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Defending America's Northern Border and Its Arctic Approaches Through Cooperation With Allies and Partners

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Executive Summary

The North American Arctic and its approaches in both the North Pacific and North Atlantic continue to pose a security dilemma for the United States. Securing the globe's commanding heights, protecting US sovereignty from adversarial air, missile, and maritime incursions, protecting economically essential undersea cables and critical energy infrastructure, ensuring well managed fisheries, and assessing the future mining of the seabed of critical minerals are just a few elements contributing to this. As a recent [Sino-Russian naval exercise](#) off the Aleutian Islands highlights, unwillingness to adequately acknowledge or urgently address these challenges heightens both the security dilemma and the critical need to fill gaps in domain awareness and posture to ensure the US homeland is secure.

This paper looks at the evolving threat delta in the Arctic in the wake of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It comes to the assessment that the war against Ukraine did not reduce Russia's military focus or largely its posture in the Arctic (minus some conventional land forces): rather it has exacerbated a dynamic of heightened tension and rising instability that started in the mid-2000s and which most policymakers in Arctic capitals chose to ignore. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and perhaps most importantly changing Sino-Russian relations have increased the urgency to address existing gaps in Arctic strategy, posture, and capabilities for the United States and its allies.

At the same time, Finland's membership in NATO—and Sweden's future membership—have and will continue to evolve NATO defense and deterrence capacities in the Arctic. NATO's implementation of its updated defense plans, including the regional plan for the High North and Atlantic, will increase NATO's Arctic capabilities over time. To enhance capacity and prevent silos, it will be of critical importance that the respective regional plans for the High North and for the Baltics will be closely coordinated. Beyond working on closer integration between the "Arctic 7" (the United States, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland), more coordinated planning with the United Kingdom, the Baltic States, Poland, and Germany will help ensure US and NATO Arctic defense coherence and enhanced deterrence posture across the Baltic-Arctic theaters.

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The evolving threat picture and strengthened NATO posture in the North have significant implications for the US Department of Defense and NORTHCOM and NORAD specifically. Repercussions of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic, our observation of Russia's military performance in Ukraine and its posture in the Arctic, and an enlarged NATO to include Sweden and Finland should compel policymakers to re-envision the military security architecture in the Arctic and accelerate the United States and NATO's deterrence and defense planning and capabilities in the region.

To do so, the following steps should be taken:

- o NORTHCOM should conduct a classified assessment of Russian missile capabilities in Ukraine and its implications for NORAD modernization.
- o USNAVEUR and the 2nd Fleet should conduct an assessment of the use of unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV) in light of Ukrainian and Russian tactics used in the Baltic, Black, and Azov Seas to evaluate implications in the North Atlantic.
- o Utilizing NATO's regional defense plans that were approved at the July 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, NATO planners should build an "integrated deterrence" posture for the Arctic and streamline NATO's force structure.
- o The US should continue to re-assess the Unified Command Plan (UCP) specifically for the Arctic to better incorporate greater Sino-Russian alignment and engagement in the Arctic.
- o NATO should conduct an inventory of government and private sector Arctic-capable capabilities. The United States should address its Arctic capability deficiencies via an Arctic Security Initiative (ASI), modelled after the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), but primarily designed to strengthen US Arctic defense and deterrence needs and secondarily ally needs.
- o The United States and its allies should focus on domain awareness, mobility, and presence and think innovatively about enhanced presence to enable rapid deployment across forces. Streamlined bilateral and NATO military exercises and joint drills will enhance NATO Arctic mobility and presence and develop a more credible force posture.
- o The Arctic 7 should work together to strengthen strategic communication around their enhanced presence and exercises. The Arctic 7 should reinforce political cohesion and resilience by closely examining Nordic cohesive and comprehensive defense concepts, particularly related to integrated air and missile defense. Special attention also should be given for the United States and NATO to counter and detect unmanned underwater vehicles in both the North Atlantic and the North Pacific.

Although geostrategic attention has shifted to supporting Ukraine and allies in Europe as well as enhanced deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, the Arctic remains a strategic arena, primarily in the eyes of Moscow and Beijing. The United States and its NATO allies must also view the Arctic strategically, assess the dramatic shifts in the international environment for the Arctic region, and utilize more fully the capabilities of its allies to strengthen defense and deterrence in the approaches to the Arctic through the North Atlantic and North Pacific.



INTRODUCTION

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The Arctic region should be prioritized to protect US sovereignty from adversarial air, missile, and maritime incursions, to protect economically essential undersea cables and critical energy infrastructure, to ensure freedom of navigation of international sea lanes, and to ensure well managed fisheries. Increased human activity as well as acceleration of climate change has placed unprecedented stress on Arctic safety, security, and governance.

For the past 25 years, Arctic nations have focused primarily on soft security issues in the Arctic, prioritizing cooperation on climate, scientific and environmental issues. The notion that the region was exempt from more challenging international issues was encapsulated by the term "Arctic exceptionalism". This concept sheltered transatlantic policymakers from thinking about the region as a strategic arena of great power competition. The Arctic is now less exceptional and more susceptible to geostrategic events. As a region like any other, great power competition needs to be managed better and a greater focus needs to be placed on increasing transparency, predictability, and stability, as well as developing confidence building measures (CBMs). To contribute to this stability, the United States, with its Arctic allies, should focus on substantially increasing multi-domain awareness and increasing its physical presence to strengthen the deterrence and defense of the North American Arctic and the US homeland.

This report looks at the evolution of circumpolar security by exploring the changing security environment and threat delta, reviewing US interests in the region, and highlighting opportunities for cooperation with other Arctic partners.

Assessments of the security situation in Chapter 1 are informed by two key developments: First, a clearer understanding of what a more aggressive and revisionist Russia means militarily (what has and

has not changed since February 24, 2022 regarding Russia's military posture) and the implications of Moscow's evolving relationship with Beijing for the Arctic. The second development is NATO's Nordic enlargement (Finland's accession and the approval of Sweden's membership bid). Given that the "Arctic 7" (Arctic Council members not including Russia), will soon also be an Arctic "NATO 7", a better understanding of the nexus between the European and North American Arctic security environments and better security synergies should be welcomed.

Chapter 2 looks at the US role in the Arctic in light of Russia's war of aggression and highlights avenues for policymakers to better navigate an increasingly challenging operating environment with regards to emerging threats, deterrence, and US force posture. In line with the [US Department of Defense's priority focused on "integrated deterrence"](#) it highlights avenues to achieve greater interagency and force integration.

Furthermore, we assess what steps need to be taken to more effectively integrate partners in the Arctic in chapter 3, which examines tools and approaches to vulnerabilities that have proven successful in Arctic ally and partner countries. This final chapter offers clear policy pathways and recommendations to increase interoperability and strategic integration by building on updates to NATO's concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) made at the Vilnius Summit in July.

The findings of this report are supported by strategy documents, peer publications, and most importantly, anonymized interviews with experts and officials from the Arctic 7 countries. These perspectives create a more holistic picture of capacity, challenges, and opportunities in the region.

