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## “Cooperation in the Age of Competition”: The Arctic and North American Defence in 2022

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Russia’s unjustifiable and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine emphasizes the importance of the rules-based international order. Challenges like the security implications of climate change, show that the Arctic is not immune to the evolving strategic landscape. Through leadership and meaningful collaboration with our allies and partners, including Indigenous communities, we will ensure the safety, security, and prosperity of the Arctic, and the wellbeing of those who live there.

*The Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of National Defence (May 2022)*<sup>1</sup>

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine beginning in February 2022 has sent shockwaves across the Arctic. While Russia has not signalled any similar aspirations for military conquest in neighbouring Arctic countries, the world has witnessed the further spillover of international tensions into circumpolar affairs and the Kremlin has shattered its credibility as a peaceful, law-abiding actor. Although Canada has often adopted language downplaying

immediate conventional military risks to its Arctic, Russian aggression in Europe has prompted subtle changes in assessments about the future threat environment. “While the Arctic has long been characterized by stability and cooperation, access to natural resources, impacts on northern Indigenous populations, concerns around national sovereignty and international security, and environmental considerations are intersecting in ways not previously seen,” Canadian Minister of National Defence Anita Anand noted in May 2022. Maintaining peace and stability in the Arctic, within a world of heightened uncertainty, has forced Canada, the United States, and their NATO Allies and partners to re-evaluate threats, strategic responsibilities, and opportunities for deeper collaboration.

As part of the federal government’s commitment to a safe, secure, and well-defended Arctic and North, Canada’s *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* (ANPF, 2019)<sup>2</sup> provides a strategic vision to guide government policy-making activities and investments over the next decade and beyond. In Budget 2022 (released in April), the federal government committed to update the country’s current defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*

(SSE, 2017), and included more than \$8 billion in new funding over five years to better equip the Canadian Armed Forces and to strengthen Canada's contributions to our core alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). On the basis of these policy foundations, Ottawa plans to acquire a range of maritime, land, air and space capabilities with Arctic applications; intends to prioritize partnerships, including with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners, to advance shared priorities; to invest in research and development; and to urgently modernize Canada's contribution to continental defence through NORAD. Announcements over the last year have affirmed that a significant amount of promised investments will have an Arctic dimension.

## From a New Ministerial Mandate to War in Ukraine

On 16 December 2021, Minister of National Defence Anand received her Ministerial Mandate letter from Prime Minister Trudeau which included various Arctic references. A key focus was to “work with the United States to expand cooperation on continental defence and Arctic security, including by modernizing NORAD through: replacing the North Warning System; deploying new technological solutions to improve surveillance and monitoring of northern and maritime approaches; modernizing CAF and NORAD command and control systems to deter and defeat aerospace threats to North America; and investing in infrastructure and capabilities to support operations in the North.” She was also directed to work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Northern Affairs, and other partners “to defend Arctic sovereignty and implement the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework to create a future where Canada's

Northern and Arctic residents, especially Indigenous Peoples, are thriving, strong and safe.” Accordingly, she was instructed to “ensure that Indigenous and Northern communities are meaningfully consulted on its development and benefit from this work.”<sup>3</sup>

These consultations with Indigenous and Northern Territorial representatives have begun through several fora. The Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee (ICPC) initiated a work plan for its newly established priority area on sovereignty, defence, and security at its June 2022 meeting.<sup>4</sup> Regular engagement between the Department of National Defence (DND)/Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the national Inuit advocacy organization, at the working, executive, and ministerial levels seeks to more closely align military activities and investments with Inuit leaders' priorities. Furthermore, when Northern and Indigenous partners met in Yellowknife for the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Arctic and Northern Policy Framework Leadership Committee meeting in late September 2022, Bryan May, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, highlighted the Government of Canada's commitments to modernize NORAD, conduct a defence policy update, and pursue a distinctions-based, nation-to-nation approach to Indigenous engagement. He reiterated how recently announced NORAD investments will enhance the Canadian Armed Forces capabilities to detect, deter and defeat aerospace threats in the Arctic and the North. He also emphasized how these investments will provide new opportunities to deepen National Defence's northern, territorial, and Indigenous partnerships as the various parties seek to advance shared objectives.<sup>5</sup>

