



TED STEVENS CENTER FOR ARCTIC SECURITY STUDIES SPECIAL REPORT

# What does Security Cooperation in the Arctic look like? The Case of the United States and Canada

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## Abstract

The Arctic is at an inflection point. Increased interest in natural resources and future commercial shipping lanes, climate change impacts, and geopolitical maneuvering are ushering in a new era of strategic competition between the United States, Russia, and China in the region. Security cooperation between the United States and its Allies and partners is vital to managing these challenges. This Special Report focuses on one aspect of Arctic security cooperation, i.e., that between the United States and Canada. The US-Canada relationship is considered unique in foreign policy and security circles in terms of both its depth and breadth (Friedman & Lefler, forthcoming). US defense arrangements with Canada are more extensive than with any other country. Hundreds of bilateral partnerships have been forged between Canadian and US armed forces, homeland security and border agencies, intelligence departments, and civilian emergency preparedness agencies. These countries, too, have common strategic interests, a joint military history, and geographic proximity. Although not aligned on every issue, these two countries also share fundamental values, principles, and a commitment to the rule of law.

*Key words:* Arctic security, security cooperation, partnerships

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## CANUS SECURITY COOPERATION

### What is Security Cooperation?

Security cooperation is a crucial aspect of international relations. For the United States, security cooperation is increasingly regarded as a tool of first resort in foreign policy (DSCA, 2021). According to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), security cooperation is “building the capacity of foreign partners in order to encourage and enable [A]llies and partners to respond to shared challenges” (DSCA, 2023[a]). The *2022 National Defense Strategy* also highlights the importance of security cooperation, stating, “[e]arly and continuous consideration, engagement, and, where possible, collaboration with Allies and partners in planning is essential for advancing our shared interests . . . the defense enterprise [should] incorporate Allies and partners at every stage of defense planning” (DoD, 2022, 14).

The underlying premise of security cooperation is that the United States is stronger by using security cooperation to obtain its strategic objectives. The overall goals of security cooperation are to create favorable military balances of power, advance areas of mutual defense or security arrangements, build allied military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and prevent crisis and conflict (Reveron, 2010). Security cooperation can take a number of forms, including formal alliances, multilateral coalitions, and military-to-military assistance, such as US forces providing training and equipment, military exercises, and exchanges to foreign partners (Dalton, 2016). It also includes institution building, advising, and planning (Dalton, 2016), as well as education programs (Reveron, 2010).

### US-Canada Security Cooperation in the Arctic

Myriad examples of US-Canada security cooperation exist related to the Arctic (Friedman & Lefler, forthcoming). This Special Report highlights several of the most relevant. Arguably the most significant example of security cooperation is the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Officially established on 12 September 1957 during the initial stages of the Cold War, NORAD embodies the long-standing shared commitment of the United States and Canada to protect respective aerospace domains and maritime approaches to US and Canadian sovereign territory. As the only binational military command in the world, NORAD is unique in defense circles.

NORAD has always been associated with defending the Arctic (Charron, 2020). The importance of the Arctic to NORAD is evident in its latest strategy released in 2021, which has an Arctic component and highlights the changing strategic environment in the region. Noting that both Russia and China are increasing their activity in the Arctic, the unclassified strategy identifies the Arctic as an example of a “changing physical and strategic environment” and is a “zone of international competition” (NORAD/USNORTHCOM, 2021, 5). The dominant military threat in the Arctic is Russia’s nuclear capabilities, i.e., advanced, long-range cruise missiles capable of flying through the Arctic to strike targets in the United States and Canada (NORAD/USNORTHCOM, 2021, 5). The strategy specifically points to developing and strengthening key partnerships, including Indigenous peoples, to defend North America (NORAD/USNORTHCOM, 2021, 12). Another key component to strengthening North American defense is upgrading the North Warning System, a series of unmanned, long- and short-radars in support of air defense that are situated the North American Arctic and Greenland.

In addition to elevating the Arctic in its strategy, NORAD also demonstrates a commitment to integrated operations. The United States and Canada routinely participate in Arctic joint exercises, including Vigilant Shield; Arctic Edge; the Arctic Collaborative Workshop; and Operation Noble Defender. These exercises collectively demonstrate the air-land-sea capabilities of NORAD/USNORTHCOM necessary for a holistic defense of North America against threats from adversaries.



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Other institutionalized aspects of the security cooperation relationship include the Permanent Joint Board on Defense (PJBD), established in 1940 by a joint declaration between the US president and the Canadian prime minister to support binational defense cooperation. The PJBD provides policy-level consultation on bilateral North American defense matters and is led jointly by cochairs designated by the president and prime minister. There also is the Canada-US Military Cooperation Committee (MCC). The MCC meets biannually and serves as the principal strategic connection between the Canadian and US joint military staffs and reports to the PJBD. Last, the Tri Command, i.e., NORAD plus USNORTHCOM and Canadian Joint Operations Command, is charged with ensuring that North America is safe and secure with air and ground missions that balance each other. The Tri-Command meets annually to discuss operations, exercises, and plans.

DSCA provides a number of formalized security cooperation partnerships and programs, the most relevant of which to the US-Canada relationship is arms sales. The United States supplies weapons, systems, and training to Canada on a regular basis. Most recently, proposed foreign military sales to Canada related to the Arctic include munitions and other systems to be integrated into the MQ-9Bs at an estimated cost of over \$300 million (DSCA, 2023[b]). The proposed sale will improve Canada's capability to meet current and future threats by enabling unmanned surveillance and reconnaissance patrols of its northern Arctic territories, as well as enable Canada to optimally fulfill its NORAD mission (DSCA, 2023[b]).