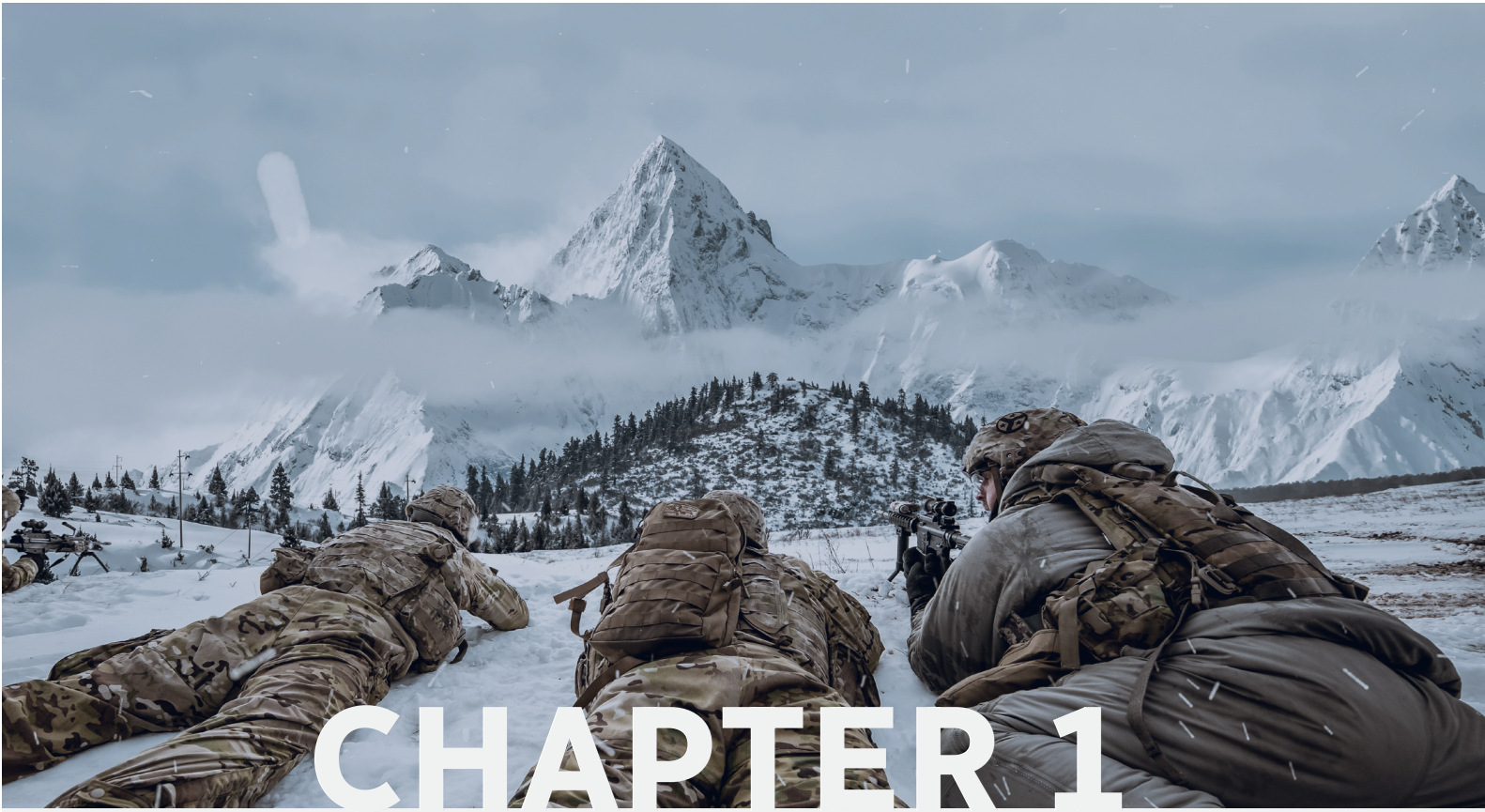


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Chapter 1— Unpacking the Threat Delta

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has undeniably altered the security dynamic in the Euro-Atlantic region and by extension US interests in the Arctic. This chapter explores the threat delta, namely the evolution of the threat environment in the Arctic, to understand the security challenges the United States is facing and determine whether instability is "moving North." Although the war against Ukraine does not represent a "seismic shift" in circumpolar affairs, it has exacerbated and accelerated a negative regional security dynamic that started in the mid-2000s with Russia's resumption of its first strategic nuclear bomber flights over the Arctic. Russia's increased risk tolerance and its need to demonstrate military strength domestically and externally due to its inability to subjugate Ukraine also heightens instability in the Arctic as Moscow seeks to protect and saber-rattle with its Arctic-based nuclear capabilities.

It is for these reasons that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has also shone a spotlight on existing gaps in Arctic security, provided insights into Russian capabilities and tactics, and highlighted new pathways for cooperation with European allies, including in the field of defense innovation. This is an opportunity for the United States to build a stronger deterrence posture and enhanced presence to meet existing and future challenges posed by Russia in the near term and China in the long term.

1.1 Russia's Arctic Military Posture, Threat Perception, and Capabilities

The Arctic remains an [area of strategic importance](#) for Russia's national interest. It is paramount to Russia's survival as a nation (second strike nuclear capability) and its future economic development. Moscow perceives climate change as a positive as it hastens a more economically dynamic and accessible Arctic through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and across the territory of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF). Moscow seeks to protect its interests through a variety of military and economic means [outlined in its most recent legislative amendments](#) to Russian Arctic policy as well as in the [updated Maritime Doctrine of 2022](#)—specifically related to control over the Northern Sea Route (NSR) along the AZRF.

Moscow's Arctic [strategic priorities remain unchanged](#). They still seek to impose costs on foreign access to the AZRF (ambitions of control); protect the NSR from foreign encroachment, upholding the Russian legal interpretation of its status (unless it cedes some select sovereignty for economic benefit); defend North Pole approaches from US presence; and remove tension from the AZRF through defense in depth (ambitions of denial).

The Kremlin's threat perception remains informed by the existing security dilemma with NATO, and notably with regards to perceived attempts by the United States and the alliance to contest [Russia's interpretation of the NSR](#) as an internal waterway. Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO may heighten the perception of threat – a point that will be explored further in the following sections.

The war against Ukraine has impacted Russian Arctic capabilities and deployments. Ground forces deployed in the Arctic have been particularly affected by the war: converging assessments by experts interviewed

estimate that around 80% of ground forces on the Kola Peninsula, [including elements from the Arctic Brigade](#), have been decimated in the war. Bases and garrisons at the border with Finland and Norway have reportedly been emptied of troops, equipment, and ammunition. The war has therefore severely degraded Russia's ability to represent a major conventional land threat to Nordic countries (primarily Finland and Norway) for the time being.

Air and naval capabilities have been less affected. Most of Russia's Fifth Military District (the Northern Fleet) and Pacific Fleet surface and sub-surface assets remain in theater although several maritime support and logistical surface vessels of the Northern Fleet have been deployed to the Black Sea theater to support war operations. Russian Arctic-based [air and naval capabilities remain](#), especially long-range precision strike systems that represent a threat to NATO airpower and regional deployments. Russia's powerful multi-layered network of long-range sensors, surface-to-air missile systems, air defense capabilities, coastal defense systems, and electronic warfare capabilities still pose an issue to NATO's access to a contested environment, especially in the European Arctic. International targeted sanctions on microelectronic components and access to modern military technology [could affect maintenance of these capabilities](#) in the long term.

The war in Ukraine has provided many keen insights into Russian tactics and military capabilities that the United States and its allies should assess closely to draw lessons for future conflict scenarios. In the context of homeland defense in the North American Arctic, specific attention should be paid to Russia's use of hypersonic cruise missiles, and Ukrainian efforts to intercept attacks through missile defense systems—most importantly the US-made Patriot and German IRIS-T systems. Additionally, because Russia has increasingly relied on Iranian drones and

ballistic missiles to conduct its military operations, an assessment of Iranian-origin capabilities and their Arctic efficacy should also be included.