These conversations have also been heavily influenced by international developments. Resurgent great power competition and the war in

Ukraine have reinforced how Russia and the other seven Arctic states are not like-minded and are engaged in competition for international legitimacy. Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine prompted the seven other Arctic Council member states to expand their diplomatic and economic sanctions against the Kremlin, which in turn means that Russia's actions have undermined the regional Arctic governance regime. The most direct Western actions thus far has been to suspend cooperation with Moscow in multiple regional governance forums currently chaired by Russia, including the Arctic Council, the Euro-Barents Arctic Council, and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum.<sup>6</sup> On the economic front, several Western business interests have withdrawn their investments in Northern Sea Route (NSR) developments and key oil and natural gas projects in the Russian Arctic. While the Kremlin seeks to compartmentalize the region from any further spillover effects of its war in Ukraine, Russia has weaponized its energy and food exports as tools of geopolitical coercion, while at the same time insisting that it will turn to "non-Arctic states" (particularly China) to forge ahead with its regional development plans. With Russian President Vladimir Putin noting in December 2022 that ending the war "may be a lengthy process,"<sup>7</sup> few experts expect that geopolitical conditions will facilitate the resumption of "normal" circumpolar affairs involving Russia in the next year.

Canada's three territorial premiers have seized on changing Arctic geopolitics and North American defence and security agendas to argue for investments in the Territorial North. In March 2022, Nunavut Premier P.J. Akeagok began his first statement of the legislature's winter sitting by addressing Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its potential implications to the Arctic. "Nunavut stands with the people of Ukraine and Ukrainians around

the world," Akeagok proclaimed, pledging humanitarian aid and asserting that Russia threatens "the stability of Arctic communities and the continuity of Arctic co-operation."<sup>8</sup> He also co-authored a letter with his counterparts from Yukon and the Northwest Territories calling for a meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau in light of the Russian invasion, which cited Russia's expanding Arctic infrastructure, icebreaker fleet, and military presence in its Arctic as causes for concern. The following month, the three Northern premiers met virtually with the prime minister and defence minister to plead their case for greater investment in the North as a way of reinforcing Canada's sovereignty and security.<sup>9</sup>

Discerning where these appeals intersect with the federal government's Arctic defence priorities and investments remains a work in progress. Over the past year, Ottawa has reaffirmed its intent to deliver on ongoing policy commitments to enhance and integrate CAF Arctic capabilities, including the *Harry DeWolf*-class Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships, Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS), new fighter aircraft (with the Trudeau government selecting Lockheed Martin's F-35 as the preferred offering in March 2022), and space-based surveillance and communication capabilities. The Government of Canada has also take substantive steps to advancing NORAD modernization, with important surveillance, infrastructure, and research and development components. Ensuring that investments align defence needs with the well-established priorities of territorial, provincial, and Indigenous governments wherever possible (such as communications infrastructure, improvements to airfields, ports and harbour facilities, and sensor systems) can address security interests as well as infrastructure deficits that create vulnerabilities and inequities in the region. Creating the conditions for this to happen –

and managing expectations along these lines – will be a core challenge in the year ahead.

## NORAD Modernization

On 20 June 2022 at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, Minister Anand made a once-in-a-generation defence announcement, committing to a six-year, \$4.9 billion plan to upgrade Canada’s continental defence systems.<sup>10</sup> Situating the need for more robust defences to counter “new threats” from strategic competitors like Russia and China, Anand had assessed the previous month that “we do live in a world at the present time that appears to be growing darker.” She continued that “in this new world, Canada’s geographic position no longer provides the same protection that it once did. And in this new world, the security environment facing Canada is less secure, less predictable and more chaotic.”<sup>11</sup> This justified the promise new money over and above the \$8-billion increase in Canada’s defence spending announced in the latest federal budget.<sup>12</sup>

