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ON

“ARCTIC SECURITY ISSUES”

BEFORE THE

**HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION &
MARITIME SECURITY**

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lesko, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the security situation in the Arctic. We are happy to work alongside our Coast Guard colleagues to deepen strategic partnerships and advance U.S. interests in the region. Our goal is a secure and stable Arctic where U.S. interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is protected, and Arctic states work cooperatively to address shared challenges.

The Department of State has fostered strong diplomatic ties with Arctic countries – even before the United States officially became an Arctic State in 1867 with the acquisition of Alaska. Our relationships with our Nordic partners are some of our most important and enduring in Europe, dating back to the earliest days of our nation’s history. Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Canada are NATO Allies whose troops deploy alongside our own in warzones like Iraq and Afghanistan, while Finland and Sweden are important NATO partners with whom we work closely. Our Northern neighbors are essential to Transatlantic security both in the Arctic and beyond.

During World War II, the United States worked with its Arctic Allies – particularly Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark – to establish bases that were critical to the war effort. During the Cold War, the United States and our Allies maintained a robust presence in the High North and the Arctic, which reflected the region’s importance to our collective security in an era of strategic competition. With the fall of the Soviet Union, our attention turned to other security challenges, and our approach to the Arctic shifted. For more than 20 years, our principal focus in the Arctic has been on promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among Arctic states – with the involvement of Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants – on issues, such as sustainable development and environmental protection.

This approach manifested itself in 1996 when the eight countries with territory above the Arctic Circle – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and the United States – formed the Arctic Council. This body serves as the premiere multilateral forum for matters of regional governance. The Council operates based on consensus and addresses issues ranging from Search and Rescue, to maritime pollution, to the health of indigenous communities. Iceland currently serves as the Council’s chair, but the chairmanship will transition to Russia in May 2021. The Department of State serves as the lead agency coordinating U.S. efforts in the Arctic Council and in multilateral fora focused on Arctic governance as well as maritime safety and security.

As Secretary Pompeo has underscored, the good work that the Arctic Council is engaged in must continue; it is an important part of our Arctic agenda. The United States has no interest in seeing these cooperative activities end. At the same time, we must adjust our Arctic policy to today’s new strategic reality, which is characterized by the return of great power competition – a strategic change driven by the desire of Russia and the People’s Republic of China to rearrange the global security order by challenging the United States and the West. The Arctic is not immune from the implications of this change. In fact, we should expect the rapidly changing Arctic system – diminishing sea ice coverage, declining snow cover, melting ice sheets, and thawing permafrost – to create greater incentives for Russia and the PRC to pursue Arctic agendas that clash with United States and Western interests. This could put at risk our collective efforts to ensure the Arctic remains a region of rules-based governance and low tension.

Russia is the largest Arctic State in terms of population residing above the Arctic Circle and by geographic area, with over fifty-three percent of Arctic Ocean coastline. Russia views the development of its Arctic region as critical to the country’s economic future, and it has legitimate Arctic interests. Within the Arctic Council, Russia has cooperated with the United States on a number of issues, including education, oil spill response, and Search and Rescue. However, Russia’s restrictions on the freedom of the navigation in the Northern Sea Route (NSR) are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention. Since 1983, the United States has viewed the Convention as reflecting customary international law with regard to traditional uses of the ocean and, as such, binding on all States including the United States. The Russian government’s threat to use military force to enforce its unilateral assertions about the NSR only further highlights its concerning behavior.

Russia's military presence in the Arctic is also growing. In recent years, Russia has established a new Arctic command, created four new Arctic brigades, refurbished old airfields and other infrastructure in the Arctic, including deep water ports, and established new military bases along its Arctic coastline. Russia has also made a concerted effort to establish a network of air defense and coastal missile systems, early warning radars, rescue centers, and a variety of sensors in the Arctic. In October 2019, we witnessed the largest Russian military exercise in the Arctic since the end of the Cold War. Last fall, Vice-Admiral Alexander Moiseyev of the Northern Fleet announced Russia’s intention to deploy S-400s to create “an air defense dome over the Russian Arctic.” Russia also maintains the largest icebreaker fleet in the world with over forty existing icebreakers and more in development. In fact, on January 15, 2020, Russia announced it will invest \$2 billion for construction of the world’s most powerful nuclear icebreaker.