Moreover, the United States and its allies should closely monitor military and commercially based innovation driven by battlespace requirements in Ukraine that could shape the future of conflict. This includes the [use of unmanned underwater vehicles \(UUVs\) by Ukraine](#) against the Russian Navy in the Black Sea. US Naval Forces Europe (USNAVEUR) and the 2nd Fleet should conduct an assessment of the use of UUVs and aerial drones in the North, Baltic, Black, and Azov Seas to understand their implications for the North Atlantic and Arctic region.

The potential for Arctic hybrid warfare has also been an [under-appreciated and resourced element](#) which Russia could rely on further as it seeks to destabilize NATO Arctic members. While Russian ultra-nationalistic rhetoric has included the suggestion that [Russia reclaim former parts of its empire, such as Alaska](#), Russian economic and intelligence activities have sought to undermine Norwegian sovereignty on Svalbard. Finland as well as Sweden have been recipients of Russian hybrid warfare tactics. Moscow's reliance on sub-threshold destabilization should be better understood in a circumpolar context.

1.2 Implications of NATO's Enlargement for Russia's Arctic Posture

NATO's Nordic enlargement and especially Finland's accession, which doubled the alliance's border with Russia, have exacerbated Moscow's sense of Western "encirclement" by an American-led NATO (Russia of course does not acknowledge that its own military aggression led the two countries to seek membership). Russian Defense Minister [Sergei Shoigu's remarks in August just before his recent visit](#)

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[to Moscow's Arctic nuclear testing facilities at Novaya Zemlya and the Northern Fleet](#) confirm this. Beyond rhetoric and demonstrations of strength through recent drills and exercises, including the [Northern Fleet's command and staff exercise in the Barents Sea](#) in mid-August, there have been no significant changes to Russia's military behavior in the Arctic region and it appears likely that Moscow is in "planning mode": For now, it is observing the national and NATO postures of Finland and Sweden and will be attuned to US deployments and other shifts in regional NATO capabilities.

For US and NATO interests, the extension of NATO's eastern flank reinforces the need to [assess the Arctic region as an interconnected continuum](#) stretching across the ARZF (from the European Arctic to the Pacific Arctic, with North Pole approaches in the middle) as well as horizontally between theaters in the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea. This continuum requires greater emphasis on the enhanced deterrence and defense capabilities of NATO's Nordic and Baltic members as lines of communications are reduced around the Kola Peninsula, St. Petersburg, and Murmansk, which could incentivize Russia to increase its military assets in the region.

The United States and its NATO allies will also need to be attentive to adjustments that Russia may make to its forces and capabilities in the region, such as its announced decision to [deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus](#). Russia may choose to adjust its long-term presence in the Baltic Sea after the completion of NATO's efforts to enhance anti-ship missile capabilities and air defense across the Baltic Sea region. Russia may choose to move some of its nuclear arsenal north to the Kola Peninsula or to increase its force posture in the Arctic rather than reconstituting it in the Baltic region. As Russia decides where and how to adjust its capabilities over time, it will also evaluate and adapt its missile and

missile defense capabilities based on the real-world performance of these weapons against US and NATO systems in Ukraine. With this in mind, it is possible that in years to come, NORAD will see a larger number of more capable or [less detectable Russian missiles](#) that exploit gaps in situational awareness in the Arctic.

NATO's as well as Russia's increased focus on hard security and increased military capabilities in the Arctic will cause discomfort to those who fear a creeping militarization of the Arctic and a diminishment of space allocated for discussion of cooperation, climate mitigation, and soft security issues. A difficult balance will need to be achieved to ensure for adequate attention to hard security issues while identifying new approaches to confidence building measures and focus on indigenous communities and other Arctic stakeholders.

1.3 Assessing Increased Circumpolar Risks

Russia's war against Ukraine and NATO's Nordic enlargement are [sharpening existing security risks](#) for Moscow. First, NATO's enlargement is putting more pressure on North Atlantic Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC) and the Nordic-Baltic-Arctic continuum. Moscow's posture seeks to remove tension from the AZRF through defense in depth and extend its ambitions of denial. The United States and NATO might therefore have to face a more contested environment around the regional chokepoints of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) and Greenland-Iceland-Norway (GIN) gaps. Even though Russian capabilities must not be overestimated, efforts to impede US and other NATO allied reinforcements to NATO's northeastern flank, as well as ensure unfettered access to the North Atlantic by US carrier groups, must be of paramount importance.

Russian contestation around the North Atlantic chokepoints also applies to the Pacific Arctic, particularly around the Bering Strait, [where Moscow might seek to contest passage](#) through the Strait, as well as increase its military presence along the Kuril–Chukchi defensive line. This situation would potentially challenge the maintenance of US air and maritime sovereignty over Alaska and the North Pacific SLOCs. Russia's somewhat sparse military presence in the Far East could one day be augmented by the increased presence of the Chinese Navy (PLAN). Russian and Chinese navies and air forces have repeatedly exercised together in the Pacific. In addition, Russia's June 1, 2023 [opening of the home port of Russia's Pacific Fleet to Chinese commercial activity](#) represents a milestone in future joint military activity and increases the likelihood of hybrid activity via Chinese fishing and other commercial vessels.

It is anticipated that the Kremlin will maintain, if not increase, the level of sub-threshold destabilization against NATO and US interests in the region, seeking to undermine alliance cohesion and impose costs. In the circumpolar context, Russian activities have raised expectations that the Kremlin may seek further interruption or sabotage attempts against subsea critical national infrastructure—namely maritime subsea infrastructure, unburied data and communication cables, and energy pipelines. Norwegian energy supplies to Europe are particularly vulnerable to aerial drones and UUVs and where more resilience and redundancy are required.

Although efforts are made to avoid unnecessary circumpolar tension and military escalation, the Kremlin is generally more willing to take risks, tolerate costs, and violate international norms [as evidenced by its activities in Ukraine as well as the Black Sea](#). Russian aircraft regularly range NATO's and NORAD's air identification zones (ADIZ) and often without adequate warning. On August 14, as this report was

being finalized, the Danish, Dutch, and UK air forces all responded to two Russian bomber flights over the North Sea near their national airspace. The [UK's Royal Airforce reported](#) that two of its Quick Reaction Alert jets intercepted the aircraft “in international airspace north of Scotland on Monday, within NATO's northern air policing area.” Russian pilots are prone to unprofessional and reckless behavior. Russia's (and Ukraine's) increasing use of drones, moreover, substantially increases the likelihood of small-scale miscalculations and tactical errors where Russian restraint should not be taken for granted. Spillover effects from one theater to another or other forms of horizontal escalation cannot be discounted.

Finally, Russia's continued international isolation, and its growing alignment with Beijing, are creating wider risks to the international system and circumpolar governance. Russia's war in Ukraine, for the first time, disrupted the work of the Arctic Council in its nearly 30 years of existence. Experts and officials from the Arctic 7 agree that continued cooperation with Russia through the vehicle of the Arctic Council during Russia's chairmanship was not viable, but opportunities are being sought to slowly allow work to be done with Russian interlocutors under the Norwegian chairmanship through the activities of its working groups. While there is no going back to the status quo ante, Arctic 7 officials seek stability and transparency from Moscow while managing the risk of escalation – which requires the continuation of communication with Moscow to avoid miscalculations and tactical errors. With this in mind, current bilateral channels of operational bilateral dialogue between countries of the Arctic 7 and Russia focused on specific issues, such as search and rescue and border control, are being maintained. The United States and allies seek to uphold a stable, low-tension environment in the Arctic, but this will require allied clarity and unity of public facing messaging.