The foundation of the plan is Canada’s ongoing commitment to NORAD – a binational command with the United States which Anand characterized as “our most important ally, our strongest partner, and our closest friend.” Building on a joint announcement in 2021 to modernize NORAD,<sup>13</sup> the lion’s share of the promised investments will upgrade technology in support of the command’s roles. This is the first major modernization since the 1980s and the upgrading of the 1950s-era Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line to the current North Warning System (NWS). NORAD was founded in 1957 “against the backdrop of the Cold War and the threat of a Soviet-era air attack,” and Anand emphasized that it “has continually adapted and evolved in responses to new threats” that now included a “pressing need” to address hypersonic

weapons, advanced cruise missiles, and other means wielded – or soon to be wielded – by strategic competitors who might wish to hold North America hostage. This required “turn[ing] another page and begin NORAD’s next chapter.”

NORAD’s next chapter – and continental defence more generally – is to be oriented around two major components. First, Canadians will be provided with four overlapping layers of situational awareness to detect threats passing through the Arctic on their way to Northern American cities in the south. Investments in a new Northern Approaches Surveillance System will contain three core elements:

- 1) An Arctic over-the-horizon (OTH) radar system to provide early warning and threat tracking across Canada, from the southern border with the United States to the Arctic Circle;
- 2) A Polar OTH radar system to provide an early warning function well past the Canadian Arctic Archipelago far out into the northern most approaches to North America, enabling monitoring of the entirety of the Canadian Air Defence Identification Zone (CADIZ); and
- 3) A new system dubbed “Crossbow” which is a network of other sensors – and their supporting communications infrastructure – distributed across Northern Canada as another layer of detection.

This “state-of-the-art” system will enable a clearer picture of future threats for officials. This new spending will also build on the space-based surveillance project outlined in *SSE* that will use new satellites to provide Canadians with a global



intelligence gathering and threat tracking capability, further Canada's situational awareness.

The tremendous amounts of data these new layers of awareness will generate will be ingested by new "technology-enabled decision-making" capabilities,<sup>14</sup> the second major component of NORAD modernization. "It is crucial," Anand declared, "that commanders and policymakers have a comprehensive and accurate operating picture that integrates data from all domain sensors and uses machine learning, quantum and cloud computing, and artificial intelligence." These technological initiatives include:

- 1) Modernizing the CAF's command and control (C2) information systems;
- 2) Expanding Canada's contribution to the NORAD Pathfinder initiative that takes advantage of cloud based computing and machine learning "to ensure that NORAD commanders can make informed and rapid decisions." This also builds upon existing DND/CAF efforts to devise innovative solutions to support the compilation of a consistent common operational picture in constrained environments<sup>15</sup> through the efficient exchange and processing of data and information originating from multiple distributed sources.
- 3) Modernizing the Canadian Combined Air Operations Centre;
- 4) Constructing a new positioning, navigation, and timing capability to assist with air navigation in remote (northern) areas;
- 5) Renewing the CAF's hi and low frequency radio capabilities;
- 6) Enhancing satellite communications across the Arctic (central to the CAF's search and

rescue and emergency responses to protect Canadians); and

- 7) Procuring and installing new digital radios and network equipment.

Together the new sensor systems to collect and the machine learning to process data will lead to what NORAD Command General Glen van Herck has deemed "decision superiority"<sup>16</sup>: making better decisions, quicker, to help limit the threat to North Americans.

Chief of the Defence Staff General Wayne Eyre elaborated that a modernized NORAD will also expand the strategic deterrence that it current provides to Canadians. The binational command was originally built around providing early warning of an incoming Soviet nuclear attack, allowing US strategic forces to respond in kind. This "deterrence by punishment" is about imposing the cost of nuclear annihilation on adversaries. Modern threats like hypersonic glide vehicles can threaten North America below the nuclear threshold, however, thus calling into question the credibility of nuclear punishment. General Eyre explained that developing the "ability to intercept" these threats will grant a "deterrence by denial" capability – to raise the costs of an adversary's action for attacking. Ultimately, the integration of these two approaches to deterrence will yield a more comprehensive and more credible defence of Canada and of North America.

