

THE WATCH



ENDURING PARTNERSHIPS

v6

BERMUDA
RBR COMMANDER SIMONS INTERVIEW

NORDIC VISION 2030
NATO PARTNERS COOPERATE ON DEFENSE

MEXICO
MARINA'S OPERATION FENIX

THE WATCH // ENDURING PARTNERSHIPS



USNORTHCOM's regional security cooperation relationships remain a critical element of the command's mission. USNORTHCOM's military partnerships with Canada, Mexico and The Bahamas enhance our own homeland defense while building the capacity of those partners to operate and communicate with U.S. forces. Those relationships are vital to countering competitor influence and presence in the Western Hemisphere while improving intelligence sharing, border security and domain awareness."

GEN. GREGORY M. GUILLOT

Commander, U.S. Northern Command
and North American Aerospace Defense Command

v6

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ABOUT THE COVER

The shield illustration depicts the protective layer of homeland defense forged through enduring partnerships among Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States.

DEAR READERS:

Welcome to The Watch, Volume 6, “Enduring Partnerships.” The United States military has built strong and enduring partnerships with our allies and partners in the Arctic, Canada, the Caribbean and Mexico, in support of homeland defense. The goal of The Watch is to strengthen U.S. security partnerships and provide an international forum to address global homeland defense issues. The publication is produced for our allies and partners, including senior foreign military leaders, high-ranking government officials and academic professionals.

Homeland defense is a global endeavor. Allies and trusted partners are integral to U.S. defense efforts. Since its founding on April 25, 2002, U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) has strengthened its alliance with Canada, which is our most important ally and defense partner. The command also has cultivated trusted and enduring defense and security partnerships with The Bahamas, the British Overseas Territories of Bermuda and the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Mexico. These partnerships are built on a foundation of trust and mutual respect for sovereignty while working together to counter common threats and support the defense of North America.

The Watch V6 begins with an interview with Lt. Col. Duncan E.R. Simons, commanding officer of the Royal Bermuda Regiment, which is one of our trusted and enduring partners. This volume is divided into three thematic sections.

Section 1 focuses on *Mutually Beneficial Trusted Partnerships*. It begins with an article on the Mexico-U.S. military relationship. This is followed by articles on the enduring Caribbean-U.S. partnership and the Royal Bermuda Regiment. The section concludes with articles on plans for a Golden Dome for America missile defense project, Canada’s Arctic foreign policy, the leveraging of Canada’s Arctic capabilities, a new vision for Nordic defense cooperation and the enduring partnership between Sweden and the U.S.

Section 2 – *Regional Cooperation* – starts by highlighting the North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSI) exercises for Canada, Mexico and the United States. It is followed by articles from the U.S. Department of Defense Regional Centers: The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies and the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. This section concludes with an article from the Canadian Coast Guard.

Section 3 – *U.S. Shares Military Capabilities* – begins by highlighting the commitment of the U.S. military to Arctic campaigning. It illustrates real-world Arctic operations, including Global Guardian, Polar Dagger and Nanook-Nunalivut. The section continues by featuring the greater operational capability of the Armed Forces of Mexico and the U.S. as defense partners with articles on exercises Amalgam Eagle, Fenix and Fuerzas Amigas. The issue concludes with an article on Mexico’s development of a cyber force and the incorporation of artificial intelligence in military operations.

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Thank you for your support and partnership.

Regards,

Robert D. Davis

Major General, USAF

Director of Operations, NCJ3

USNORTHCOM



THE WATCH

Homeland Defense

Volume 6 2025

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The Watch is a professional military journal published by United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) for foreign partners and allies to include senior military leaders, government officials and academic professionals. The goal of the publication and website is to strengthen U.S. security partnerships and provide an international forum to address global homeland defense issues and challenges.