1.4 Russia-China Relations in the Arctic

Another key factor to consider in the Arctic threat delta is the evolving relationship between Moscow and Beijing in circumpolar affairs. Beijing has been a permanent observer at the Arctic Council since 2013 and unveiled its official regional intentions in the 2018 Arctic White Paper, [where it described China as a "near-Arctic state"](#) (for which it received pushback from the Arctic 8).

China's contestation of international maritime norms presents a challenge to Arctic stability. Understanding and assessing Beijing's policies and approaches in relation to both poles is essential as the Arctic 7 seek greater transparency and stability in the Arctic. China's polar activities are an integral part of China's economic diversification strategy as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for access to energy and fossil fuels, fishing stocks, commerce, passage, etc. Beijing, therefore, has an interest in imposing its revisionist views on future governance, especially in the context of the opening of the Central Arctic Ocean. And it finds a ready partner in Moscow to contest established norms of regional governance by imposing its own interpretation of what will ultimately serve Beijing's interests (ironically at the expense of Russia's Arctic sovereignty).

There is a growing expectation that Beijing will seek to increase its commercial, and therefore its military, footprint in the Arctic through agreements with Russia with the eventual ambition to project and sustain its economic and military power there (the fulfillment of its "near-Arctic" state ambitions). The PLAN started operating in an Arctic environment as early as 2015, with its [first naval deployment in the Bering Sea](#). Beijing now operates two scientific research stations in the European Arctic (in Ny Ålesund on Svalbard and in Iceland), with a willingness

to open a third station in Greenland and a thwarted attempt to open a station in Canada.

China's regional economic presence and scientific infrastructure are likely to be dual-purpose by nature – outfitted for military intelligence gathering and greater Arctic domain awareness. Beijing's focus appears to be on the Northern Sea Route where, during a March 2023 state visit to Moscow, the two countries [agreed to form a joint organization](#) for the development and transit management of the NSR, as the Chinese shipping company COSCO is the primary international user of the NSR since 2013. China seeks alternative global shipping routes. Although China does not yet have an operational cold-water fleet, the [PLAN is investing in Arctic-specific](#) surface and sub-surface capabilities. China is also building a new class of nuclear-powered icebreakers under PLAN specifications, notably to support nuclear submarine operations against US deployments. There might be a point where the quantity of Chinese assets matches, if not outpaces, those of other Arctic powers.

The [recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the Russian FSB and China's coastguards strengthened joint maritime security efforts, and raised concerns about the potential for further military cooperation between the two countries. Indeed, through their joint naval exercises and sub-threshold activities, Russia and China have clearly demonstrated their willingness to deepen military collaboration in the Arctic. In 2021, the highly publicized Maritime Interaction exercise in the Western Pacific Ocean garnered attention for its overt anti-submarine warfare drills. More recently, [joint naval exercises in late July 2023](#) included a submarine search-and-destroy drill in the Bering Sea, and in early August, the two countries carried out a [provocative joint naval patrol near Alaska](#). This joint regional posturing has implications also for US theater missile defense presence (Aegis Ashore and the

Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system). These developments should be urgently addressed by US and allied policymakers.

However, China's increased presence in the Arctic can only occur with support from Moscow as well as the Arctic 7. Today, Moscow is a "gatekeeper" to Beijing's access to the Russian Arctic in the Pacific and the Northern Sea Route. But the Kremlin's economic needs and China's support for its foreign and security policy may require Moscow to incrementally cede some of its Arctic sovereignty to Beijing as a cost to maintain its international status. Over time and with the acceleration of climate change in the Arctic, Beijing will have less interest in developing Russia's Northern Sea Route and instead, seek greater access to the Central Arctic Ocean through the Transpolar Sea Route where, in the future, it could seek to access deep seabed mining and fisheries stock.

Sino-Russian Arctic relations are as defined by collaboration as they are by mistrust. Beijing will prolong negotiations to seek the lowest cost possible for its investments which is why Moscow is so irked by the scarcity of Chinese investments in the Russian Arctic to develop NSR and energy infrastructure. While China wants others to be economically dependent on it, it assiduously avoids becoming overly dependent on Russian energy or access for passage and transit. Russia is focused on protecting and projecting its sovereignty in the Arctic; while China is eager to secure unfettered access to the Arctic, which is why it seeks both multilateral and bilateral approaches to assure continued access. Beijing will continue to pressure the Kremlin for concessions on Arctic energy exports and NSR development to help sustain the Russian economy. Moscow would then have no other choice than to concede to China (at very low cost) more presence in its Arctic which will in turn make the Kremlin more insecure about its sovereignty.

Overall, while Russia's presence and posture in the Arctic have not fundamentally changed in the context of the war in Ukraine, there is a new geopolitical reality in which its Arctic presence (as well as the US Arctic presence), must be assessed to more effectively deter Moscow in an era of "low to no collaboration."

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CHAPTER 2

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Chapter 2—The US Role in the Arctic

Recent US strategy shifts have sought to underscore and attempt to manage a decade-plus lack of prioritization of the Arctic as a theater of strategic interest – which has resulted in late-to-need investments in situational and domain awareness and defense capabilities – to protect America's Northern border and the two approaches to the Arctic from the North Atlantic and North Pacific. With the declaration of the era of great power competition, the Arctic has featured more prominently in US national strategy documents since 2019. Yet, greater strategic and operational integration is needed. The 2022 US National Strategy for the Arctic Region and the establishment of the Department of Defense Arctic Strategy and Global Resilience Office are significant steps. However, the Arctic must be seen as a regional national security priority with budgets and accountability in alignment with that prioritization.

Now is the moment to strengthen US posture and capabilities in the Arctic, improve collective deterrence, and rethink command structures – across US forces, bilaterally (especially with Canada), and multilaterally via NATO. With Russia preoccupied with Ukraine, China not yet able to project and sustain power in the Arctic, and new Nordic contributions enhancing NATO's capabilities in region, there is a window of opportunity to drive more NATO joint operations and interoperability in the Arctic and to develop greater public-private sector cooperation within the United States and across the Arctic 7. This will not be an easy feat, even with increased investments. It will require leadership from the top

levels of the US government and the military and close collaboration with NATO.

2.1 Navigating a Challenging Operating Environment

The operating environment in the North American Arctic is unique and complicated. Infrastructure is sparse and the harsh weather conditions pose a challenge to development and maintenance. Communications networks are unreliable, hampering already convoluted command and control (C2) mechanisms. This in turn [challenges US force movement, maneuver, and sustainment](#). Situational awareness is lacking, due to limited satellite coverage and high latitude challenges, higher levels of charged particles, and complicated remote sensing, and electromagnetic disruptions and other challenges to positioning and navigation obstruct presence and operations overall.

Each domain comes with its own challenges, but all are severely inhibited by weather conditions and seasonality and depend on extreme cold-weather capabilities. This is especially true for the maritime domain, where [according to the US Army](#) “year-round operations will only be possible for ships with the highest ice-class ratings available.” Air operations face similarly severe restrictions from limited infrastructure. While the Army is critical to defending the US homeland in Alaska, it has a limited legacy in the Arctic. This has provided an opportunity to redefine the Army's Arctic doctrine, and specifically think through multi-domain operations and integration within the Total Force.