The Minister's comments also reinforced her "resolute" commitment to work with Indigenous peoples and cooperate "towards meaningful reconciliation" through smart investments that benefit both the Defence Team and Indigenous rightsholders. In the case of continental defence, this includes new infrastructure and economic opportunities that benefit Northern and Indigenous

communities. This builds upon Anand's previous announcement, as Minister of Public Services and Procurement in August 2021,<sup>17</sup> of new measures to increase federal procurement opportunities for Indigenous businesses pursuant to the government's commitment to providing increased economic opportunities to First Nations, Inuit and Métis. An indication of what this looks like came in January 2022 when DND announced that Nasittuq,<sup>18</sup> an Inuit company, had won the seven-year, \$592 million maintenance contract to operate and maintain the current North Warning System.

Overall, Minister Anand said that her announcement represents "the most significant upgrade to NORAD from a Canadian perspective in almost four decades." This follows on the heels of Prime Minister Trudeau and Anand's June 2022 meetings with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and NORAD officials in Colorado,<sup>19</sup> and Anand's anticipation of an "upward trajectory" in Canada's defence spending during a brief at the Pentagon the month before.<sup>20</sup> In introducing long-awaited commitments to the NORAD modernization process, which will require an estimated \$40 billion in additional spending over the next 20 years, Anand emphasized that this effort will also support the Trudeau Government's Indigenous agenda by providing new funding to enable Indigenous partners to meaningfully engage and partner with the Government of Canada as it delivers these initiatives.<sup>21</sup>

Criticisms surrounding Minister Anand's announcement focused on when these new capabilities would become operational, where the money was coming from, and when it would be spent. Anand, General Eyre, and NORAD Deputy Commander Lieutenant-General Alain Pelletier could not say when the North Warning System will be replaced – even though senior defence officials

in Canada and the US have pointed to competitors exploiting gaps in the old radar system.<sup>22</sup> Observers also noted that officials could not explain whether the \$4.9 billion for NORAD modernization was new money or reallocated or partially reallocated existing defence spending.<sup>23</sup> None of the initiatives that Anand announced contained any costing nor timelines. Furthermore, Nunavut MP Lori Idlout commented that while her constituents welcome new defence spending in the North, "Northerners should have a say in how the money is spent."<sup>24</sup> Without advanced knowledge of when new defence initiatives will begin or where they will be placed, however, Northern communities will find it difficult to incorporate potential "dual-use" investments in their development plans.

## Strengthening Relationships with International Allies and Partners

On 16 May 2022, Minister Anand hosted a virtual Security and Defence Dialogue with her counterparts from Arctic allied and partner states, including the Kingdom of Denmark (Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. "Canada, its allies, and partners are facing some of the most serious security challenges in decades," the DND news release noted. "With climate change, technological advancements and changing economic interests increasing the strategic importance of the Arctic, collaboration between democratic Arctic states is crucial to address areas of mutual concern." During the meeting, Anand and her counterparts discussed evolving security dynamics in the Arctic and in the cyber domain, the imperative of developing requisite capabilities to detect, deter, and defend against these threats, and appropriate responses to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. They also emphasized "the need to

continue strengthening collaboration between like-minded Arctic states and partners to address ongoing challenges into the future, including the security impacts of climate change.” During the meeting, Minister Anand highlighted Canada’s commitment to strengthening its capabilities and presence in the Arctic, noting in particular Ottawa’s engagement with Northern and Indigenous partners “as part of an inclusive and necessary approach to the region’s defence and security.” Specific efforts cited included joint exercises, the new *Harry DeWolf*-class Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships, enhanced surveillance and intelligence capabilities, and investments in equipment to bolster the defence of Canada and contribute to continental defence and global security. More generally, the read-out from the event noted that “Canada will continue to work closely with allies and partners to foster information-sharing, improve situational awareness, and enhance operational cooperation on a broad range of Arctic and regional issues.”<sup>25</sup>

