

Statement before the House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security and Subcommittee on
Counterterrorism and Intelligence
*On Arctic Security in an Era of Global Competition: Safeguarding U.S. Interests in Frigid
Waters*

Testimony before a joint hearing of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security and Counterterrorism and Intelligence

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Arctic Security in an Era of Global Competition: Safeguarding U.S. Interests in Frigid Waters

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Chairmans Pfluger and Gimenez, Ranking Members Magaziner and McIver, thank you for holding this joint hearing to better understand the long-term Arctic threat picture. Understanding this threat can ensure that the United States, in close cooperation with its Arctic allies, can protect and defend the northern flank of our homeland and its two Arctic avenues of approach via the Pacific and the Atlantic.

Changes in the Arctic Great Powers. There are three Arctic great powers: The United States along with its NATO allies, Russia, and China, which aspires to be a great polar power by 2030. Over the past 14 months, the United States has significantly shifted its Arctic policies and its security posture. This has, in turn, dramatically shifted the Arctic security stances of Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark and NATO. As the international system accelerates its transition from the post-1945 order, sovereignty and maritime access will be increasingly challenged by the great powers as they compete for increased access and control across the Arctic region.

Arctic America. The United States has moved away from its post-Cold War concept of the circumpolar Arctic as a separate and distant region where long-term security challenges and new economic opportunities are managed cheaply. Washington has returned “home” to the Arctic as it centers the region within homeland defense as part of an integrated defense strategy for the Western Hemisphere. The United States has prioritized modernizing its Arctic-based missile defense architecture and begun to develop a persistent presence in the maritime Arctic with long-overdue investments in its icebreaker fleet. The most notable step in this direction is the construction of up to 11 Arctic Security Cutters in cooperation with Canada and Finland through the Icebreaker Collaborative Effort (ICE Pact), with the first deliveries scheduled for 2028.¹ In addition to the Arctic Security Cutters to be built through ICE Pact, three heavy Polar Security Cutter icebreakers will replace the only aging heavy icebreaker in the US inventory and ensure access thick year-round ice in the Arctic and Antarctica, with the first vessel anticipated to be completed by 2030.² This forthcoming icebreaker fleet must play a vital role in detecting and deterring Arctic threats, protecting America’s territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and ensuring Freedom of Navigation in increasingly ice-free waters in the high seas area of the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO). However, today, the integrated mission for these new security cutters is unclear. It is important to note that an icebreaker alone does not provide Arctic security – it is a tool to detect, deter and defend sovereignty and freedom of navigation when required while being able to

¹ United States Coast Guard News, “U.S. Coast Guard completes the President’s contract awards for 11 Arctic Security Cutters.” February 11, 2026: <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4403354/us-coast-guard-completes-the-presidents-contract-awards-for-11-arctic-security/>.

² Mike Schuler, “Bollinger Shipyards Secures Full Funding for Troubled Polar Security Cutter Program.” gCaptain. August 5, 2025: <https://gcaptain.com/bollinger-shipyards-secures-full-funding-for-troubled-polar-security-cutter-program/>.

conduct a range of activities to advance American interests. America's new icebreaking fleet must be accompanied by a suite of Arctic capabilities that are able to develop a common operating picture with our Arctic allies through data integration of seafloor sensors, polar orbital and navigational satellites as well as autonomous systems. These capabilities must be accompanied by new dual-use infrastructure and operating bases to increase the American and allied physical presence in the Arctic. The Trump administration has persuasively outlined this wider suite of Arctic capabilities in America's Maritime Action Plan's Arctic Waterways Security Strategy, yet it is unclear what (and from where) new budgetary resources will be identified to implement this waterways strategy and who will ensure its implementation.

America's Arctic allies have responded to this shift in America's Arctic strategy, specifically motivated by President Trump's challenge to the sovereignty of America's Arctic neighbors, Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark. In response, Canada has committed \$29 billion (USD) to substantially increase its military force presence across the Canadian Arctic. This includes the establishment of three Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, upgrading and modernizing Arctic airports, and connecting the territory of Nunavut with Canada's national highway system.³ Ottawa has made overdue investments in upgrading NORAD early warning capabilities, pledging \$28 billion (USD) for the Arctic-Over-the-Horizon radar project.⁴ To enhance domain awareness in its distant northern regions, Canada has also announced plans to strengthen the Canadian Forces military satellite communications capabilities.⁵ As a partner alongside Finland and the US in ICE Pact, Canadian shipbuilder Seaspan Shipyards will provide the design specifications for the our Arctic Security Cutters that are to be built in Finland, Houma, Louisiana,⁶ and Galveston, Texas.⁷ Canada has also recently completed a class of six Arctic and offshore patrol ships, further enhancing Ottawa's ability to police its territorial waters.⁸ Canada and the five Nordic countries (Arctic 6) have recently participated in a first of its kind summit in Oslo, Norway where they have announced new defense industrial partnerships.⁹

³ Prime Minister of Canada, "Prime Minister Carney announces ambitious new plan to defend, build, and transform the North." March 12, 2026: <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2026/03/12/prime-minister-carney-announces-ambitious-new-plan-defend-build-and>.