The [2021 Army Arctic strategy](#) outlines their force's commitment to regaining “Arctic dominance,” through a “Multi-Domain Task Force-enabled division” and by recasting “two Alaska-based brigade combat teams to operate for extended periods in the Arctic

winter." This not only requires cold-weather enabled capabilities and equipment, but demands very specific training conditions that cannot be simulated in other environments.

2.11 Building Out Presence

Strategy documents of the different branches of the US military have highlighted several related priorities in an effort to build out US presence in the region. Experts assess that mobility and reach are more important than building a bigger presence. This is a high priority for the US Army, including the 11th Airborne division in Alaska. At the same time, it will be important to build out resilience—especially with regard to infrastructure and capabilities that enable rapid deployment across forces. To manage the challenge and high cost of new infrastructure and maintenance in the harsh Arctic environment, the US government has focused on expanding and repurposing existing infrastructure, as in the case of the reactivation of the Navy's 2nd Fleet headquarters in 2011 and the [expansion of the Keflavik airfield](#) in Iceland due to be completed in 2023. Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCA) with Nordic partners, including Denmark and Finland, which can provide US forces access to national airfields and bases, will present an opportunity for the United States to increase its physical presence in the Arctic. In addition, Canada's focus on a more modular approach through "Agile Basing" that enables a forward operating presence is a noteworthy example cited by experts that should be explored further for US purposes. However, this approach comes with challenges related to calibrating and scaling base capabilities that need to be assessed.

US and multilateral exercises serve as an important element to demonstrate presence, test equipment, and optimize processes. The [Department of Defense has pledged](#) that it will "demonstrate and enhance the

Joint Force's ability to operate in the Arctic through regular exercises and deployments in the region, both independently and with allies and partners (within NATO, bilateral, and multilateral)." The Navy routinely exercises with allies and partners in the Arctic region, including via NATO (2015 Trident Juncture) and [emphasizes the utility](#) of "joint, bilateral, and multilateral exercises to improve interoperability, warfighting prowess, and operational expertise in a Blue Arctic."

Similarly, the [Air Force strategy stresses](#) the "unique positioning afforded by bases in locations like Alaska and Greenland to project combat-credible, all-domain air and space power" and highlights the importance of "additional training, exercises, wargames, and combined deployments with regional and joint partners." All these efforts present the opportunity to exercise unity of effort on operational coordination.

2.12 Capabilities and Awareness

The United States faces significant gaps in capabilities in the Arctic. Specifically, the various US strategic documents have highlighted the need for ground-based space assets, early warning systems for missile detection and unmanned ISR systems (Air Force), ice-hardened surface vessels and ASW capabilities (Navy), and logistical and infrastructure capabilities (Army). [As the 2019 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy already emphasized](#), modernizing the US missile and cruise missile defense systems remains critical (including "multi-domain sensors that include terrestrial radars and space-based capabilities").

Given that the "North American Arctic also lacks the relatively robust logistics infrastructure of the European Arctic," the strategy recognizes the department needs to make "time-sensitive, risk-informed investments to understand and build awareness of the region." Modernization of

infrastructure through “deployable communications and data networks capable of operating in the northern latitudes to enable C4ISR for operations”, [as emphasized in the strategy](#) remains important.

When it comes to future procurement, the United States needs to adapt its overall approach. The war in Ukraine and associated capability shortages have highlighted structural problems with defense industrial development and procurement – while also highlighting opportunities for defense innovation. Experts and officials emphasize the importance of having a strategy in place that guides Arctic related R&D and procurement. This will require setting priorities, seeking commercial options, placing greater emphasis on innovation, testing before production, and cost-effectiveness. Partnerships with industry leaders will be key. The private sector has the potential to fill gaps on a much larger scale, particularly related to satellite coverage and communications. SpaceX is a prime example.

Rather than modifying existing capabilities to fit the environment, the Department of Defense and industrial partners should think more strategically about Arctic-specific capabilities and, [as Brookings Institution experts point out](#), “develop operating concepts that, in turn, drive the requirements and capability development that support mobility and sustainment of its modernization platforms in Arctic conditions.” In short, capabilities should be Arctic by design, not by default. This also applies to new technologies including autonomous systems and communication technology, which should be enablers, not drivers of policy. This should also be taken into consideration when it comes to pooling and sharing resources and approaches to R&D in the Nordic context—a topic that will be explored below.

Bolstering domain and situational awareness should be the first priority for the United States and its

partners. This means greater investments in air, space, and missile defense capabilities and better communications and ground-based space systems. In addition to the priorities highlighted above, dedicated satellite communication and geo-positioning capabilities, internet connectivity and fiber optic cables, and Arctic-specific power generation and power storage technologies will be needed.

2.2 Streamlining Command and Control

Beyond environmental limitations and capability gaps, the multi-layered command structure in the Arctic presents a unique challenge. In the United States, the overlapping combatant command responsibilities of USNORTHCOM, USEUCOM, and USINDOPACOM complicate the implementation of an integrated strategic mission and Unified Command Plan even across the US joint force. While NORTHCOM solely focuses on homeland defense and is an advocate for US Arctic capabilities, INDOPACOM offers opportunities to think about forward posture in the Arctic. Alaskan operations under NORTHCOM are complicated by the fact that military assets belong to INDOPACOM.

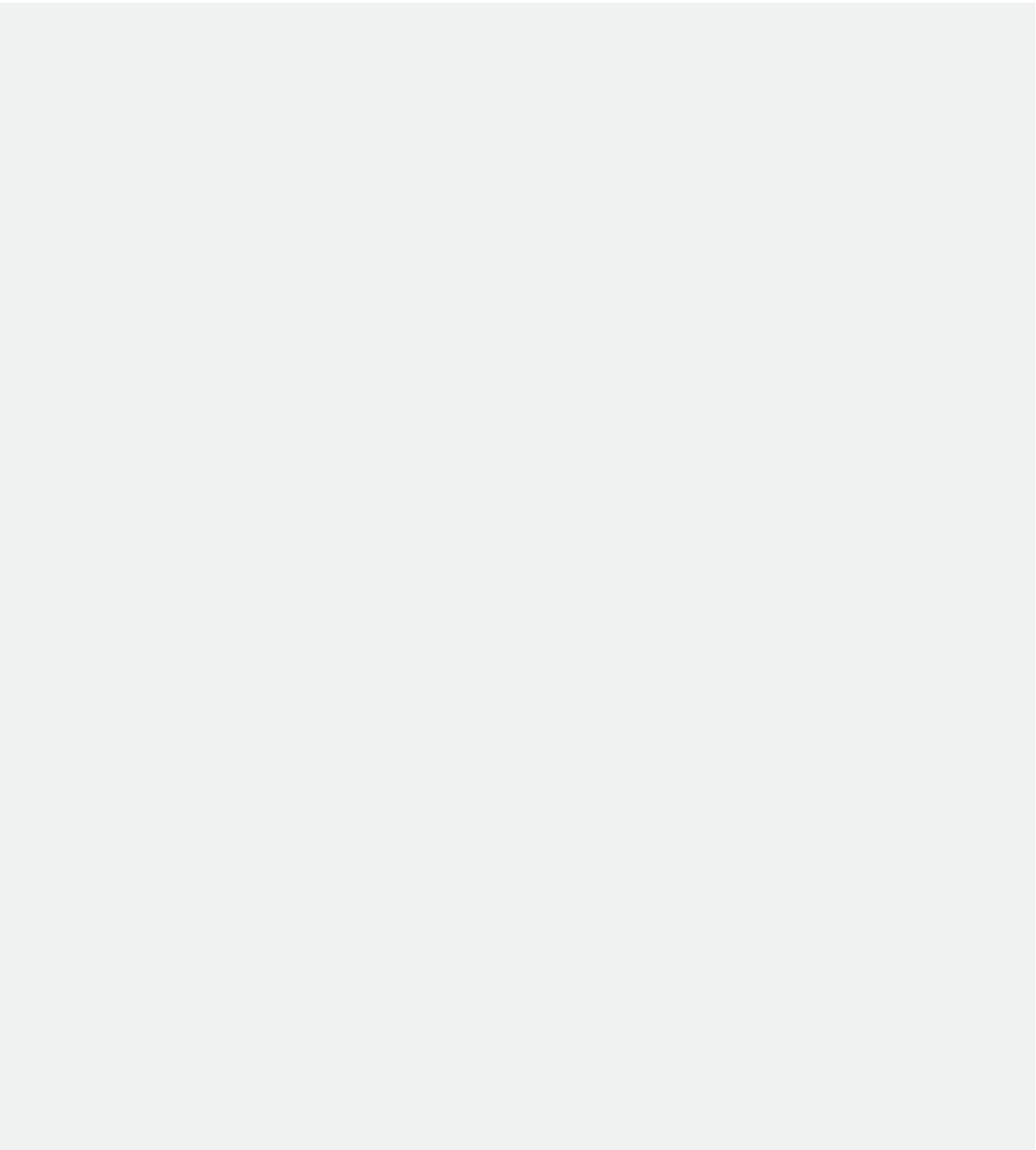
Experts from the Arctic 7 countries specifically highlight the need to address division of labor between NORTHCOM and EUCOM in the Arctic. Of particular concern are overlaps in areas of operation and division of labor between the 6th Fleet based in Naples, the 2nd Fleet operating out of Norfolk, and US Joint Forces Command. This obstacle of overlapping responsibilities is further complicated by delineations between NORTHCOM and NORAD within the United States (where NORAD is integrated under NORTHCOM) and in Canada (where it stands on its own).