On 8 August 2022, Chief of the Defence Staff Wayne Eyre hosted an Arctic Chiefs of Defence (ACHODs) meeting in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, that included Chiefs of Defence (CHODs) or equivalents from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and the United States (Sweden was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict). The last meeting of the group had been convened in 2013, prior to Russia’s initial invasion of Crimea, and had involved Russia (which was not invited to the St. John’s event). The participants discussed the evolving Arctic defence and security environment, including increasing militarization by Russia, climate change impacts, and the increasing level of activity of non-Arctic nations in the region. At the meeting, Whitney Lackenbauer shared his framework for conceptualizing Arctic security threats “Through, To and In” the region. Generally, threats “through” the

Arctic, such as strategic weapons, are best analyzed at the international, circumpolar or sub-regional levels. While conflict is unlikely to be generated in the Arctic region itself, he suggested that the leading threat “to” the Arctic is the risk of spillover effects from strategic competition between Russia, China and the West. Significant threats “in” the Arctic requiring collaboration include emergency response, search and rescue, infrastructure, and military operations. Lackenbauer concluded that like-minded nations needed to more carefully coordinate and calibrate their strategic messaging, promote integrated deterrence as a source of regional stability, pursue information dominance, and synchronization allied efforts as global and regional competition heightens. In the end, the participants reached a broad agreement that ACHODs should be formalized as a collaborative forum to promote peace and security through communication, cooperation, collaboration, and information sharing amongst like-minded Arctic nations within the construct of the rules-based international order.

In late August, Jens Stoltenberg completed the first visit of a NATO Secretary General to the Canadian Arctic to underline “the High North’s strategic importance for Euro-Atlantic security.”<sup>26</sup> Emphasizing the context of climate change and growing strategic competition demonstrated by Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine, he and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Cambridge Bay on 25 August where they toured the Canadian High Arctic Research Station, met local community and Inuit leaders, observed part of Operation NANOOK-NUNAKPUT, and visited the local North Warning System (NWS) station where Stoltenberg received a briefing on Canadian and American efforts to modernize the defence infrastructure supporting NORAD.<sup>27</sup> Academic commentators noted that the

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Secretary General's visit signalled to Canadians and our allies a commitment to collective defence in the Arctic.<sup>28</sup>

The following day, Stoltenberg travelled to Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake to discuss Canada's contribution to NATO and its promise of \$38.6 billion in new spending on NORAD over the next twenty years. His comments focused on the threats that Russia and China pose to the North. "Russia has set up a new Arctic command," he observed. "It has opened hundreds of new and former Soviet-era Arctic military sites, including airfields and deep water ports. Russia is also using the region as a test bed for many of its new novel weapon systems." For its part, China has declared itself a "near Arctic" state, plans to build the world's largest icebreaker, and "is investing billions of dollars in energy infrastructure and research projects in the high North." Stoltenberg concluded that Russia and China have "pledged to intensify practical operation in the Arctic. This forms part of the deepening strategic partnership that challenges our values and our interests" as liberal democracies. Flowing from this narrative, Stoltenberg and Trudeau concluded their visit by pledging heightened defence cooperation between Canada and NATO.<sup>29</sup>

Bilateral and multilateral conversations continue to deepen key strategic international relationships. In October, Minister Anand hosted another Northern Defence Dialogue meeting with Arctic Allied and partner states in which they discussed evolving regional security dynamics and respective Arctic defence priorities. She again highlighted Canada's plans to modernize Canada's NORAD capabilities, emphasizing that this represents the largest Canadian investment in NORAD modernization in decades.<sup>30</sup> These dialogues, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (held in Anchorage in May)<sup>31</sup> and ACHODs meetings, as well as the NATO Secretary

General's visit to the Canadian Arctic, send strong strategic messages in their own right. They also reinforce the value of structured dialogue so that Canada and its Allies can stay on top of developments, maintain pressure, and discern ways to challenge and where necessary confront competitors in an uncertain Arctic and increasingly complex world.

