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The United States and Arctic Information Influence, 2022-2024

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Between July 2022 and December 2024, the United States conducted a multi-layered information influence strategy in the Arctic, shifting away from direct diplomatic messaging toward gray zone operations and indirect narrative control.¹ This period saw the U.S. government leverage a combination of public-sector funding, academic partnerships, and private-sector channels to counter Russian and Chinese influence without always carrying an explicit U.S. government byline. By utilizing narrative filtering techniques, ranging from small grants to social media operations, the United States successfully empowered organizational efforts and independent researchers to legitimize Western security interests. This strategy allowed Washington to project power and shape regional governance while maintaining plausible deniability and avoiding the political complications often associated with unilateral intervention.

Theme 1: Unilateral and Public-Sector

This section elucidates how the U.S. government utilized direct funding mechanisms and institutional mandates to shape the information environment through periphery actions rather than official spokespersons. By deploying embassy small grants to Indigenous groups and journalists, the U.S. State Department fostered organic, domestic opposition to Russian and Chinese gray zone activities in Norway and Greenland. Simultaneously, the Global Engagement Center (GEC) and the Ted Stevens Center (TSC) collaborated with third-party researchers and legal scholars, creating an echo chamber of legitimacy that validated U.S. security concerns and Extended Continental Shelf claims through the lens of independent science and international law.

Grants and Agreements

The U.S. Embassy Small Grants Programs in Oslo, Copenhagen, and the Consulate in Nuuk operated as a sophisticated, low-visibility mechanism for information influence between July 2022 and December 2024. Far from simple philanthropic gestures, these financial instruments functioned as a strategic method of narrative support, allowing the United States to inject its preferred security and political themes into the Arctic discourse

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without the need for direct diplomatic messaging. By channeling funds, typically ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000, into local hands, the State Department effectively recruited indigenous groups, academic institutions, and media organizations to serve as local legitimizers.² This approach ensured that pro-Western narratives regarding security and governance appeared to originate from organic, domestic concerns rather than foreign intervention, giving the messaging a level of credibility that official U.S. government statements could not achieve.

In Norway, specifically within the High North regions of Finnmark and Troms, the funding strategy was designed to inoculate the population against Russian hybrid threats and border diplomacy. The Embassy in Oslo utilized these grants to support media literacy and investigative journalism workshops for local Northern press outlets.³ This funding effectively empowered local journalists to aggressively report on Russian gray-zone activities, such as GPS jamming or dual-use maritime operations, under the banner of independent domestic reporting, thereby validating U.S. security concerns through local voices. Simultaneously, grants targeting youth leadership, such as funding participation in the Arctic Frontiers Emerging Leaders program, ensured that the next generation of Norwegian policymakers was mentored by U.S. experts, subtly aligning their worldview with NATO security priorities rather than historical cross-border cooperation with Russia.⁴

In Greenland, where the political environment is highly sensitive to issues of sovereignty and militarization, the influence campaign was posed as educational and economic capacity building to avoid the appearance of interference in Danish-Greenlandic relations. Through the Consulate in Nuuk, the United States deployed significant funding toward the Arctic Education Alliance and similar educational initiatives.⁵ By partnering U.S. institutions like the University of Alaska Fairbanks with the University of Greenland (Ilisimatusarfik), the United States was able to shape the curriculum of future Greenlandic civil servants. Courses on sustainable land management and Western-standard environmental impact assessments effectively created a regulatory environment that favors Western investment while making it bureaucratically difficult for Chinese state-owned enterprises, which often rely on different operational standards, to gain a foothold, especially as Chinese actors learned how to identify and engage with the more influential members of local populations.

Furthermore, these grants extensively targeted cultural preservation and indigenous heritage, funding projects to digitize the Inuit language or preserve historical sites, sometimes even highlighted by funding concerns.⁶ This maneuver served a distinct geopolitical purpose: it positioned the United States as a respectful partner distinct from the historical colonial oversight of Denmark, and it fostered a sense of North American kinship among the Inuit. Ultimately, the success of this small-grants ecosystem lies in its deniability. When a U.S.-funded Greenlandic NGO releases a report on the dangers of unregulated fishing, or a Norwegian newspaper exposes Russian espionage, the narrative possesses an organic credibility that a State Department press release could unlikely achieve. The United States provided the resources, but the local actors provided the voice, successfully executing a campaign of influence that remained largely invisible to the casual observer.