To address C2 concerns within the United States, there are strong arguments for “creating a separate, subregional command” in the Arctic, [as argued in previous publications](#) that would fall under the “direction of USNORTHCOM for the purpose of protecting the homeland and its own avenues of approach from the North Pacific and North Atlantic.” If this were implemented, the new command should better integrate the Department of Homeland Security, with specific focus on the US Coast Guard, which has key law enforcement, search and rescue, and situational awareness capabilities in the American Arctic. Moreover, US military planners and the executive branch should once again re-assess the US Unified Command Plan (UCP) specifically for the Arctic to better incorporate greater Sino-Russian alignment and engagement in the Arctic.

C2 in the Arctic theater becomes yet more challenging when coordinating with allies and partners. The coming months will be critical in devising a strategic path forward when it comes to integrating command plans across the US joint force, NORAD, and NATO. NATO's Northern enlargement and Sino-Russian alignment alter the Arctic security map for the United States, which requires military planners to think anew about a stronger “Arctic dimension” within NATO. This could include consideration of a US or joint forward operating base in the European or North American Arctic. These questions will need to be carefully considered by NATO as it adjusts its posture to align with the new regional defense plans. The new Nordic and Arctic 7 dimension of NATO reinforces the imperative for the alliance to understand the threat continuum between the Baltic Sea, European Arctic, and the North Atlantic, while also balancing requirements for the North Pacific. Shifts in either US or NATO posture may heighten the risk for horizontal escalation and potential responses from Russia.

Regardless, the United States and NATO require greater deterrence and operational clarity in the Arctic, with specific attention given to the integration of new allies into the NATO command structure. This includes the questions of which navy and air force commands they should join in the long term. For now, Finland has been integrated via JFC Brunssum but Finnish officials have previously advocated for integration via JFC Norfolk, along with its neighbor Norway. The latter would allow for a more integrated Arctic posture between the Arctic 7. In 2022, the [chief of the Royal Norwegian Air Force proposed the establishment](#) of a Nordic Air Operations Center upon Finland's and Sweden's accession to the alliance to further integrate the Nordic Air Forces and serve to defend NATO territories. Moreover, in March 2023, the Nordic nations [proposed a joint Nordic air force](#) which would bring together nearly 250 modern and capable fighter aircraft. With Sweden officially on track to join NATO after the Vilnius summit, the Nordic nations will need to work closely with NATO and other allies to identify the best path forward in relation to defense planning, division of responsibilities, and the area of operation.

Defending America’s Northern Border and Its Arctic Approaches





CHAPTER 3

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Chapter 3— Cooperating with Allies and Partners in the Arctic

Recent US strategy documents, including the [2022 National Security Strategy](#) and [National Defense Strategy](#), have placed a heavy emphasis on the concept of “integrated deterrence” which includes “integration with allies and partners through investments in interoperability and joint capability development, cooperative posture planning, and coordinated diplomatic and economic approaches.” Although many experts point out that the concept needs to be further fleshed out, the Arctic region seems ripe to deploy more integrated approaches to defense and deterrence.

Accordingly, the [2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region](#) cites the goal of deepening relationships and “cooperation with Arctic Allies and partners Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.” The strategy specifically highlights the aim of undertaking “calibrated and coordinated activities with NATO Allies and Arctic partners with the aim of both defending NATO’s security interests in the region, while also reducing risks and preventing unintended escalation, especially during this period of heightened tension with Russia.” Additional goals included in other strategy documents include cooperating with Arctic allies and partners to improve deterrence and [enhance situational awareness, increasing joint exercises and training](#) and [deepening interoperability, joint operations, and capabilities](#). While these are all

important aims, the United States should ambitiously drive focused strategic integration that will enhance homeland defense and strengthen collective defense and deterrence against Russia.

At the Vilnius summit in July, [NATO approved](#) the “most comprehensive and detailed defense plans since the Cold War”, furthering its modernization process under the concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA). This update included new domain specific and geographic regional plans to reflect priorities outlined in NATO’s new strategic concept adopted at last year’s Madrid summit. One of the three regional plans focuses on the High North and the Atlantic. By outlining new force structure plans that spell out specific needs for troops, capabilities, and equipment to defend against Russia and other threats across the Euro-Atlantic region, this update lays the foundation for the alliance to plug gaps and optimize command and control to enhance deterrence and be better positioned to respond to crises when they arise. [According to NATO Supreme Allied Commander \(SACEUR\) General Christopher G. Cavoli](#), they will help turn NATO “from an alliance that was optimized for out-of-area contingency operations, to an alliance fit for the purpose of large-scale operations to defend every edge of the alliance’s territory.” Although the process of implementing these plans will take time, the transformation process will require the United States and its allies to further align and enhance their defense posture and readiness, including in the Arctic theater.

3.1 Creating a Common Operating Picture and Clarity of Mission

The regional plan for the High North and Atlantic has the potential to enhance the alliance’s Arctic capabilities if it is implemented effectively and manages to facilitate comprehensive integration

across theaters. To provide greater Arctic defense coherence and posture, the Arctic 7 will need to cooperate closely with the United Kingdom, as well as the Baltic States, Poland, and Germany.

In addition, the Arctic 7 governments should consider further increasing coordination and integration of joint intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR) activities and domain awareness capabilities. Stronger intelligence capabilities will not only give the Arctic 7 a better understanding of Moscow's regional intentions but will also [potentially deter malign Russian activities](#). These capabilities will also be needed to support joint operations in the air, sea, and land domain, such as efforts to enhance maritime surveillance of the GIUK gap and the North Atlantic, and joint air patrol missions between the United States, United Kingdom, and Norway, as well as NATO missions hosted by Iceland.