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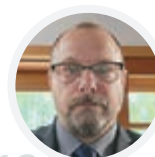
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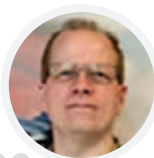
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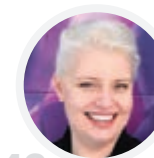
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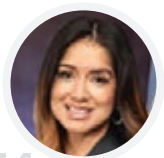
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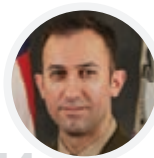
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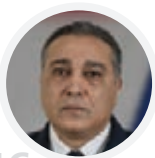
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MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TRUSTED PARTNERSHIPS



THE WATCH INTERVIEW

Lt. Col. Duncan
E.R. Simons,
Royal Bermuda
Regiment

THE WATCH STAFF

The Royal Bermuda Regiment (RBR) provides homeland defense for the British Overseas Territory (BOT) of Bermuda. The 300-person unit of mostly reserve Soldiers plays a critical role in defending the island's territorial waters and assisting civil authorities during natural disasters, including hurricanes. The Watch interviewed the regiment's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Duncan E.R. Simons, about the regiment's goals and ambitions.

THE WATCH: As the 18th commanding officer of the RBR, what is your vision for the service?

SIMONS: The RBR must be the most attractive service in Bermuda. Our community engagement and conditions of service must attract diverse talent. We must then invest in our people, so that we can deliver a professional service, enabling our response to threats and challenges in a flexible and adaptive manner to ensure Bermuda's resilience and the safety of our people.

THE WATCH: As the new commanding officer, how will you change the implementation of the RBR core missions of maritime assistance, force protection, humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HADR), ceremonial duties, international assistance and enhancing Bermudian society?

SIMONS: Our missions and roles are currently under review. For a small unit of 300 that is mostly comprised of reserve Soldiers, we have a broad set of tasks. We will likely see a shift in priorities that will include continued

growth of our maritime capability, the maintenance of our HADR capability, a greater focus on community engagement, maintaining our ceremonial role, and finally continuing our regional engagement with the other BOT regiments and participating in engagements like exercise Tradewinds, where we have delivered public order training across the Caribbean region.

THE WATCH: What led you to join the RBR at age 19 in 1999?

SIMONS: Simply put, I was conscripted. I didn't have much of a choice in the matter, although I could have deferred because I was in college. Once I got here, I took the view that I would make the most of the experience, so I joined the Junior Non-Commissioned Officers Cadre and was then selected for commissioning the next year.

THE WATCH: What are the biggest threats affecting Bermuda today, and how is the RBR countering these threats?

SIMONS: Given our location in the middle of the North Atlantic, the most likely threat is that of a major hurricane. We train to support recovery operations, be it clearing roads, shoring buildings, supporting the health department or even clearing the airport runway of debris. Essentially, we accelerate the island's recovery. Our Coast Guard unit has responsibility for search and rescue and border protection on the water. Countering the importation of narcotics on the water falls to the Coast Guard. We work with our maritime control center, customs,



Lt. Col. Duncan
E.R. Simons

“As a highly developed island of 20 square miles, we are severely constrained with respect to our training areas, so opportunities to train at USMC Base Camp Lejeune and similar places are important.”

— Lt. Col. Duncan E.R. Simons

police and immigration to interdict suspicious vessels. In 2023, we successfully intercepted a vessel carrying over \$20 million worth of drugs onto the island.

THE WATCH: *The RBR is mandated to assist civil authorities in the event of a major disaster (either natural or human-made). How does the regiment support the government of Bermuda Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) to protect and preserve the community and its property prior to, during and after disasters?*

SIMONS: The EMO is a body stood up to coordinate a cross-government response to disasters, routinely for hurricanes, but it also coordinated the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With respect to hurricanes, we are generally well prepared; the island has robust building codes, and it is not prone to flooding. As a regiment, we organize into five or six platoon-strength Immediate Response Teams, which will all have chainsaw operators, medics, signalers, people with experience in construction. Some will have a boat and boat operators. These units mobilize ahead of a storm and deploy across the island with the initial task of clearing the island’s main roads to allow for emergency vehicle movement, and then they are retasked as necessary — addressing any risk to life or aiding in the reopening of the airport. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we enforced curfews and supported testing and vaccination centers.