⁴ Government of Canada, "National Defence announces progress on the Arctic Over-the-Horizon Radar project." July 17, 2025: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2025/07/national-defence-announces-progress-on-the-arctic-over-the-horizon-radar-project.html>.

⁵ Government of Canada, "Government of Canada announces strategic partnership to strengthen military communications in the Arctic." December 9, 2025: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-services-procurement/news/2025/12/government-of-canada-announces-strategic-partnership-to-strengthen-military-communications-in-the-arctic.html>.

⁶ Mike Schuler, "Canadian Icebreaker Design Picked for U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Security Cutters." gCaptain. January 7, 2026: <https://gcaptain.com/canadian-icebreaker-design-picked-for-u-s-coast-guard-arctic-security-cutters/>.

⁷ Mike Schuler, "U.S. Coast Guard Awards Arctic Security Cutter Contracts to Davie Defense, Closing Out 11-Ship Program." gCaptain. February 11, 2026: <https://gcaptain.com/u-s-coast-guard-awards-arctic-security-cutter-contracts-to-davie-defense-closing-out-11-ship-program/>.

⁸ Naval News, "Canada Launches Sixth and Final Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship." November 12, 2024: <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/12/canada-launches-sixth-and-final-arctic-and-offshore-patrol-ship/>.

⁹ Prime Minister of Canada, "Prime Minister Carney deepens cooperation with Nordic countries in defence, Arctic security, and critical minerals." March 16, 2026: <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2026/03/15/prime-minister-carney-deepens-cooperation-nordic-countries-defence>.

The Kingdom of Denmark has committed over \$6 billion¹⁰ dollars in two agreements,¹¹ to improve Arctic security in Greenland. This new funding includes the addition of three Arctic patrol vessels, long-range drones, additional funding for coastal radars, and the establishment of a new Joint Arctic Command Headquarters in Nuuk with a new military unit affiliated with the command to be stationed in Greenland. For well over a decade, the UK has taken a leadership role in the defense and security of Northern Europe through its Joint Expeditionary Forces (JEF), collaborating with Norway on the purchase of interoperable anti-submarine warfare frigates¹² and taking a leading role in responding to threats to underseas cables.¹³ The UK has announced it will deploy forces from the Royal Marines to northern Norway.¹⁴

After much delay, NATO has embraced a more active Arctic deterrence and defensive role. Pressed into action by the transatlantic crisis over Greenland, NATO has increased defenses of Greenland under the umbrella of the Arctic Sentry mission and the Arctic Endurance exercise by committing additional air, sea and ground assets.¹⁵ NATO has also developed a permanent NATO presence through a Forward Land Forces (FLF) Multinational Staff Element (MNSE) in Rovaniemi, Finland. Sweden is the lead nation in NATO's enhanced forward presence in Finland.¹⁶ Finland and Norway this month hosted land, sea and air exercises involving 32,500 participants from the United States and 13 other allied nations for NATO's Cold Response 26 exercises.¹⁷

American and allied Arctic security investments are long overdue and very welcome. NATO's role will be particularly important as Arctic allies implement their regional defense plans, exercise cold-weather fighter capabilities and work on greater interoperability and a common operating picture. ICE Pact is a new allied defense procurement model which not only benefits all three countries' shipyards but produces more rapidly interoperable platforms to strengthen allied deterrence and defense. However, to optimize collective defense and deterrence in the Arctic, it is vital that the seven NATO allies and the United Kingdom integrate their new Arctic capabilities to create an Allied Arctic shield.

Sino-Russian Pursuits in the Arctic. Russia is an undisputed superpower in the Arctic with its nuclear deterrent housed above the Arctic Circle on the Kola Peninsula and its long-term economic ambitions in

¹⁰ Danish Ministry of Defence, "First agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic," <https://www.fmn.dk/globalassets/fmn/dokumenter/-fact-sheet-first-agreement-on-the-arctic-and-north-atlantic.pdf>.

