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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Pfluger, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Magaziner, and distinguished members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Marisol Maddox and I am a Senior Arctic Fellow at the Institute of Arctic Studies at Dartmouth, where I study the Arctic interplay between security, geopolitical, and environmental change dynamics. Today I am testifying in my personal professional capacity, and the views expressed are my own.

The three pillars I will speak about today provide an overview of the strategic environment. This includes Russia and China’s Arctic activities and interests, why the Alliance is our strategic advantage, and why environmental change matters for security.

STRATEGIC COMPETITION

Russia is the largest Arctic state, and the region features prominently in their core strategic security and economic priorities. Russia prioritizes military investments in the Arctic-- strengthening their ability to enforce the vision they hold for what they perceive to be the rightful Russian Arctic-- including by controlling access to it.

Despite the massive expenditure of missiles used in the war against Ukraine, experts estimate in early 2026 that Russia’s stockpile includes about three times as many cruise, ballistic, and quasiballistic missiles as they had at the beginning of 2022, and that their military will likely rapidly reconstitute once the war is over.ⁱ Particularly if the war against Ukraine does not end in a just way, Russia will likely expand its aggression elsewhere, including heightened levels of brinkmanship towards NATO members in the Arctic and beyond, if the United States’ commitment to Article 5 is perceived to be in doubt.ⁱⁱ

Since 2018 when China declared itself to be a “near Arctic state” and launched the Polar Silk Road extension of the Belt and Road Initiative, they have invested in Arctic capable platforms to gain domain awareness, operational capability, and to position themselves as an indispensable provider of data key to understanding changes in the fastest warming region on earth.

China is interested in the Arctic region as it relates to the larger vision they hold for themselves as a great power, including as an arena for power projection. China’s military views the Arctic Ocean as a potential region of future contestation and strategic interest. It is important for the U.S. to meet presence with presence, so it is encouraging to see the USCG-- as the U.S.’ primary surface presence in the Arctic-- finally receive an historic level of appropriations to fund icebreakers, sensors, C-130s, and more. Now that this money has been appropriated it will be important for Congress to have tight oversight to keep the service on time and on budget, and to ensure that Coast Guard has the pipeline of expertise and staffing necessary to support these platforms as they come online. Programs like Evergreen are also important to resource as they play important roles in developing robust strategic foresight amidst significant environmental change.

The Department of Defense’s 2024 update to its Arctic Strategy identified a significant increase in collaboration between the People’s Republic of China and Russia,ⁱⁱⁱ and that trend has only continued. China has benefitted from Russia’s relative isolation after 2022, but there are limitations and tensions in the relationship and the longer term is likely to be less rosy than the “partnership without limits”^{iv} image they project. The threat of sanctions has been effective in deterring China from even further levels of commercial alignment. This relationship is at its heart a transactional one, that doesn’t have the reliability, longevity, trust, and confidence of a true alliance.

ALLIES ARE KEY TO SECURING US INTERESTS IN THE ARCTIC

The NATO Alliance is the greatest strategic enabler of US interests in the Arctic region. Exercising and embedding with our allies who have expertise in Arctic survival and warfighting allows us to relearn skills and instincts that are essential to survive and thrive in extreme and austere Northern environments.

It is because of these trusted relationships that an agreement like ICE-PACT with Finland and Canada is possible, and for a waiver to allow Finland to construct four badly needed icebreakers for us on an accelerated timeline. As close allies and neighbors, the US and Canada share the world’s only bi-national military command, NORAD. Canada recently changed their position on non-participation in the US Ballistic Missile Defense system, which creates even greater potential for integration and alignment.

One of the biggest challenges in the Arctic is the pursuit of all domain awareness, from space to the seabed, so as to detect, track, and defend against any threats. The complexity of this task requires allied cooperation from innovation to leveraging strategic geography. Cross sector all domain awareness includes ideas such as higher levels of coordination with allies on investment screening to protect against predatory investments, and refinement of concerns regarding dual use research.

In 2024, Space Norway’s Arctic Satellite Broadband Mission (ASBM) launch marked the first time an ally’s space vehicle hosted an operational US military payload. This allowed us to more easily get a payload up

into space to fill a gap in “vital secure communication capabilities”^v for Arctic operations until a more advanced platform can come online in the 2030s. Norway, as Russia’s immediate coastal neighbor in the North, provides crucial intelligence on Russian submarine activity on the way towards the GIUK Gap.