THE WATCH: *In 2020, the Defence (Coast Guard Unit) Amendment Act 2018 established the RBR Coast Guard as a marine force for the protection and security of Bermuda’s territorial waters. What recommendations can be implemented to increase the RBR Coast Guard’s capabilities and presence in Bermuda’s coastal waters?*

SIMONS: Our Coast Guard unit’s area of responsibility is limited to our territorial waters (12 nautical miles), and we operate with a handful of vessels and 15 full-time staff supplemented by 22 reserve Soldiers with a mandate of providing 24-hour search and rescue capability. Our long-term strategy to increase RBR Coast Guard capabilities and presence includes increasing our full-time

complement; this is particularly important as it would improve the training and development of our personnel and would facilitate succession planning. Establishing a satellite Coast Guard station on St. David’s Island would decrease response times at the east end of Bermuda by an hour. Finally, modernizing our fleet by acquiring Secure All-around Flotation Equipped (SAFE) Boats would increase our capability with respect to the conditions we can operate in, and would improve the working conditions of our staff. We continue to work with the Ministry of National Security to advance these efforts, and I believe that in time they will improve the service we deliver.

THE WATCH: *In April 2024, 100 members of the RBR participated in a two-week urban operations exercise called Island Warrior 24 at U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. What are the advantages of the RBR participating with the United Kingdom and the United States in an overseas training exercise with other BOT regiments from the Caicos Islands, Cayman Islands, Falklands and Turks and Caicos Islands?*

SIMONS: As a highly developed island of 20 square miles, we are severely constrained with respect to our training areas, so opportunities to train at USMC Base Camp Lejeune and similar places are important. Since the formation of both the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands regiments, we have worked to support their startup, facilitating recruit training in Bermuda, sending trainers south to support ranges, and inviting them on our annual camps. As small territorial regiments, we are all challenged regarding resources and scale, so it makes sense to combine efforts where we can.

THE WATCH: *One of the biggest challenges facing the RBR today is recruitment. What are some innovative recruitment strategies that the RBR can implement? How can the RBR Junior Leaders program assist in this effort by providing education, skills and training to young people in Bermuda?*

SIMONS: Since the effective end of conscription in 2016 (it was formally removed from legislation in 2018), we have had annual intakes of 30-60 recruits a year, down



Royal Bermuda Regiment Soldiers attack the obstacle course during Exercise Island Warrior. CPL. CHRISTIAN AYERS/U.S. MARINE CORPS

Then-Gov. Rena Lalgie of Bermuda addresses participants of exercise Tradewinds 23 at Camp Seweyo, Guyana.

SPC. JOSHUA TAECKENS/U.S. ARMY SOUTH

from 150 per year during conscription. The good news is that our rates of retention are very high. We have introduced a second annual intake, made our fitness program available to potential recruits who need to improve, and introduced a military preparation course to engage Soldiers before they complete recruit training. We have also been able to attract women and expatriate residents, who now make up a significant portion of the unit. Our long-term recruiting strategy is to engage with young people. Bermuda has a long tradition of school-based cadet programs. Our intent is to build on our existing Junior Leaders program and deliver it across Bermuda's schools. Similarly, our band has been engaging actively across Bermuda's schools and we will soon have a Junior Leaders Band. Finally, the regiment is a sponsor of Outward Bound Bermuda, and we will redouble our investment in that program this year.

THE WATCH: How is the RBR cooperating with other BOT regiments/defense forces to support HADR efforts in the Caribbean region?

SIMONS: The BOT regiment commanding officers meet every year to work to address common challenges. Our cooperation and support have mostly been around facilitating training and development, and sharing best practices, be it around recruiting or sharing how we operate in various situations.

THE WATCH: How can the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence (MOD-U.K.) and U.S. Department of Defense better support the RBR to accomplish its vision and missions?



SIMONS: For Bermuda and the other Overseas Territories, the United Kingdom (U.K.) holds responsibility for defense. This responsibility in the first instance lies with the governor and is funded by the government of Bermuda. The regiment draws almost all its doctrine and practice from the British Army. Until the mid-2010s, we benefited from the British Army Loan Service Program, our Soldiers and officers continue to attend U.K. courses, and the RBR is listed on the British Army Order of Precedence. At the same time, formal connections with the MOD-U.K. are limited, and we are not part of the British Army. There are efforts ongoing to establish more formal agreements with the MOD-U.K. to strengthen the relationship for mutual benefit. Given the long-standing U.S. military presence in Bermuda from the early 1940s through the mid-1990s, and given Bermuda's strategic location, the regiment has benefited from engagement with the U.S. since its inception. We have supported U.S. forces while they have been in Bermuda, participated in training and ship rides with the U.S. Coast Guard, and have trained on U.S. bases for many years. Continued U.S. support around training and engagement, Coast Guard operations, and procurement, sensitive to our small size and mostly reserve makeup, can be a force multiplier and will continue to be welcomed. ■



PARTNERS OF CHOICE

Mexico and U.S. military cooperation

INIGO GUEVARA MOYANO/JANES STRATEGIC SERVICES

The military relationship between Mexico and the United States continues to strengthen. Mexico's Secretariat of National Defense (DEFENSA), Secretariat of the Navy (MARINA), and the United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) are continuing to engage in dialogue and joint exercises, enhancing collaboration toward a mutual strategic vision. Originating from the Bilateral Military Cooperation Roundtable, these bilateral institutions are shaping a unified approach to North American security across short-, medium- and long-term time frames.