Beyond this, it will be important to create clear common policies and scenarios on the nature of crises, and the response options, including clarity on sub-threshold attacks on undersea infrastructure. This is especially critical for US-Canadian cooperation and shared infrastructure and capabilities, but also for the United Kingdom, Nordic, and Baltic countries whose infrastructure remains a prime target for Russia.

There is significant overlap between defense and deterrence priorities of the Arctic 7 when it comes to increased mobility to support operations and training ([Canada](#)), increased readiness and crisis preparedness ([Finland](#) and [Sweden](#)), and reinforced situational awareness ([Canada](#) and [Norway](#)). However, as Nordic partners point out, there are currently fundamental differences with regard to US priorities in the Arctic—which are primarily shaped by longer term views towards environmental changes, US-China relations, and strategic competition—versus the priorities of European (especially Nordic)

allies—which are primarily focused on defending against Russia's aggressive behavior and violations of their sovereignty. Experts stress that there is an urgent need for a common assessment from the United States, Canada, and Europe on how to react to deliberate escalation on the part of Russia in the region as well as an understanding of the strategic implications of an increased Chinese presence and the interaction of both powers in the Arctic. NATO leaders should build on decisions made in Vilnius to answer these questions and to solidify strategic foundations that the allies can further build on.

3.2 Investments in Joint Capabilities

The United States should also continue to prioritize working with the Arctic 7, the United Kingdom, and Baltic allies to develop and upgrade joint capabilities that enhance shared deterrence and defense. To do so, the allies should request the NATO Military Committee conduct an inventory of government and private sector Arctic-capable capabilities across the alliance. NATO member Finland constitutes a significant force multiplier for capabilities and structures in the Arctic although Finnish forces have been designed for territorial defense and more work is needed to streamline integration via NATO. However, Nordic defense capabilities and increased readiness have been demonstrated over the past decade, culminating in joint exercises between Norway, Finland, Sweden in 2022, and will strengthen NATO and US defense planning.

A strategically collaborative approach will strengthen R&D and procurement of capabilities designed for unique Arctic conditions. Experts from the Arctic 7 countries stress that a higher emphasis should be placed on jointly assessing strategic trends and identifying both gaps and opportunities with a view to developing shared capabilities and pooling of

knowledge and resources. [As previously argued](#), an Arctic Security Initiative (ASI), modelled after the US European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) which provided critical support to European allies to accelerate mobility, capabilities and readiness, could be constructed as a private-public initiative that helps finance critical US Arctic capabilities to buttress domain awareness (improved telecommunication, sensors, and early warning missile defense radars), posture and deterrence (through “layered homeland defense design”), and overall infrastructure development and maintenance, and help the United States address critical capability gaps.

The Arctic 7 could also be recipients of ASI funding when participating in joint or complementary investments in greater maritime domain awareness (surface and sub-surface) and situational awareness capabilities such as radars and remote sensors for search and rescue, environmental protection, and mitigation of climate impacts. Investments in air capabilities are equally important. Upon renewal of the US-Danish Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), this should include further investments in capabilities (including F-35 fighter jets) at Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base) in Greenland. Similarly, the US [DCA with Finland](#), which is currently under negotiation, could result in additional infrastructure investments to support the country's F-35 fleet and benefit mutual defense.

A high priority should be placed in continued NORAD modernization. As recent incidents involving Chinese surveillance balloons and increased use of UAVs have demonstrated, NORAD has severe gaps in coverage that need to be addressed to prepare for more high-stake scenarios that demand rapid responses, including those involving drones or hypersonic missiles, as well as cyber effects. As NORTHCOM and NORAD commander [General Glen D. VanHerck has pointed out](#), capabilities such as over-the-horizon

radar (OTHR), upgrades to the North Warning System, improvements in integration of information networks and fixes to vulnerabilities of critical infrastructure, are all essential steps to detect threats and enhance deterrence and defense. To help inform these upgrades, NORTHCOM should conduct a classified assessment of Russian missile capabilities in Ukraine and its implications for NORAD modernization.

3.3 Fostering Cohesion

In these modernization efforts, as well as others, it remains important to foster constructive relations with local communities – an aim that needs to be prioritized further. It is noteworthy that the US Coast Guard places a premium on its seasonal interaction with local Alaskan communities. Similarly, Canada has further increased its efforts to engage with local Canadian communities, including through its Ranger concept. Beyond this, additional avenues to create mutually beneficial results and multi-purpose investments that strengthen security should focus on upgrading local infrastructure and telecommunications connectivity (an activity which could be funded via the ASI). Relatedly, the United States and its allies should focus on pathways to increase capacity in the region with sustainability at the forefront of its planning. These efforts strengthen social cohesion and resilience and are reflective of the Nordic countries' concept of comprehensive or “Total Defense”, which are successful examples for the United States to emulate.

As the United States seeks to develop a more persistent military presence in the Arctic, officials should adapt policies and procedures to respond to both the changing threat and physical environment by working closely with state and local officials as well as indigenous populations, as is done in Finland. This approach requires flexibility and innovative approaches to overcome bureaucratic silos affecting

local agencies that do not frequently interact with military structures. Total or comprehensive defense approaches are especially important in building greater resilience to protect against growing hybrid threats as Moscow counterbalances the current diminishment of its land forces and conventional capabilities affecting Russia's Northern posture.

3.4 Envisioning the Future of an Arctic Security Architecture

The Arctic needs a [dedicated security architecture](#) that the Arctic 7 plus the United Kingdom must start building with relevant stakeholders and rightsholders. It will require political will between these powers to discuss regional military security affairs and define what constitutes acceptable and non-threatening military operations (an [Arctic code of conduct](#)). Further, the seven will need to decide on the level of inclusion and representation of external actors, such as non-Arctic states and non-state actors.

Finally, the Arctic 7 should increase the quality and quantity of the regional and multilateral security architecture or "connective tissue" by dynamically utilizing existing cooperative frameworks to streamline efforts and avoid duplication. Some experts argue that military security discussions should not be over-institutionalized, and that talks should remain informal or at the level of working groups. Formats such as the Arctic Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) Staff Conference, which was relaunched by Canada in 2022, can be useful here, especially if they are used pragmatically and designed to construct the sinews of an Arctic security architecture.

Members of the expert and policy community remain deeply divided, however, on NATO's role in Arctic military security affairs. Some fear that significant NATO involvement in the Arctic could be perceived as a vindication of the Kremlin's threat perception

and over-militarize the region, adding to the risk of escalation. Regardless, the alliance must find innovative ways to be involved in regional military affairs – for instance through a multilateral coalition of northern states within NATO. NATO's regional defense plans will be a critical foundation to build on. The alliance's priorities should be to strengthen the security of its northern members by ensuring the protection of its northern approaches, and to deter potential Russian military aggression. It will be important to think simultaneously about the whole Arctic theatre—both the Pacific Arctic and the Atlantic Arctic—which means engaging the entire Arctic 7 in this shared vision of an Arctic theatre.

For this to happen, the scope and mission of NATO's role in the region needs further delineation, as do methods for integration with allied forces, including the United States. USNORTHCOM and NATO Joint Force Command-Norfolk (NATO-JFCN) will need to be better integrated to further optimize command structures and operations in the Arctic theater. Within the maritime and air domains, NATO will need to drive enhanced coordination. Specifically, allies will need to strengthen information sharing and coordination of activities between NORAD, USNORTHCOM, and NATO (especially NATO-JFCN).