Counter-Disinformation

The Global Engagement Center (GEC), operating out of the State Department (until December 2024) but sometimes bolstered by funding transfers from the Department of Defense, functioned as a premier informational venture capitalist for the United States' Arctic influence strategy between July 2022 and December 2024.⁷ Rather than engaging in direct, "tit-for-tat" arguments with Russian spokespersons, which often elevates the adversary's platform, the GEC adopted a strategy of outsourcing verification. The Center utilized its unique interagency authorities to identify, fund, and equip third-party research institutions, digital forensic firms, and academic bodies.⁸ These non-governmental partners were tasked with tracking and exposing foreign manipulation, effectively creating a firewall between the U.S. government and resulting analysis. By enabling these independent entities to publish reports on inauthentic coordinated behavior or state-backed disinformation ecosystems, the GEC ensured that the rebuttals to Russian and Chinese narratives appeared as objective, scientific consensus rather than political counter-propaganda.

In the specific context of the Arctic, this GEC-funded research was instrumental in dismantling the NATO aggression narrative that Moscow aggressively pushed following the accession of Finland and Sweden to the alliance. During this period, the GEC supported projects that mapped the flow of Russian disinformation targeting Northern European populations – specifically narratives claiming that increased U.S. military presence in the High North would lead to the destruction of Indigenous communities or environmental catastrophe. By funding digital forensic labs to trace these narratives back to St. Petersburg-based bot farms or proxy websites, the U.S. was able to name and shame the Russian apparatus through third-party efforts. This effectively protected local Arctic audiences (particularly in Scandinavia) by revealing the artificial nature of the anti-NATO sentiment online, treating disinformation as a cyber security threats rather than a legitimate political viewpoint.

Furthermore, the GEC's mandate expanded significantly during this window to address the People's Republic of China's Near-Arctic ambitions, pivoting from pure disinformation counters to exposure of intent.⁹ The GEC supported open-source intelligence (OSINT) reports that scrutinized the dual-use nature of Chinese scientific diplomacy in the region. Instead of the State Department issuing diplomatic communications expressing concern about Chinese icebreakers, GEC-sponsored academic reports would methodically detail how Chinese climate research stations in the Arctic could be utilized for submarine tracking or signal intelligence.¹⁰ These reports were then amplified by legitimate Western media outlets as investigative news or reports.¹¹ This strategy successfully reframed the public perception of Chinese Arctic investment from economic opportunity to national security risk, achieving a major U.S. strategic objective, the cooling of Arctic nations' relations with Beijing, without the U.S. government ever needing to appear as the primary accuser.

Counter-Lawfare and Strategic Communications

The emergence of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) during this period marked a definitive doctrinal shift within the U.S. Department of Defense, moving beyond hardware-centric strategies toward a sophisticated Counter-Lawfare approach designed to dominate the cognitive and legal battlespace of the High

North.¹² As the newest DoD Regional Center, the TSC functioned not merely as an educational body but as a strategic engine for narrative pre-emption, specifically tasked with intellectualizing U.S. Arctic policy in a way that creates international legitimacy. Between 2022 and 2024, the Center operationalized the concept that legal interpretations are a part of domain-related warfare. By producing academic analysis and hosting high-level track 1.5 dialogues, the TSC effectively weaponized scholarship to inoculate the information environment against Russian and Chinese attempts to frame U.S. activities as imperialistic or destabilizing.

This counter-lawfare strategy was most critically deployed in support of the United States' December 2023 announcement regarding its Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) limits. Knowing that the United States remains a non-party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), American strategists anticipated that Russia and China would immediately attack the legitimacy of the United States submitting a packet involving nearly one million square kilometers of seabed without a treaty ratification.¹³ To pre-empt this, the TSC and its affiliated network of scholars engaged in a sustained strategic communications campaign that reframed the U.S. claim not as a political land-grab, but as a rigid adherence to customary international law.¹⁴ Through symposia, policy papers, and engagement with allied military lawyers, they socialized the specific legal argument that the scientific rules of the shelf (Article 76) function independently of the treaty mechanism itself.