The recent structural changes within Mexico's defense and security apparatus will help clarify and bolster cooperation with the U.S. The reorganization of the National Guard under DEFENSA, alongside

the Mexican Army and Air Force, has clarified each service's roles and missions.

The Navy's restructuring is set to enhance its global presence, leading to a deepening military collaboration with the U.S. In early 2024, MARINA began an analysis to incorporate the essential concepts, terms and vocabulary required for effective communication within the NATO framework. This signifies a pivotal shift toward aligning linguistic practices and facilitating better interaction without implying intention or membership in NATO. It harmonizes communication

Marines from Mexico disembark a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter in Trinidad and Tobago during the Tradewinds exercise in April 2025. LANCE CPL. PAYTON GOODRICH/U.S. MARINE CORPS







Marines from Mexico and the U.S. launch a rubber raiding craft from the well deck of the ARM Usumacinta during Operation Fenix 2023.

CPL. WILLOW MARSHALL/
U.S. MARINE CORPS



practices to enhance collaboration and understanding within the international defense community.

MARINA has announced its intention to restore a blue-water capability, which will help separate its external defense from its Coast Guard functions. In both cases, this is likely to lead to continued close cooperation with U.S. Navy and Coast Guard forces.

Over the past decade, both countries' militaries have actively engaged in a series of confidence-building mechanisms. Regular meetings involving secretaries, general staff and border commanders have been instrumental in establishing mutual trust and fostering a cohesive institutional structure. This concerted effort aims to lay the foundation for a common strategic outlook and enhanced cooperation.

In growing operational sophistication, joint exercises have expanded. Examples include:

- **Fuerzas Amigas:** 220 U.S. Soldiers and 300 Mexican Soldiers synchronized a joint response to a hypothetical natural disaster on the border.
- **Amalgam Eagle:** Air Forces collaborated in an air interception exercise.
- **Joint Specialized Exercise:** A seven-week exercise with binational company-level airborne forces at the National Training Center in Santa Gertrudis, Chihuahua. This exercise reciprocated the annual rotating exercise of the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Cristobal Deanosegura calls out directions to Mexican Naval Infantry Corps Marines during urban terrain training at Marine Corps Base Hawaii as part of the Rim of the Pacific 2024 exercise. CPL. AIDAN HEKKER/U.S. MARINE CORPS

These joint exercises showcase the growing dimension and operational coordination between the military forces. Reciprocal airborne exercises are scheduled to grow from company- to battalion-level exercises in 2025, signaling an increase in the relationship from small- to medium-size joint forces. Exercises lead to more effective operations, such as the North American Maritime Security Initiative, a joint Royal Canadian Navy, Mexican Navy, and U.S. Coast Guard and Navy trilateral maritime exercise aimed at deterring organized crime at sea.

Beyond exercises, what is important is that neighbors are there for each other when it matters. In mid-January 2025, as the California wildfires raged, Mexican military units along with other Mexican federal agencies were deployed on Mexican Air Force C-27J Spartan and C-130 Hercules transport aircraft and helped firefighting and search and rescue operations. In an era of complex challenges, the Mexico-U.S. military relationship appears to be a solid bridge for serious, discreet and stabilizing understanding. ■



ENDURING CARIBBEAN-U.S. ALLIANCE

**Fourth Island
Chain is Vital
to Homeland
Defense**

HARVEY A. SCHOONOVER/U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND

During the early days of the Cold War, former U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles conceptualized the Island Chain Strategy as a maritime containment effort to curtail the influence and spread of communism in the Pacific. This concept was part of Dulles' overarching foreign policy goal of developing international security arrangements to contain the growing global communist threat.