There is no indication that Russia or China have the desire or intention to invade Greenland.^{vi} Greenland, as part of the Kingdom of Denmark, is a member of NATO so if they were attacked Article 5 would be triggered, and Allies would respond just as they unhesitatingly responded after 9/11 when the US activated Article 5.

As we approach the 25th anniversary of 9/11 it is important to recall that our alliance is tested and proven. Our own military describes Canada as “unsung heroes of 9/11”^{vii} because they accepted hundreds of international flights that could no longer enter US airspace, and even provided shelter for Americans in their homes. Denmark suffered the highest per capita rate of casualties among coalition forces because they would accept the most dangerous missions. Both Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark are exemplary allies.

The US does not need to acquire new territory in the Arctic in order to implement the golden dome or any type of highly coordinated continental defense architecture. Language from the U.S. indicating a desire to acquire an ally against their will-- such as the repeated statements about buying Greenland or making Canada the 51st state-- is counter-productive and harmful. Our allies view us as increasingly unreliable, unstable, and as a potential aggressor.

US language about the desire to acquire Greenland has also created an opportunity for China to assert itself as a responsible actor.^{viii} At Munich Security Conference this past February, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi pointedly stated, “China will be a reliable force for stability.”^{ix} Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pointed to the rationale given for a US acquisition of Greenland to justify the 2014 annexation of Crimea.^x Our competitors benefit when trust between America and her allies erodes, and it is damage not easily repaired.

The most prominent intergovernmental forum for Arctic regional cooperation is the Arctic Council, which the Kingdom of Denmark-- led by Greenland-- Chairs until May 2027. Although the Arctic Council excludes matters of military security, it serves our security interests as a stabilizing force within the region, as a unique forum for pursuing cooperation on areas of mutual interest, and as a significant demonstration of interagency leadership by US government representatives from the Department of State, the US Coast Guard, NOAA, and others. This is a critical forum for centering the eight Arctic States and the Permanent Participants as the primary decision-makers for the region, while allowing for common-sense cooperation and engagement with non-Arctic states that have interests and equities in the region.^{xi} Geopolitical and security dynamics can change but geography doesn’t, and the Arctic remains a region strongly characterized by transboundary challenges and transboundary opportunities.

THE GROWING PROMINENCE OF ACTORLESS THREATS

The growing risk of wildland fire in the Arctic puts our assets, personnel, and readiness at risk.

Permafrost underlies 15% of the Northern Hemisphere and increasingly is thawing. In a 2023 Report to Congress, Pituffik Space Base in Greenland was identified as having “moderate to considerable” levels of risk because it is entirely underlaid by permafrost.^{xii} The loss of land-fast ice exposes our coastal infrastructure to threats from storm surge and erosion. There is greater demand for our military to provide defense support for civil authorities.^{xiii} Growing powers such as India point to Arctic climate change as an acute security threat because of how it affects their monsoon precipitation and therefore their economic and food security.^{xiv} What happens in the Arctic doesn’t stay in the Arctic.

Our planet is composed of complex and highly interactive systems, so systems level analysis is necessary to understand the changes underway. I recommend referencing the Planetary Boundaries Framework^{xv} to understand the consequential *systems* at play, which demonstrate a need to break out of siloed thinking. This framework articulates 9 components of the Earth System that promote stability for life on Earth. 7 of the 9 components are in the red (unsafe) zone, and only one of these is climate change.

Robust international cooperation on scientific research and the incorporation of different types of knowledge systems are essential for understanding the changes underway, and the tools we have to mitigate risk.^{xvi} Underinvesting in data collection and scientific research threatens to create blindspots in our analysis, which needs to project forward since there is not historical analog for the conditions we encounter today.

The threat environment is becoming more complicated. There is an inclination to have tunnel vision and focus on the actor-based threats we are more accustomed to, but it is the duty of security professionals to appropriately account for all factors that bear upon the threat environment. *Especially* in the presence of significant global conflict— which only furthers the release of emissions and degrades the environment— this task become more essential. And the complexity of this task requires allied cooperation, where we can leverage each others strengths to more efficiently mitigate risk and develop solutions that benefit us all.

Thank you very much. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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