Consequently, when the State Department officially released the ECS coordinates, the international security community had already been primed to accept the science-based validity of the claim.¹⁵ The TSC's efforts created an echo chamber of legitimacy where allied nations and Arctic stakeholders repeated the U.S. legal rationale that the shelf is inherent to the landmass and not a political grant. This effectively neutralized the anticipated Russian lawfare counterattack before it could gain traction. By utilizing a DoD-funded academic institution to clarify and disseminate these complex legal definitions, the U.S. government successfully established a rule of law narrative that protected its sovereign expansion in the Arctic, making the unilateral acquisition of vast subsea resources appear as a mundane bureaucratic compliance with international norms.

Theme 2: Track 2 Diplomacy and Delegation-type Influence

This section explores the utilization of semi-official Track 2 and Track 1.5 channels, where the U.S. leveraged non-governmental venues to bypass the limitations and constraints of traditional statecraft.¹⁶ Using the open mic environment of the Arctic Circle Assembly and the academic cover of think tank partnerships like the Atlantic Council, U.S. delegations were able to aggressively stress-test future policies and publicly confront Russian and Chinese representatives. These forums functioned as gray zone theaters, allowing U.S. officials and allied defense ministries to align narratives and signal red lines to adversaries under the guise of expert consensus and informal dialogue.

Arctic Circle Assembly

The Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik served as the premier gray-zone theater for U.S. influence between 2022 and 2024, functioning less as a conference and more as a strategic sounding board where the United States

could aggressively shape narratives without the constraints of official diplomatic protocol. The U.S. presence was ostensibly informal, often lacking the rigid hierarchy of a formal State Department summit, but was in reality a carefully planned unconventional delegation designed to compete the information space. By flooding the venue with high-profile figures such as Senator Lisa Murkowski, NATO Admiral Rob Bauer, and key Pentagon architects like Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Arctic and Global Resilience Iris Ferguson, the United States utilized the Assembly's unique open mic format to bypass traditional diplomatic courtesies.¹⁷ This allowed American actors to publicly challenge Russian and Chinese representatives in real-time, creating viral moments of conflict that reinforced Western security narratives in ways more effectively than scripted press releases or reports.

A primary tactic employed during these assemblies was the calculated use of the Combative Town Hall. Admiral Bauer, Chair of the NATO Military Committee, frequently played the role of the enforcer, using his keynote slots not just to present policy, but to deliberately bait Chinese officials into public blunders. His 2022 confrontation with the Chinese Ambassador to Iceland, whom he publicly accused of arrogance and paranoia regarding Beijing's Arctic ambitions, was a prime example of this influence operation.¹⁸ It forced China to react defensively in a public forum, shattering the image of Beijing as a benevolent, cooperative partner and highlighting its alignment with Russia. Simultaneously, Senator Murkowski operated as the soft power counterbalance, engaging in hallway diplomacy, she projected an image of American accessibility and democratic engagement, subtly contrasting U.S. values with the rigid, state-controlled messaging of authoritarian competitors.

Furthermore, the Assembly functioned as a critical laboratory for policy stress-testing. The U.S. delegation used the 2023 Assembly to float trial balloons regarding the upcoming 2024 DoD *Arctic Strategy*. Officials such as Deputy Assistant Secretary Ferguson previewed controversial concepts, such as the need for increased domain awareness (surveillance) and total force integration, to an audience of allies and Indigenous leaders.¹⁹ This allowed U.S. strategists to gauge the immediate reaction of Nordic partners (Norway, Iceland, Denmark) and Indigenous Permanent Participants in a lower-stakes environment. If a specific phrasing or concept met resistance in the hallways of the Harpa Concert Hall, it could be refined or softened before the official government doctrine was published in Washington. This socialization of pre-strategy ensured that when the U.S. eventually announced major shifts in posture, key regional allies had already been privately aligned and publicly primed to support them.

Think Tank Partnerships

The Atlantic Council's think tank partnerships served as a sophisticated mechanism for transatlantic narrative alignment between July 2022 and December 2024, functioning as a gray zone diplomat that could bypass the difficulties of official statecraft.²⁰ While serving as independent academic forums, these events, most notably the Looking North conference series, were operationalized through direct funding and strategic partnership with allied defense ministries, particularly the Norwegian Ministry of Defense.²¹ By co-hosting these high-level dialogues in Washington, D.C. or Oslo, the Atlantic Council effectively provided a neutral commercial venue

where U.S. and Nordic security officials could validate their threat assessments regarding Russia and China under the guise of expert consensus rather than unilateral U.S. proclamation.