The primary emphasis of this strategy was securing important archipelagos along different maritime routes and preventing expansion and power projection from competitors. Since the end of the Cold War, the Island Chain Strategy has taken prominence in U.S. and Chinese military planning. However, the application of this concept solely focuses on the Pacific.

Despite its origin and distinct impression on contemporary U.S. strategic thinking in the Indo-Pacific

region, the Island Chain Strategy can be applied to other regions that have a direct and measured impact on U.S. homeland defense. Application to the Caribbean not only highlights the importance this area has on U.S. global strategic competition efforts, but it also shows how the enduring partnership between Caribbean nations and the U.S. is beneficial for the safety and security of this underestimated region of the Americas, for the U.S. homeland and for the rules-based international system.

ISLAND CHAIN STRATEGY

The Island Chain Strategy seeks to establish a series of defensive lines formed by groups of islands that serve as both physical and geopolitical barriers to limit adversarial access to critical maritime zones. These islands often are situated along essential trade routes, near the



Caribbean and U.S. defense leaders are photographed at the 2024 Caribbean Nations Security Conference in Trinidad and Tobago. U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND

approaches to a major power's territory or along strategic lines of communication.

The core element of this strategic thought is establishing a military forward presence that allows a state to control strategic choke points and project power to deter aggression and counter threats. It is important to note that the successful application of this concept doesn't solely rely on military presence. Maintaining and reinforcing relationships with partners and allies also is critical for achieving success. Through partnership, cooperation bonds are formed, interoperability is achieved and a credible presence is maintained.

There are three established lines of defense within U.S. interpretation. The first defensive line is from the Kurils to the Japanese home islands, the Ryukyus to Taiwan, the Philippines and down to Indonesia. The second line goes from Japan through the Marianas to Micronesia. The third line is concentrated in and around Hawaii. Contemporary planners have suggested adding fourth and fifth defensive lines centered in the Indian Ocean and potentially out to China's base in Djibouti to counter the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) developing maritime strategy. However, when taking a holistic view, other regions may have a direct, demonstrable impact on U.S. homeland defense. One such region is the Caribbean.

CARIBBEAN SECURITY AND U.S. HOMELAND DEFENSE

Caribbean security has a direct link to U.S. security. Based on its geostrategic location, besides the land borders shared by the U.S. with Canada and Mexico, the Caribbean provides direct access to the U.S. The region is home to key maritime trading routes, and the Caribbean Sea serves as a gateway to the Atlantic and the Gulf of America.

The region is also a major transit point for narcotics and other illicit commodities going north to the U.S. and east to Africa and Europe. Additionally, the Caribbean also has a growing presence of U.S. strategic competitors. Both the CCP and Russia have increased their influence throughout the region in the form of predatory economic initiatives, dual-use infrastructure projects and increased malign military/intelligence cooperation. The presence of these strategic competitors contests U.S. freedom of maneuver and applies pressure to the U.S. southern flank. Finally, the Caribbean is a primary source of both legal and illegal migration, and it serves as a point of origin for oil and natural gas shipments, which impact the energy security of the U.S. In the absence of any attention to the Caribbean, regional stability can be threatened, jeopardizing key U.S. defense objectives.

ENDURING PARTNERSHIP-NEXT STEP

The Caribbean-U.S. partnership is historical, has deep roots based on shared experiences, and is enabled by the close cultural ties between the geographic neighbors. Both U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM)



Special operations forces from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago aboard a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter conduct a simulated air assault during exercise Tradewinds 25. U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD



Brig. Carlos Lovell, chief of staff of the Barbados Defence Force, interacts with a local child during the opening day of the Tradewinds 24 military exercise. PVT. ROLAN HOLDER/BARBADOS DEFENCE FORCE

and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) conduct a wide range of annual operations, activities, investments and exercises with Caribbean partners. Examples of these activities include USSOUTHCOM's Caribbean exercise Tradewinds, the Caribbean Nations Security Conference, the Lesser Antilles Medical Assistance Team and USNORTHCOM's security cooperation efforts with The Bahamas, such as the maritime surveillance system radar sites. As a formidable next step, not only should key yearly activities and events occur, but also the Caribbean should be included within the U.S. island chain strategic narrative. By achieving this, the U.S. and its allies can continue building relationships with trusted partners and ensure this enduring partnership supports not only regional collective defense but also contributes to international security. ▣



OPERATIONAL READINESS

RBR Conducting Advanced International Training with the U.K. and the U.S.