In 2022, the CAF also pledged to increase its participation in multinational exercises and to continue to encourage key Arctic and non-Arctic Allies and partners to participate in joint activities in the Canadian Arctic such as Operation NANOOK. The latter is Canada's signature Arctic operation aimed at enhancing and expanding the CAF's Arctic capabilities, demonstrating sovereignty, and developing interagency, government, Indigenous and multinational partnerships and interoperability. The four components of NANOOK are:

- 1) NUNALIVUT (March-April) - High Arctic joint defence and security with international participation;
- 2) TATIGIIT (June-September) - whole-of-government responses to threats and emergencies;
- 3) TUUGAALIK (August-September) – maritime-focused activities in the Labrador Sea and Davis Strait in conjunction with international partners; and
- 4) NUNAKPUT (August) - joint operation for domain awareness and presence along the Northwest Passage.<sup>32</sup>

In February and March 2022, the CAF also participated in several recurring joint Arctic exercises alongside the U.S. military in Alaska and other locations across North America, strengthening situational awareness, information sharing, and



operational capabilities. Key activities included Exercise ARCTIC EDGE, led by U.S. Alaskan Command and supported by U.S. Northern Command; Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC), led by the U.S. Army in Alaska; Exercise ARCTIC EAGLE-PATRIOT, led by the Alaska National Guard; and ICE EXERCISE (ICEX), led by the U.S. Navy. Canadian military personnel also participated in NORAD's Operation NOBLE DEFENDER in Alaska, northern Canada, and off the coast of Greenland.<sup>33</sup> These activities align with commitments in *Strong, Secure, Engaged* to increase Canada's presence in the Arctic and cooperate with allies and partners to ensure a stable, conflict-free Arctic.

## The United States' Arctic Strategy Updates

From a North American defence perspective, the northern air and maritime approaches to the continent have re-emerged as potential avenues for an attack on Canada and the United States, with senior defence officials affirming that capabilities to detect, deter, and (if necessary) defeat these threats have not kept pace with emerging technologies. Particular attention is directed towards Chinese and Russian advanced missile capabilities below the nuclear threshold, which can strike at North America from longer ranges, can be delivered from multiple platforms, travel more quickly, and are more maneuverable and difficult to detect than previous generations of strategic delivery systems. The need to address potential threats that may pass *through* the Arctic shows how the Canadian Arctic is imbricated in continental defence and global deterrence. As NORAD Commander General Glen Van Herk explained in a March 2022 statement to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, "the Arctic demonstrates how regional challenges

increasingly take on global implications that require a global framework."<sup>34</sup>

The United States' surging interest in Arctic defence and security became increasingly apparent in 2022. Progress continues towards the creation of a Department of Defense (DoD) regional center, the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies in Anchorage, Alaska, which will provide a venue for academic, diplomatic, and military Arctic experts to grapple with regional issues. The DoD has also established an Arctic Strategy and Global Resilience Office, with Iris Ferguson appointed as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Arctic and global resilience ("a new position that signifies the importance U.S. leaders place on the region"). Given that the Circumpolar Arctic falls within three U.S. geographic combatant commands' areas of responsibility (Northern Command, European Command, and Indo-Pacific Command), creating this focal point for Arctic policy will help determine priorities for capability development and coordinate Arctic partnerships with allies such as Canada.<sup>35</sup>

On 7 October 2022, the White House released its *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, which replaces and updates the 2013 strategy released by the Obama Administration. Laying out an agenda for the 2022-2032 timeframe, the new Arctic Strategy outlines four pillars to organize action: security, climate change and environmental protection, sustainable economic development, and international cooperation and governance. It relies on five principles to guide actions within the four pillars: consult, coordinate, and co-manage with Alaska Native tribes and communities; deepen relationships with allies and partners; plan for long lead-time investments; cultivate cross-sectoral coalitions and innovative ideas; and commit to a whole of government, evidence-based approach. The strategy "also accounts for increasing strategic

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competition in the Arctic, exacerbated by Russia’s unprovoked war in Ukraine and the People’s Republic of China’s increased efforts to garner influence in the region, and seeks to position the United States to both effectively compete and manage tensions.”<sup>36</sup>