In addition to weapon sales, DSCA also offers "soft power" tools (Nye, 2005). It established the Defense Security Cooperation University (DSCU) in 2019 to serve as the Center of Excellence for the Department of Defense (DoD) for security cooperation education, training, development, research, and institutional capacity building. Its vision is to be universally recognized as the leading academic institution for security cooperation knowledge and practice (DSCU, 2023). In addition to education, DSCU supports the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy by managing executive agency oversight for DoD's six regional centers for security studies that are charged with building strong, sustainable international networks of security leaders. These centers are international venues for bilateral and multilateral research, communication, exchange of ideas, and training involving the United States and foreign military, civilian, and non-governmental participants (DSCA, 2023[c]). In addition, executive-level education and professional development programs and resources, including strategic and security studies, research and publications, and outreach programs, are offered.

The goals of these centers are to foster long-term collaborative relationships, develop and sustain relationships and communities of interest among security practitioners and national security establishments throughout respective regions, and enhance partnerships worldwide. The audience of these programs includes senior military and civilian policymakers, but also targets practitioners and stakeholders outside of the usual government defense and security institutions. For example, participants come from foreign ministries, including foreign affairs, justice, law enforcement, parliamentarians, and non-governmental and international organizations (DSCA, 2023[d]). In terms of demographic diversity, approximately 30 percent of regional center participants are women (DSCA, 2023[d]).

To demonstrate its commitment to the Arctic, DoD established the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) on 9 June 2021 as the sixth DoD regional center to serve as an instrument of policy and security cooperation. TSC is viewed as a soft power complement to DoD's hard power investments in and across the Arctic region, located near the Arctic at 61+ degrees north. Aligned to USNORTHCOM, the vision of TSC is to advance a network of civilian and military practitioners by promoting understanding and providing collaborative security solutions for the Arctic region. Its mission is to build strong, sustainable, domestic and international networks of security leaders and to promote and conduct research focused on Arctic security to advance DoD security priorities in the region (TSC, 2023).



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TSC promotes its mission through three pillars: 1) research and analysis; 2) executive education; and 3) engagement and outreach. Specifically, TSC aims to 1) advance Arctic awareness, both among partners and within the increasingly professionalized field of US Arctic service; 2) advance DoD Arctic priorities; 3) reinforce the rules-based order in the Arctic; and 4) address the impacts of climate change in keeping with the priorities of the 2022 *National Security Strategy*; 2022 *National Defense Strategy*; and 2022 *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*. The value proposition is that, through delivering education, analysis, and symposia, TSC will prepare security professionals, propose valuable solutions, and strengthen networks to ensure a stable, rules-based order in the Arctic that will benefit all Arctic nations.

### Insights

Recalibrating the US approach in the Arctic will include reinvigorating and strengthening its network of Allies and partners, including Canada, to manage challenges. Both hard security cooperation tools, such as NORAD, the PJBD, MCC, the Tri Command, and arms sales, as well as soft power tools such as TSC hold significant promise for security cooperation in the Arctic. Several questions are worth asking: How can the United States strengthen security cooperation with Canada to face these challenges? How can the United States and Canada engage more meaningfully to increase cooperation around mutual security interests? How can the United States and Canada leverage security cooperation tools such as NORAD and TSC to address the rising ambitions of Russia and China in the Arctic? How can hard and soft tools be deployed in the Arctic to maximize bilateral objectives in the defense and climate security realms?

Answering these questions fully is beyond the scope of this Special Report. Yet three thoughts come to mind. First, some have suggested that NORAD modernization should include a new US-Canada “black plan” that considers a multi-domain, traditional and nontraditional attack on North America (Charron & Fergusson, 2022, 13). This would be developed and exercised at the strategic level, with focus on institutional seams and gaps. Also, given that our competitors view the world through a global, rather than regional lens, consideration could be given to NORAD working in concert with other US combatant commands and NATO to defend North America (Charron & Fergusson, 2022, 13).

Second, TSC, as a projection of smart power (Nye, 2005), could serve as an Arctic Secretariat to the PJBD and the MCC, thus enhancing US-Canadian security cooperation. It could provide a dedicated staff of professionals who will be “rightly networked” across the United States and Canadian security and defense professional communities to support intercessional studies and analyses important to both PJBD and MCC (Kee, 2022). TSC also could serve as a convening body to support PJBD and MCC that connects other Arctic security and defense centers such as the Polar and Canada Institutes at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; the US Coast Guard Academy Center of Arctic Studies and Policy; the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Center for Arctic Security and Resilience; the University of Idaho Center of Resilient Communities; and the North American and Arctic Defense and Security Network at Trent University, Canada (Kee, 2022).

Third, officials could consider rethinking security cooperation to encompass more than traditional defense matters, particularly in the Arctic. National strategies point to the climate, human, health, and environmental security concerns that are pressing in the region and requiring attention. Coordinating with our Allies and partners, especially Canada, on security cooperation broadly defined may be worth exploring.

### Conclusion

More work remains to be done to recalibrate US-Canadian security cooperation – as well as broader security cooperation between the US and other Arctic Allies and partners – to address the rising ambitions of both Russia and China in the region. Nonetheless, the proposals in the Special Report represent a first



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step toward strengthen security cooperation in the Arctic so that it is well-managed for generations to come.

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