¹¹ Danish Ministry of Defence, "The Second Agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic strengthens the operational effectiveness of the Danish Armed Forces with new acquisitions totalling DKK 27.4 billion." October 10, 2025: <https://www.fmn.dk/en/news/2025/the-second-agreement-on-the-arctic-and-north-atlantic-strengthens-the-operational-effectiveness-of-the-danish-armed-forces-with-new-acquisitions-totalling-dkk-27.4-billion>.

¹² Fatima Bahtić, "UK and Norway sign major defense deal, establish interchangeable Type 26 fleet." Naval Today. December 5, 2025: <https://www.navaltoday.com/2025/12/05/uk-and-norway-sign-major-defense-deal-establish-interchangeable-type-26-fleet/>.

¹³ Tinsui Yeung, "UK and Norway form naval alliance to hunt Russian submarines." BBC. December 4, 2025: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v152ep9l0o>.

¹⁴ Clara Bullock, "Marines arrive in Norway as part of new agreement." BBC. January 26, 2026: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgl8ddy18yno>.

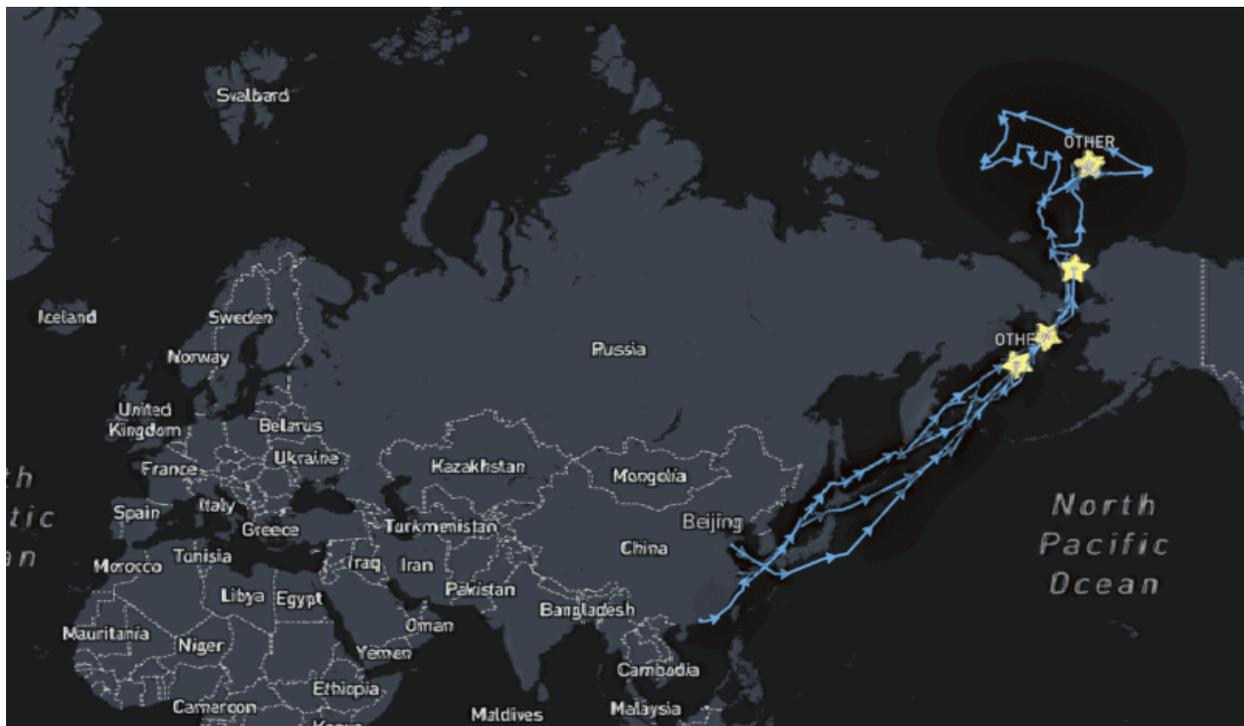
¹⁵ Danish Defence, "Arctic Endurance continues throughout 2026." January 23, 2026: <https://www.forsvaret.dk/en/news/2026/arctic-endurance-fortsatter-i-hele-2026/>

¹⁶ NATO, "Strengthening NATO's eastern flank." October 23, 2025: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/strengthening-natos-eastern-flank>.