LT. LEEANN M. TUCKER/ROYAL BERMUDA REGIMENT

The Royal Bermuda Regiment (RBR) plays a pivotal role in maintaining public order and contributing to regional security. Mandated to provide a limited public order capability in support of the Bermuda Police Service (BPS), the RBR has invested significantly in training and international partnerships to enhance its operational readiness and effectiveness.

The regiment's work includes the delivery of in-demand training overseas, which provides greater experience for RBR instructors and helps develop a unified approach to public order tactics throughout the Caribbean region.

TRAINING FOR PUBLIC ORDER OPERATIONS

To ensure that RBR Soldiers are prepared for any civil unrest in Bermuda, the RBR selects and sends potential instructors to Great Britain for specialized training with the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom. This course is delivered by the Mission Ready Training Centre based at Basingbourn Barracks in Cambridgeshire. The program is meticulously designed to train and qualify exercise-conducting officers, safety supervisors and instructors. These qualifications empower units within the RBR to plan training sessions, conduct assessments and deliver realistic and demanding exercises autonomously.

Soldiers in the wider battalion first encounter public order training during their recruit camp continuation training. This foundational phase allows instructors to impart basic lessons and assess recruits before they join their respective companies. By standardizing this training, the RBR alleviates the burden on individual companies and ensures a consistent level of preparedness across the regiment.



A member of the Royal Bermuda Regiment provides security while engaging in urban terrain operations as part of Exercise Island Warrior at the USMC Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

LANCE CPL. TREY MICHAEL/U.S. MARINE CORPS

Officers are mandated to conduct public order training annually to fulfill their missions and tasks as directed by the commanding officer. While most companies deliver this training internally using a pool of qualified instructors, larger training sessions or exercises may require additional instructors and safety staff from the wider regiment. In the past, the RBR has conducted joint public order training with the BPS to assess and enhance interoperability, tactics, techniques and procedures.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS AND GROWTH

The RBR's public order engagement extends beyond Bermuda's shores, primarily under the umbrella of



Members of the RBR train to extinguish petroleum bombs during a November 2024 exercise.

ROYAL BERMUDA REGIMENT

exercise Tradewinds. This multinational exercise focuses on ground, maritime, law enforcement, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response training, supported by U.S. Southern Command

(USSOUTHCOM) and its partners. Through exercise Tradewinds, the RBR has conducted public order training in Barbados, Belize, Guyana (twice) and St. Vincent. These engagements have been instrumental in honing skills and broadening operational perspectives.

The RBR also has collaborated closely with the Regional Security System (RSS) in Barbados to support its initiative to train, qualify and standardize public order training across all eight member states. In February 2022, the regiment delivered the basic public order instructors course, enabling the RSS to select and develop its own instructors for subsequent courses. As the RSS expanded its public order capability, a senior military instructor led further training to prepare an all-RSS training team for delivering the public order training during exercise Tradewinds 24 in Barbados. This collaboration was a significant achievement for both the RSS and the RBR, resulting in the RSS enhancing its capabilities with personal protective equipment, new public order policies and access to a pool of experienced instructors.

MUTUAL BENEFITS AND ENHANCED CAPABILITIES

These international engagements offer mutual benefits. For the RBR, instructors gain experience in planning, coordinating and deploying overseas to deliver capabilities to the wider Caribbean region. The training track has evolved into one of the most requested courses, receiving

commendations from students, USSOUTHCOM and the broader audience. Individually, instructors become better professionals, enriched by the experience of traveling and interacting with other forces in the region.

PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHEN DEFENSE

The RBR recognizes the crucial role that partnerships play in bolstering homeland defense and hemispheric security. The RBR's contributions are aligned with supporting the U.S. and its allies in their commitment to regional cooperation and collective security efforts to counter common threats. By leveraging the superior capabilities of the U.S. and its allies, the RBR shares in the wealth of knowledge, resources and best practices. These partnerships allow the regiment to enhance its capabilities while contributing to the collective security of the region. Trusted collaborations enable the regiment to address shared challenges more effectively, ensuring stability and peace within the hemisphere.

