at a speed of 30 miles per hour. Without the capacity to intercept, search, and detain, it is akin to observing a shoplifter (if they do not spot you first) without intervening.

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Protecting the Corridor of Freedom to America’s Asian Border

Expanding the toolkit entails recognizing US military support for countering illegal fishing operations in the FAS as an activity integral to these nations’ national defense, for which the US bears responsibility under the COFAs. US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) can address the issue accordingly, particularly considering the dual-use nature of the PRC fishing fleet. Furthermore, established methods exist for dual-flagging US Navy ships for law enforcement duties, should the commander of USINDOPACOM opt to do so. USCG legal detachments routinely deploy on Navy vessels to combat the influx of illegal drugs into the United States. Upon encountering a suspected drug runner, the Navy ship is “re-flagged“ as a USCG vessel, enabling the Coast Guardsmen to lawfully conduct law enforcement activities in support of US homeland defense policies.32

Viewing IUU fishing through the broader lens of homeland defense, rather than aiming to apprehend every IUU vessel, permits asymmetric application of penalties. For instance, given that most IUU fishing involves Chinese vessels, the United States could apply financial and economic pressure on other Chinese entities associated with the fishing industry. This may include targeting fish processing, fish-meal production, and the sale of frozen fish originating in China but marketed in the United States. That is the blocking. As for the building efforts should also encompass fostering fishing industries in the Pacific Island territories and the FAS, prioritizing the revitalization of the US fishing fleet and processing capability within US territories.

**Bottom Line**

At its very core, this represents a battle of systems: authoritarianism versus democracy, playing out in one of the world’s most strategically significant regions. From Beijing’s perspective, without exerting some degree of control over the central Pacific, the PRC cannot effectively project power and counter US influence.33 Conversely, from the US viewpoint, without the ability to deploy across the corridor of freedom in the central Pacific, the United States faces heightened vulnerability. This underscores the critical importance of institutions that uphold democracy, such as a free press, independent judiciary, and free and fair elections—precisely the targets of PRC influence operations in the central Pacific.34 As exemplified in

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Solomon Islands, each country stands merely one election away from a PRC-proxy assuming power and dismantling democracy. Without the survival of democracy and relatively honest and consensus-driven governance, little else can succeed. All efforts by USAID, agreements signed, or visits by Pacific Island Forum officials hold limited efficacy if authoritarian leaders beholden to Beijing hold sway.

The CCP has meticulously crafted a focused, well-funded, and resourced initiative aimed at undermining the sovereignty of Pacific Island nations to expand PRC influence across the region—seeking to achieve through political and legal warfare what Imperial Japan failed to accomplish through kinetic means. Should the CCP succeed, the outcome would mirror the centralized, oppressive, and environmentally and socially damaging system one finds in the PRC. As one senior Chinese official candidly conveyed to Admiral Timothy Keating, “You take Hawaii east. We’ll take Hawaii west.” This proposition echoes sentiments reminiscent of Pete Ellis’ era.

We stand at a familiar crossroads. Hopefully, this time, we will honor the legacy of those who came before us by choosing the path of block and build now, rather than fight and die later.

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