The Russian military buildup in the Arctic has implications well beyond its waters. From a geostrategic perspective, the Arctic and the North Atlantic are inextricably linked. The Arctic provides Russian ships and submarines with access to a critical naval choke point, the Greenland, Iceland, UK Gap (the GIUK Gap), that plays an outsized role in NATO's defense and deterrence strategy. Underwater transatlantic communication cables – the foundation of our communication system with Europe – cross the same waters. In short, NATO's Northern Flank must once again command the attention of the United States and its Allies.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) presents a different challenge. Its stated interests in the Arctic are primarily focused on access to natural resources and the opportunities offered by the Arctic sea routes for shipping. As Admiral Ray highlighted, in 2018, the PRC launched its first Arctic Strategy, outlining plans to develop a "Polar Silk Road" as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. In that document, the PRC declared itself a "near-Arctic" state and signaled its intention to play a role in Arctic governance. This is disconcerting given the PRC's behavior outside the Arctic where it often disregards international norms, as it has in the South China Sea, for example. As Secretary Pompeo noted in a May 2019 speech, "Beijing claims to be a 'Near-Arctic State,' yet the shortest distance between China and the Arctic is 900 miles. There are only Arctic States and Non-Arctic States. No third category exists and claiming otherwise entitles China to exactly nothing."

The PRC is pursuing greater influence in the Arctic by seeking to grow its economic, diplomatic, and scientific presence. The Department of State fully supports the conclusion of the Fiscal Year 2020 NDAA that "China is projecting a physical presence in the Arctic through upgrading to advanced icebreakers, utilizing the Arctic Ocean more regularly through subsidizing arctic shipping, deploying unmanned ice stations, and engaging in large and sophisticated data collection efforts in countries of the Arctic region, including Iceland, Greenland, and Canada." Over the past several years, the PRC has secured mining licenses for several mineral deposits throughout the region, including uranium and other rare-earth minerals. In 2019, the PRC launched its first home-built icebreaker and has begun work on a new (potentially nuclear powered) icebreaker. The PRC maintains research stations in Iceland and Norway (on the island of Svalbard). It operates 23 Confucius Institutes in Arctic countries outside of the United States and Russia.

As we have seen across the globe, "soft power" tools often have a sharp edge when deployed by the PRC. The PRC has weaponized its state capitalism in an effort to secure control of critical, dual-use infrastructure, such as ports, airports, and telecommunication networks. The PRC has demonstrated a willingness to use coercion, influence operations, and other methods to get what it wants, and we have seen this in the Arctic. The recent experience of the Faroe Islands, in which a PRC Ambassador threatened to drop a trade agreement if the Faroese government did not sign a 5G contract with Huawei, is one example. The PRC's objections to Norway's efforts to protect the integrity of the Svalbard Treaty and ensure the island remains a base for only legitimate scientific research is another.

The PRC's patterns of aggressive behavior elsewhere in the world, the way the PRC has used Chinese money, Chinese companies, and Chinese workers to develop critical infrastructure in other parts of the globe to establish a permanent security presence must inform our approach to

the PRC's interests and activities in the Arctic. The United States is not arguing that Chinese economic investment or scientific research in the Arctic is unwelcome. We welcome transparent, rules-based engagement by the PRC, but the United States and its Arctic Allies and partners must examine the PRC's activities much more closely than we have in the past. The PRC's behavior over the last decade underscores that we cannot and should not assume its good intentions.

Security challenges exist in the Arctic, but the region is also full of opportunity. It is home to fish stocks critical to global food supply, oil reserves, and deposits of critical minerals essential to the production of advanced technology. As the navigation seasons in the Arctic Ocean increase, new, faster, and cheaper circumpolar shipping routes between Europe and the United States may emerge. The Department of State will work to ensure the region remains open to shared economic and scientific, and our security interests are protected.

Our goal is for the United States to be the partner of choice in the Arctic. We hope to accomplish this by increasing our engagement with and investment in the region. We are actively working to establish a diplomatic presence in Greenland this summer – reopening a U.S. Consulate in Nuuk, which closed in 1953. We have proposed a \$12.1 million funding package to jumpstart our engagement with Greenland. We are also exploring the possibility of increasing the footprint of U.S. Embassy in Reykjavik. As a Department, we support people-to-people exchanges to increase English language skills and programs focused on sustainable economic development – all to increase the resilience of Arctic communities to malign actors. We are continuing the good work and strong cooperation through the Arctic Council – a body that has directly contributed to the region's long history of peace and stability. Its work on non-security issues makes a vital contribution to Arctic security.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lesko, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you, again, for the opportunity to meet with you today to discuss the challenges and opportunities we face in the Arctic. I look forward to our continued cooperation as we work to increase Arctic security.

I look forward to your questions.