The RBR's dedication to rigorous training and international cooperation underscores its commitment to excellence in public order operations and regional security. Through specialized training programs, joint exercises and strategic partnerships, it continues to enhance readiness and contribute meaningfully to collective defense efforts. The regiment's engagements not only strengthen operational capabilities but also foster relationships that are essential for addressing the complex security challenges of today's world.

By embracing these opportunities, the RBR stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and the importance of preparedness in maintaining peace and security, both at home and throughout the region. ■



THE GOLDEN DOME AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NORTH

DRS. TROY BOUFFARD, P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER AND ANDREA CHARRON

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order (EO) on January 27, 2025, directing the U.S. Department of Defense to build an “Iron Dome for America,” which is shorthand for a next-generation missile defense shield for the United States (and since rebranded as the Golden Dome for America). “Over the past 40 years, rather than lessening, the threat from next-generation strategic weapons has become more intense and complex with the development by peer and near-peer adversaries of next-generation delivery systems and their own homeland integrated air and missile defense capabilities,” the EO noted. Although skeptics have questioned the cost and technological feasibility of a Golden Dome, the need to defend North America against ballistic, hypersonic, advanced cruise missiles and other next-generation aerial attacks from peer, near-peer and rogue adversaries is now a U.S. priority.

Many will think of Israel’s 10 Iron Dome batteries, which can cover about 150 kilometers, to guard against missiles launched from relatively short ranges. Israel also has other systems, including David’s Sling, Arrow System and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), which together protect 9.4 million people and about 22,000 square kilometers of land. A Golden

Dome for the U.S. will be on a scale, size and level of complexity to deal with the myriad missile threats (and their trajectories, flight paths and delivery systems) that will stretch the capabilities of engineers, scientists and the military. The system could cover North America, including Canada, the Arctic and

A Golden Dome for the U.S. will be on a scale, size and level of complexity to deal with the myriad missile threats (and their trajectories, flight paths and delivery systems) that will stretch the capabilities of engineers, scientists and the military.

Alaska, protecting more than 380 million people and 19 million square kilometers. However, for this current iteration of the EO, the Golden Dome will likely concentrate on the U.S.; the EO is clear that it is the Golden Dome for America. The technical necessity for comprehensive space-based architecture and additional costs for systems to cover the entire

continent of North America is beyond the current defense directive. The EO hints, however, at a role for allies and partners, noting, “Increase[d] bilateral and multilateral cooperation on missile defense technology development, capabilities, and operations” is required. Canada and other allies will have important parts to play.

Retired U.S. Adm. James Stavridis, the former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, recently outlined the three elements of a successful Golden Dome for America: space-based sensors and interceptors; artificial intelligence to fuse and analyze information; and the ability to design, build and implement a new method of destroying incoming missiles, including with lasers.

The clarion call to protect North America has been made by successive commanders of the U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The goal of militaries is to have all-domain awareness and defense of North America, informed by sensors from seabed

to outer space, that support deterrence by denial. Deterrence by denial aims to change the calculus of adversaries by permitting North America to see as far away as possible, in time and space, to give the commander information dominance and decision superiority. In other words, if North America can

The Golden Dome for America could fundamentally reshape how the U.S. thinks about defense and redefine integrated air and missile defense systems.

detect potential threats earlier, governments have more options to respond, especially options that do not involve force. The Golden Dome for America could fundamentally reshape how the U.S. thinks about defense and redefine integrated air and missile defense systems. But answers about what to defend and from what need to come first.

The Golden Dome for America is likely to feature missile defense systems in many domains.

DARRELL AMES/PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICE MISSILES AND SPACE



An Iron Dome Missile Defense System-Army battery is shown here in 2021. The project has been renamed the Golden Dome for America.

DAVID HUSKEY/PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICE MISSILES AND SPACE



The costs, logistics and engineering need to be tackled. Rather than one system to cover all of North America, it is more likely to be many systems in many domains to deal with different missile threats that protect the continental U.S. at the early stages and expand from there with individual, likely ground-based and aerial systems for Canada and Alaska.

Missile defense and modernizing early warning systems in the North American Arctic are complicated by the lack of persistent satellite communications capabilities above 60 degrees latitude. Today's effective missile defense systems are information-intensive, and future versions will be more so. One reason the F-35 is so hotly anticipated in Canada is because it is a data and information vacuum, but managing such information flows requires new communications capabilities. Technical issues posed by the Arctic location include frequent low cloud cover, aurora effects, maintaining a stable power supply, thermal management for optics, ice formation, protecting sensitive optical components and complex atmospheric turbulence, among others.