The core utility of this model lies in its ability to socialize sensitive security concepts before they become official policy. For instance, during the 2023 and 2024 periods, these forums were used to road-test the integration of commercial space capabilities (like satellite monitoring) into Arctic defense – a controversial topic due to the dual-use nature of the technology. By featuring panels where independent experts from the Scowcroft Center agreed with Norwegian defense officials on the urgent need for all-domain awareness, the U.S. government could generate a surrounding layer of intellectual legitimacy for its military expansion plans. This echo chamber effect meant that when the U.S. Department of Defense eventually released its 2024 *Arctic Strategy*, the key themes had already been pre-validated by a network of trans-Atlantic think tank reports, making the strategy appear as a response to settled fact rather than a hawkish escalation.

Furthermore, this model allowed for Track 1.5 signaling to adversaries that official channels could not carry. In events like the Arctic Security Network (hosted in Oslo in September 2024 with partners like the Wilson Center and the Fridtjof Nansen Institute), U.S. officials could share stages with European counterparts to project a seamless united front specifically calibrated to deter Moscow.²² Unlike a NATO summit, which requires a consensus communiqué, these think tank partnerships allowed for more aggressive, forward-leaning statements about red lines in the Arctic. The presence of entities like the Ted Stevens Center and the U.S. Coast Guard alongside European academics created a visual and intellectual tableau of total defense, signaling to Russia that U.S. Arctic policy was now fully integrated with its European allies at every level, from the university seminar room to the operational command center.

Theme 3: Private Sector and Gray Zone Activities

This third section focuses on the intersection of commercial diplomacy and digital operations, representing the most uncertain elements of U.S. influence. In Greenland, this involved a pivot to business-to-business engagements and delegation-like maneuvers using Alaskan Native Corporations to promote a Western-centric economic model that crowded out Chinese investment. Concurrently, in digital competition, the U.S. employed algorithmic strategies and social media networks to amplify pro-NATO narratives and suppress Russian disinformation, effectively acting as a volume control for the regional internet while unmasking foreign intelligence operatives posing as local activists.

Commercial Diplomacy in Greenland

The Private Sector & Gray Zone influence strategy in Greenland between July 2022 and December 2024 represented a calculated pivot from the purchase rhetoric of the previous administration toward a sophisticated, commercial-first approach. Recognizing that direct political pressure often backfired, the United States utilized the Consulate in Nuuk and the U.S.-Greenland Joint Committee to facilitate business-to-business engagements that carried heavy geopolitical subtext. A prime example occurred in September 2023, when the Joint

Committee convened in Qaqortoq not just for diplomatic talks, but to host a business roundtable specifically connecting Indigenous-owned Alaskan companies with Greenlandic counterparts.²³ This was a strategic delegation-like maneuver: by facilitating Alaskan Native Corporations as part of U.S. engagement, the State Department could promote a model of Western-style Indigenous economic sovereignty, implicitly contrasting it with the state-centric models offered by Chinese investors, while avoiding the appearance of a Washington-dictated agenda. While the State Department's public release did not disclose the individual company names for this specific event, the delegation was part of a broader 2023 commercial diplomacy track that heavily utilized the leadership of NANA Regional Corporation (specifically Elizabeth Qaulluq Cravalho, VP of Lands) and Bering Straits Native Corporation (BSNC) (led by President Gail Schubert) to engage with Greenlandic counterparts on infrastructure and tourism.

This commercial diplomacy was further operationalized through specific financial and technical interventions designed to crowd out non-allied investment. In April 2023, the State Department hosted a Direct Line webinar on Hydropower Opportunities in Greenland, explicitly marketing Greenland's energy tenders to U.S. firms to ensure critical infrastructure remained in Western hands.²⁴ This culminated in November 2024, when Under Secretary of State Jose W. Fernandez visited Nuuk to host a Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) forum.²⁵ This event was the physical manifestation of the anti-China narrative; by bringing Western investors directly to Nuuk under the banner of supply chain diversification, the U.S. effectively signaled to the Greenlandic government that a values-based economic alternative to Beijing was not just theoretical, but ready to deploy capital.