¹⁷ Dzirhan Mahadzir, "NATO Forces Wrap Arctic Warfare Cold Response 26 Drills." USNI News. March 19, 2026: <https://news.usni.org/2026/03/19/nato-forces-wrap-arctic-warfare-cold-response-26-drills>.

the region. Since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia's elite Arctic special forces have sustained significant losses following deployments to Ukraine but it continues to modernize its Borei and Yasen class strategic nuclear submarines as well as enhance its hypersonic missile and autonomous capabilities, such as the Zircon cruise missile and Oreshnik ballistic missile (used twice in Ukraine, with a range of 3,500 miles.) These systems, designed to evade US missile defenses, are tested in and fired from the Arctic. Russia's re-deployment of its deep-sea nuclear-powered submarine, the Losharik, designed for special intelligence missions, is capable of cutting transatlantic undersea cables or launching devastating weapons. Moscow's advanced hybrid warfare capabilities will also shape the future Arctic landscape. Russia's use of aerial and underwater drones, accelerated adaptation, production and electronic jamming capabilities are and will continue to be used against NATO Arctic bases and allied capabilities. We see these tactics revealed in the cutting of undersea cables, suspicious drone activity near civilian airports and NATO bases, economic coercion to sponsor arson attacks and other sabotage campaigns.

Through its "unlimited" partnership with China, Russia has facilitated the PRC's increased access to the Arctic as it advances its dual-use economic and scientific presence. China's focus in the Arctic centers on resource extraction, maritime infrastructure development, satellite communications and military and coast guard cooperation that include joint exercises and patrols between the Russian Federal Security Services and the China Coast Guard along the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and on the high seas. The PRC is also increasing its Arctic satellite tracking and monitoring capabilities with a recently established ground station near Avacha Bay in the Russian Far East, co-located with a Russian submarine base which also serves as an access point to the NSR. Rosatom, which operates Russia's icebreaker fleet, increasingly relies on Chinese satellite data to facilitate navigation and ice forecasts along the NSR.



Path of Chinese icebreakers in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, August 2025. Source: gCaptain.

Chinese scientific and economic activity prioritizes the future biodiversity and fishing opportunities of the

Central Arctic Ocean and the testing of future shipping routes in the Central Arctic high seas area. Its icebreakers are able to penetrate the deepest reaches of the Central Arctic and Pacific Arctic. In an unprecedented display of its growing Arctic capabilities, in the summer of 2025, five Chinese icebreakers were present in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, in some instances only 200 miles off the Alaskan coast.¹⁸ Beijing's Arctic scientific research is concentrated around the Chukchi Borderland, a region that extends northward from Alaska's Beaufort and Chukchi Shelf into the deep Arctic Ocean. This is likely to advance the PRC's knowledge of the Arctic seabed for future submarine activity and fisheries. The PRC has also focused its scientific research on the Atlantic Arctic seabed, specifically near the Gakkel and mid-Atlantic Ridges, where its manned submersibles have probed the seafloor and could be applied to future sonar detection systems to detect American submarines and undersea cables as well as exploit future seabed mining and fisheries. Chinese science drives the underlying data that will shape future Arctic governance through multilateral mechanisms such as the High Seas Treaty and the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA).

The threat from Russia and China in the Arctic, separately and combined, is real and it is growing, particularly in the Pacific Arctic. Russia and China have conducted ten joint air patrols since 2019 (as of December 2025)¹⁹ and five joint maritime patrols (as of August 2025.)²⁰ The tempo and scope of these patrols have increased, with a joint bomber patrol entering the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in 2024, the first time that both countries' aircraft were detected simultaneously entering the ADIZ.²¹ The NSR is increasingly becoming a preferred route for Russia's sanctioned shadow fleet and a new diversified source of liquid natural gas (LNG) for China, originating from Russia's LNG facilities located on the far northern Yamal Peninsula. China began receiving LNG shipments from the sanctioned Arctic LNG-2 project in the summer of 2025 and has steadily increased the rate of delivery.²² Already eight LNG shipments Arctic LNG-2 have been delivered to China this year alone.²³ Since 2023, the Russian government has given Beijing extensive access to Russia's largest Far East port of Vladivostok as it becomes a transit hub for Chinese goods that will traverse the narrow Bering Strait to the NSR. This is the first time the port has been opened to Chinese shipping since the Qing Dynasty 163 years ago, codifying Beijing's aspiration to be a "near-Arctic" state.²⁴ This was the same year that China

¹⁸ James Brooks, "U.S. Coast Guard intercepts two Chinese research ships in disputed portions of the Arctic Ocean." Alaska Beacon. September 5, 2025: <https://alaskabeacon.com/2025/09/05/u-s-coast-guard-intercepts-two-chinese-research-ships-in-disputed-portions-of-the-arctic-ocean/>.