This will require a two-tiered approach: better bilateral integration between the United States and Canada and USNORTHCOM and NORAD—followed by integration of both within NATO. Continued investment in the [Global Information Dominance Experiment \(GIDE\)](#) which seeks to "enable cross-combatant command collaboration to generate globally-integrated effects using artificial intelligence enabled information", between NORAD and USNORTHCOM, is a critical tool to improve information sharing procedures between all 11 US combatant commands and NORAD. NATO will need to expand its thinking and messaging around

NORAD, which, as experts point out, is not sufficiently addressed in NATO's strategy documents.

In addition, NATO and the United States need to improve coordination, as well as strategic communication, around exercises and operations in the Arctic, which are currently lacking. This is a wasted opportunity when it comes to signaling allied cohesion toward Russia.

3.5 Leveraging Partnerships for Integrated Deterrence

Based on interviews with experts and officials from the Arctic 7 countries, there is consensus on a number of scenarios Arctic allies should strive to deter. These include the use of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons; conventional and non-conventional military force operations impeding the Arctic 7's regional access and freedom of operation and navigation; and sub-threshold activities, especially attacks on undersea cables and critical national or shared infrastructure. In addition, the Arctic 7 should use the current moment to assess military cooperation between Russia and China in circumpolar affairs and consider how to deter both Russian and Chinese activities in the region.

Key steps to strengthen collective defense and deterrence in the Arctic will be to enhance presence, resilience, readiness, as well as C2. Beyond this, it will be critical to coordinate and facilitate clarity of mission based on a unified understanding of the threat and operating landscape. Lastly, the Arctic 7 should focus on strategic communication. As one expert put it, messaging should be "bold and coordinated", ensuring that "all NATO voices are carefully tuned."

To achieve this, it will be important to gain a better understanding of Arctic conflict and response

scenarios. Tabletop exercises that allow political and military leaders from Arctic 7 countries to develop national, allied, and broader multilateral responses, would be a useful tool in this effort. In addition, it will be crucial to put in place clear formats for quick decision making. Any discussions around forward defense or persistent presence in the Arctic should be carefully deliberated with allies and partners. Experts stress that any such action should be precise and clearly and transparently communicated.



CONCLUSION

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Conclusion

The North American Arctic, through approaches in both the North Pacific and North Atlantic, continues to pose a security dilemma for the United States. In cooperation with allies and partners, defense planners must work to defend this critical frontier and urgently address gaps in domain awareness and posture to ensure the US homeland is secure, in spite of the growing risks associated with great power competition and Sino-Russian cooperation.

The current window of opportunity should not be wasted. Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine, China's still limited capacity in the region, and new Nordic members that strengthen NATO's capabilities in the Arctic, provide an opportunity for the United States and its allies to strengthen their situational awareness, readiness, and "integrated deterrence" posture to deter and defend against impending threats. At the same time, lessons from the war in Ukraine can help the United States and NATO plan for future conflict scenarios—including in the Arctic.

Think Strategy First

The United States should seize this moment and think holistically about Arctic policy and implications for US national strategy and operational planning. It should internationalize US Arctic policy and incorporate its own concept of "integrated deterrence" in the Arctic alongside the concept of total societal defense, embraced by Northern European allies. To do this, it will need to further reconceptualize the US Unified Command Plan (UCP) and streamline the force structure, both on the US-level, as well as bilaterally and multilaterally.

The United States and the other members of the Arctic 7 should pursue a more purposeful Arctic security architecture. This requires strategic decision making across the US interagency as well as dialogue to inform those decisions with Arctic allies and partners—specifically Finland and Sweden—but also Norway, which now chairs the Arctic Council, and the United Kingdom. Formats such as the Arctic CHODs, the 8+1, and NATO Arctic roundtables, will remain important to launch collaborative thinking about the future of an Arctic security architecture. These formats should drive a common operating picture and common assessment on how to respond to future conventional and hybrid threats between the Arctic 7.

In line with this, the United States and its allies must develop a common approach to NATO's role in the region, including defining the limits of the alliance's mandate, and should update bilateral and multilateral strategies, C2, and operations accordingly. The United States needs to better integrate its command and force structure, domestically and with NATO in an Arctic context, notably when it comes to interactions between USNORTHCOM and JFC-Norfolk, as well as between NATO and NORAD and the North Warning System (NWS). A clearer division of labor is needed to reassure allies, streamline efforts, and avoid duplication of structures. NATO's updated defense plans can help guide this effort and will provide important strategic foundations that the Arctic 7 can further build on.

Strengthen Deterrence

The Arctic 7 and interested NATO allies, such as the United Kingdom, must remain focused on current and future Russian encroachments and constant probing of NATO's air, land, and maritime sovereignty across the circumpolar Arctic. Efforts should focus on denying Russia the use of its asymmetric enablers, including A2AD systems and electronic warfare (EW)

capabilities, and address any ambitions toward out of area denial.

To strengthen allied capabilities and posture, domain awareness is critical. This includes both Maritime Domain Awareness, integrated air and space defense, and better communications and ground-based space systems. The United States and NATO should also give specific attention to countering and detecting unmanned underwater vehicles, particularly in the North Atlantic. In addition, efforts to strengthen NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) and the formal integration of highly capable and interoperable Nordic Air Forces into IAMD will significantly enhance NATO’s and the Arctic 7’s air defenses. Beyond capabilities, communication and information sharing with allies and partners will need to be optimized.

The United States, NATO, and bilateral partners should do more to coordinate military exercises and joint drills to avoid duplication of efforts as well as create an enhanced and persistent presence which will ensure a more credible NATO posture. Concurrently, NATO should launch a coordinated strategic communications plan regarding activities in the Arctic. This is true both for communication with allies and partners and the broader global community, as well as signaling toward Russia and China. With regard to Russia, clarity of messaging and communication via existing working channels will remain important.

The United States and its Arctic partners should reinforce political cohesion and resilience in the Arctic and proactively strengthen unity of purpose and societal resolve. It can learn from Nordic comprehensive defense concepts. Factors to consider are creating strong relationships and mutually beneficial results when engaging local and indigenous communities and aligning defense investments with climate goals.

Make Smart Investments

The United States and its allies should ensure they use their comparative advantage and take stock of existing efforts and capabilities to avoid duplication. This will also help streamline future military and commercial procurement choices in a NATO context. Moreover, given the high cost and limited lifespan of new infrastructure in the circumpolar region, the United States and allies and partners should continue to utilize, revive, and upgrade existing US and allied infrastructure. Investments beyond this should prioritize mobility and persistent presence while thinking innovatively about cost. This includes considerations for agile basing to enable rapid deployment.

The United States should focus on tailored Arctic capability development and procurement. Needs should be clearly conveyed to the defense industry to increase competitiveness in the private sector and ensure that capabilities are Arctic by design, and that they use resources strategically and follow more ambitious production timelines. It should also include efforts to work more closely with the private sector and pool and share resources with Arctic allies and partners when it comes to capability investments. An Arctic Security Initiative (ASI) modelled after the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) could be a useful tool for this purpose.

The Arctic remains a strategic arena of great importance to Moscow and increasingly to Beijing. The United States and NATO must also view the Arctic strategically and act accordingly by assessing the dramatic shifts in the international environment and utilizing its considerable strengths to deter and defend the US homeland and its approaches in the North Atlantic and North Pacific as well as our NATO allies.

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