Simultaneously, the strategy leveraged U.S. financial instruments to validate the Independence Capability narrative, the idea that Greenland could eventually afford independence from Denmark if it aligned with the U.S. economy. In April 2024, the U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM) issued a Letter of Interest to GreenRoc Mining, signaling willingness to finance a graphite project in southern Greenland.²⁶ This was a quintessential gray zone signal: while technically a private-sector loan inquiry, it functioned as a geopolitical guarantee, assuring Greenlandic voters that the U.S. government would backstop their resource economy. By focusing on sectors like critical minerals and hydropower, the U.S. promoted a vision of Greenlandic self-sufficiency that was strictly connected to NATO supply chains, effectively supporting Greenland's autonomy from Copenhagen only insofar as it deepened dependence on Washington.

Algorithm and Social Media Influence

The most secretive and high-tech part of the United States' influence strategy in the Arctic between 2022 and 2024 involved using social media and computer algorithms to fight an information war against Russia. This digital battlefield came to light in late 2022, when the Pentagon ordered a major review of its clandestine psychological operations after researchers discovered networks of fake online profiles linked to the U.S. military.²⁷ This review confirmed that the U.S. military possesses the tools to create artificial popularity online, a tactic often used to counter the massive troll farms operated by Russia. In the Arctic context, this likely involved using clusters of fake accounts or computer programs to rapidly like and share pro-NATO news stories on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) or Facebook. By tricking the social media algorithms into thinking these stories were trending,

U.S. operators could force positive news about Western security to appear on the screens of real people in Norway, Finland, and Greenland, effectively drowning out anti-American propaganda.²⁸

The primary goal of these digital operations was to act as a volume control for the internet, amplifying Western messages while silencing Russian ones. Russia frequently uses the internet to spread fear in the High North, posting stories that claim U.S. military bases will destroy the environment or make local towns a target for nuclear war. To fight this, U.S. digital teams could use their online networks to ensure that when a local person searched for news about a military base, the search results would prioritize articles about economic benefits and safety, pushing the scary Russian narratives so far down the list that no one would see them. This technique allowed the U.S. to shape what Arctic residents believed was true without ever officially putting a government spokesperson on camera.

This social media strategy worked hand-in-hand with the work of U.S. military cyber teams sent to help allies like Denmark and Norway. These Hunt Forward teams were tasked with finding Russian spies or hackers hiding inside allied computer networks.²⁹ When they found a local activist account online that was actually being run by a Russian intelligence agent, they did not just block it, they often leaked that proof to local reporters. By exposing that a supposedly angry local citizen was actually a Russian operative, the U.S. effectively destroyed the credibility of the Russian message. This combination of boosting pro-U.S. stories and unmasking Russian fakes allowed the United States to quietly steer public opinion in the Arctic, ensuring the region remained friendly to NATO interests during a time of high tension.

Conclusion

The United States' Arctic information activities from 2022 to 2024 represented a cohesive doctrinal shift toward indirect influence, prioritizing the use of local faces and voices to carry U.S. messages. By layering U.S. strategic objectives under the cover of indigenous cultural preservation, independent academic research, and private sector investment, Washington successfully inoculated key populations in the High North against adversary narratives. Whether through the pre-socialization of military strategy in Reykjavik or the funding of investigative journalism in Finnmark, the U.S. created a resilient information ecosystem where Western security interests appeared as organic domestic priorities, ensuring the region remained aligned with NATO during a period of heightened geopolitical tension.

This period demonstrated that modern great power competition in the Arctic is fought as much in the cognitive domain as it is in the physical one. The integration of high-level counter-lawfare scholarship with forward-leaning cyber operations revealed a holistic approach where legal arguments and digital methods reinforce one another. By treating information not just as public diplomacy but as a theater of irregular warfare, the U.S. effectively denied Russia and China the ability to control the narrative baseline. This gray zone competition allowed Washington to advance significant geopolitical goals, such as the Extended Continental Shelf claim, with minimal diplomatic friction, proving that the most effective projection of power in the 21st-century Arctic often occurs without military intervention.

Looking forward, the infrastructure built during this two-year window, ranging from the Arctic Education Alliance in Nuuk to the trans-Atlantic think tank circuit, establishes a durable influence architecture that will likely outlast specific administrations. This web of relationships ensures that U.S. interests are permanently embedded in the region's educational, commercial, and media institutions. As the Arctic continues to open to global competition, this established network of local validators will serve as a persistent resilience system against future authoritarian influence attempts, securing the Arctic's political alignment with the West for the foreseeable future.

Notes

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