¹⁹ Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan "China, Russia hold 10th joint strategic air patrol over E.China Sea, western Pacific Ocean; simultaneous operation with carrier Liaoning possible: expert." *Global Times*. December 9, 2025: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202512/1350124.shtml>.

²⁰ USNI News, "Russia, China Wrap Fifth Annual Joint Patrol," <https://news.usni.org/2025/08/25/russia-china-wrap-fifth-annual-joint-patrol>.

²¹ Chris Gordon, "NORAD Fighters Intercept Russian, Chinese Bombers Near Alaska." *Air and Space Forces Magazine*. July 24, 2024: <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/norad-fighters-intercept-russian-chinese-bombers-near-alaska/>.

²² Stephen Stapczynski, "US-Sanctioned Russian LNG Lands in China for First Times." Bloomberg. August 28, 2025: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-08-28/us-sanctioned-russian-lng-shipment-docks-in-china-for-first-time>.

²³ Reuters, "China receives eighth LNG cargo from Russia's sanctioned Arctic LNG 2 this year." March 13, 2026: <https://www.bairdmaritime.com/shipping/tankers/gas/china-receives-eighth-lng-cargo-from-russias-sanctioned-arctic-lng-2-this-year>.

²⁴ Wong Siew Fong, "Russia opening Vladivostok port to China after 163 years." ThinkChina. May 16, 2023: <https://www.thinkchina.sg/economy/russia-opening-vladivostok-port-china-after-163-years>.

participated in a naval exercise with Russia in the North Pacific.²⁵

Safeguarding US Interests. The United States and its NATO allies have begun to reorient their Arctic policy approaches based on improved territorial, regional and collective defense. This reorientation however came at an enormous cost: there has been a significant loss of trust between the United States and its allies, particularly with Denmark and the people of Greenland, that will take time to repair, and it will not be the same transatlantic security relationship moving forward.

We have a brief window of opportunity to get this right as China and Russia advance their interests while challenging US and allied interests. US Arctic policy as homeland defense requires a very different, high-level and purpose-driven strategic coordination effort at the highest levels of government at the Department of Homeland Security (Coast Guard) and the Pentagon as well as the Interior and Energy Departments, and the state of Alaska. The private sector also must be meaningfully engaged to develop dual-use infrastructure and build greater resiliency to Russian and Chinese military and hybrid tactics. This new coordination effort will likely require new command and control arrangements for the US military and new lines of civilian authority. For example, the new icebreaker fleet must be integrated into an overarching national defense strategy, or it will be a fleet searching for a mission, providing Washington with a false sense of security. It is also essential that this strategy is seamlessly integrated with the new capabilities of our NATO allies in order to create an enduring Allied Arctic shield. It is also critical that America's Arctic science agenda is fully integrated into this national strategy as science is the underlying foundation for all future activities in the Arctic. The Arctic seafloor and Central Arctic high seas must be given greater priority in our scientific agenda and the United States and its allies must demand greater transparency and accountability from Beijing for the science it conducts in the Arctic.

Nothing is more important than protecting the homeland and revitalizing the defense of our northern flank must remain an urgent priority. But to do so, we must organize ourselves differently, both internally and externally. The United States can only strengthen its air and maritime northern shield in close coordination with its NATO allies—not by challenging their sovereignty. The United States no longer has the luxury of time; in fact, we have wasted the past 15 years in a paper avalanche of studies and strategies that did not create capabilities. Unfortunately, we wasted those 15 years not reconstituting our icebreaker fleet or developing a deep-water port in Nome, Alaska that could have been available to the national command authority today had we acted with urgency. China will continue to advance its interests through governance and scientific avenues, areas the United States has now largely abandoned. Russia will seek to maintain great power parity with the United States through its nuclear deterrent and hypersonic capabilities based in the Arctic and its dependent relationship with China. Together, they will continue to work against American and allied security interests in the region. As the conflict in the Middle East today demonstrates, we must anticipate a potential future contested maritime chokepoint in the Bering Strait. We must also understand the national security implications of the demand for greater diversification of international maritime routes as well as energy, mineral and protein sources that only a more-accessible Arctic region can provide. This is why it is essential that the US prioritizes developing an allied Arctic shield to better defend the homeland. And because of the enormous challenges of operating in the Arctic, the future we must prepare for is now.

²⁵ Erdem Lamazhapov, Andreas Osthagen, "Alaska, not Greenland, should worry the United States in the Arctic." October 28, 2025: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/alaska-greenland-should-worry-the-united-states-arctic/>.