The security pillar of the U.S. Arctic Strategy focuses on deterring threats to the U.S. homeland and those of its treaty allies (including Canada) “by enhancing the capabilities required to defend our interests in the Arctic, while coordinating shared approaches with allies and partners and mitigating risks of unintended escalation.” The discussion emphasizes that the Arctic operational environment “poses region-specific challenges that require tailored technology, assets, infrastructure, training, and planning” and enhanced military and civilian whole-of-government capabilities “to deter threats and to anticipate, prevent, and respond to both natural and human-made incidents.” Strategic objectives include improved understanding of and familiarity with the Arctic operating environment, “exercising military presence” (eg. conducting regular training, exercises, and episodic deployments with allies and partners), and “maximiz[ing] our cooperation with Arctic Allies and partners to enhance our shared security and deter aggression in the Arctic, especially from Russia.”<sup>37</sup> Points of emphasis related to information sharing, combined exercises and training to improve cold weather operations and interoperability, and collective deterrence all resonate with Canada’s NORAD modernization and broader Arctic defence and security agendas articulated this past year.

Five days after the U.S. Arctic Strategy appeared, the White House released its 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) which articulates a vision for “cooperation in the age of competition.” In order to pursue “a free, open, prosperous, and secure

world,” the U.S. seeks to “effectively compete with the People’s Republic of China, which is the only competitor with both the intent and, increasingly, the capability to reshape the international order, while constraining a dangerous Russia.” The specific section of the NSS on the Arctic (the first time that the region has been specifically featured in the NSS) is worth reproducing in full given the carefully calibrated language:

The United States seeks an Arctic region that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative. Climate change is making the Arctic more accessible than ever, threatening Arctic communities and vital ecosystems, creating new potential economic opportunities, and intensifying competition to shape the region’s future. Russia has invested significantly in its presence in the Arctic over the last decade, modernizing its military infrastructure and increasing the pace of exercises and training operations. Its aggressive behavior has raised geopolitical tensions in the Arctic, creating new risks of unintended conflict and hindering cooperation. The PRC [Peoples Republic of China] has also sought to increase its influence in the Arctic by rapidly increased its Arctic investments, pursuing new scientific activities, and using these scientific engagements to conduct dual-use research with intelligence or military applications.

We will uphold U.S. security in the region by improving our maritime domain awareness, communications, disaster response capabilities, and icebreaking capacity to prepare for

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increased international activity in the region. We will exercise U.S. Government presence in the region as required, while reducing risk and preventing unnecessary escalation. Arctic nations have the primary responsibility for addressing regional challenges, and we will deepen our cooperation with our Arctic allies and partners and work with them to sustain the Arctic Council and other Arctic institutions despite the challenges to Arctic cooperation posed by Russia’s war in Ukraine. We will continue to protect freedom of navigation and determine the U.S. extended continental shelf in accordance with international rules. We must build resilience to and mitigate climate change in the region, including through agreements to reduce emissions and more cross-Arctic research collaboration. As economic activity in the Arctic increases, we will invest in infrastructure, improve livelihoods, and encourage responsible private sector investment by the United States, our allies, and our partners, including in critical minerals, and improve investment screening for national security purposes. Across these efforts, we will uphold our commitment to honor Tribal sovereignty and self-governance through regular, meaningful, and robust consultation and collaboration with Alaska Native communities.<sup>38</sup>

Canada’s assessments of the Arctic security environment are similar and show natural

alignments between the North American neighbours. The language around “freedom of navigation” is typical of U.S. official statements and, despite a longstanding dispute between the two allies over the legal status of the Northwest Passage, should not alarm Canadians.<sup>39</sup> The NSS also signals that Washington intends to “sustain” circumpolar forums and remains committed to regional cooperation where possible, while casting both Moscow and Beijing as regional competitors.

While the PRC has announced itself as a self-proclaimed “polar great power” and “near-Arctic state,” the Arctic is but one area of focus among many for that country. Nevertheless, its Arctic pursuits in the scientific, shipping, and economic sectors are driven by the practical need to acquire additional energy sources for its expanding industries, fish protein for its growing population, and shorter routes for the largest commercial shipping fleet in the world. Like-minded Arctic states are increasingly aware of the risks associated with a Chinese presence, with some (including Canada) having taken steps to block Chinese investment in the mining and technology sectors on national security grounds. The PRC also maintains a strong scientific interest in discerning the impacts that climate change in the Arctic has on environmental conditions in China – and in dual-use benefits of scientific research to advance strategic and military interests. While Western commentators often wrongly elevate China to “peer” competitor status in the Arctic,<sup>40</sup> the U.S. clearly considers the PRC to be its primary *global* competitor – a rising and disruptive/revisionist power seeking to change the international system to its advantage. This has implications for all parts of the world, including the Canadian Arctic. Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, released in November 2022, cautiously notes that “powers in the Indo-Pacific region are looking to the

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Arctic as a region of opportunity” and that, “at a time of accelerating impact of climate change and rising geopolitical competition, Canada will advance its standing as an Arctic power and uphold our Arctic sovereignty and the rules-based international order in our bilateral and multilateral engagement with Indo-Pacific countries on Arctic and polar affairs.”<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusions

Despite increasing geopolitical friction over the past year, Canada’s official view holds that global climate change remains the most significant threat to the Arctic, including Northern peoples and communities. Nevertheless, Russia and China see this region as key to their strategic objectives and are adopting a more assertive posture in the region. General Eyre told the House of Commons Committee on National Defence on 18 October 2022:

The world is more dangerous now than at any time since the Cold War, and maybe even since the eve of the Second World War. The rules-based international order that has underpinned our peace and prosperity for 80 years is fragile and threatened and needs to be defended. Strategic competition once again dominates the geopolitical landscape.

Rapid technological advances are changing the character of conflict. All of this upheaval is set against the ever-present backdrop of climate change, which has improved access to resources and shipping routes in the [Arctic] region.

... I see no real threat today to our territorial sovereignty; nor do I see one

in the near future, but given the upheaval and disruption I have spoken of, we cannot assume this will always be the case. If the day arrives when that sovereignty is threatened, our presence there is limited.

... Mr. Chair, preserving the security of Canada's Arctic is a significant challenge, a challenge that will only become greater in the decades to come. Given the challenges of developing capabilities and infrastructure to operate in that harsh environment, it will take decades to be ready.<sup>42</sup>

While the Government of Canada still assesses a relatively low risk of armed conflict in the Arctic compared to other regions, it recognizes various forms of interstate competition already occurring below the threshold of armed conflict – and that the military has a requirement to anticipate and prepare for future challenges.<sup>43</sup> Although we still await the “unwritten” North American defence chapter of *SSE* to articulate a fuller policy basis for NORAD modernization and continental defence renewal, money speaks louder than words – and investments promised in 2022 appear to open a new chapter in NORAD’s history and of the Canada-US continental defence partnership more generally.

While the threat of a conventional military attack on the Canadian Arctic remains low, the spillover of international dynamics into circumpolar affairs was readily apparent in 2022. While Russia’s further invasion of Ukraine undermined regional institutions and working relationships with that country, it served to expand and enhance relationships amongst the seven like-minded Arctic states – including prompting Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership. This will continue to influence Russia’s perception of the Arctic security environment. Operationalizing



collaboration between like-minded Arctic states is vital to showing the world that Canada and its allies are working together from the same playbook. It also signals that, within an alliance context, Canada is committed to deterring potential adversaries. Furthermore, implementing NORAD modernization plans, improving information sharing amongst allies, and synchronizing Arctic-related homeland defence

efforts, will better place Canada to manage the regional and continental defence and security space in a rational, proportionate, and resource-effective manner while reinforcing the principle of collective defence.

## Notes

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A version has been published in French as P. Whitney Lackenbauer et Ryan Dean, « La défense dans l'arctique nord-américain en 2022, » dans *L'année arctique 2022 - Revue annuelle OPSA*, dir. Michael Delaunay et Magali Vullierme (Montréal : Observatoire de la politique et la sécurité de l'arctique, décembre 2022), 89-107.

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