Adequate supply chains and industry capacity are other challenges.

Strategically, the Arctic is a critical portion of the future Golden Dome, especially for cruise missiles, given that the shortest avenue of approach for many adversaries' delivery systems is over the Arctic.

Strategically, the Arctic is a critical portion of the future Golden Dome, especially for cruise missiles, given that the shortest avenue of approach for many adversaries' delivery systems is over the Arctic.

Analysts have wrestled with missile defense for decades, including the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, U.S. Strategic Command, USNORTHCOM, NORAD, U.S. Space Force (and component commands), and Defence Research Development, Canada's missile defense research programs.



The U.S. Army demonstrates an Iron Dome Missile Defense System-Army battery at White Sands Missile Range in June 2021.

DARRELL AMES/PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICE MISSILES AND SPACE



The U.S. Army sets up what was then called the Iron Dome missile defense system in New Mexico in 2021.

DARRELL AMES/PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICE MISSILES AND SPACE

Canada shares these concerns and has committed to help address them through modernization programs at the long-standing binational command NORAD. This includes promises to enhance Canada's military footprint in the northern approaches to North America. NORAD warns of incoming missiles, but USNORTHCOM decides which ones to defeat using its Ground-Based Midcourse Defense System, which is oriented to defeat intercontinental ballistic missiles. NORAD's North Warning System, a series of short- and long-range radars, and future Arctic and Polar Over the Horizon Radar systems will be essential sources of information. The latter two will be able to see far beyond North America and into the Arctic and the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap. A firm commitment to contribute to the Golden Dome is an important shift in policy for Canada.

The deadlines the EO sets for initial concepts are tight, and off-the-shelf options likely will be preferred. NORAD will continue to defend all of North America with its three missions: aerospace warning, aerospace control and maritime warning.

Canada has a great opportunity to rethink its defense posture and the sensors and space-based assets that it hosts. It could catalyze deeper bilateral cooperation in continental defense, pushing both countries to develop new capabilities tailored to high-latitude operations. The U.S. is defended with the help of allies and is the basis of Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous pledge in 1938 delivered in Kingston, Ontario, that the American people will "not stand idly by." Canada must be ready to do its part. ■

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The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the policies or points of view of USNORTHCOM or the United States government.



DEFENDING THE NORTH AMERICAN ARCTIC

Canada's new Arctic foreign policy

DR. P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER/TRENT UNIVERSITY

Canada released its revised Arctic Foreign Policy (CAFP), which supplements its 2019 Arctic and Northern Policy Framework statement's international chapter, due to profound geo-strategic changes that have spilled over into Arctic affairs. Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly's foreword paints a dramatic picture, lamenting that "for many years, Canada has aimed to manage the Arctic and Northern regions cooperatively with other states as a zone of low tension that is free from military competition. ... However, the guardrails that we have depended on to prevent and resolve conflict have weakened. Russia's illegal war in Ukraine has made cooperation with it on Arctic issues exceedingly difficult for the foreseeable future. Uncertainty and unpredictability are creating economic consequences that Canadians are facing every day."

In the policy released on December 6, 2024, Joly was careful neither to cast the CAFP as the culmination of a new full-scale codevelopment process nor as a full strategy, like Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy released in 2022. Instead, the policy reiterates that Canada's desired end state is "a stable, prosperous and secure Arctic" with "strong and resilient Arctic and Northern communities," and with Canada's foreign policy serving to "advance the interests and priorities of Indigenous peoples and northerners who call the Arctic home." By comparison, the Conservatives' 2010 Statement on Arctic Foreign Policy set its vision for



Mélodie Joly, then Canadian minister of foreign affairs, says Canada desires "strong and resilient Arctic and Northern communities." AFP/GETTY IMAGES

the Arctic as "a stable, rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant Northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems." In this sense, Joly's statement at the launch of the CAFP heralding "a fundamental change in how we look at the Arctic" is somewhat of an overstatement. Instead, one might see the 2024 statement as a logical continuation of Canada's Arctic foreign policy since the late 1990s, albeit with a much stronger emphasis on defense and security, and likely to attract support across federal party lines.

“A stable, rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant Northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems.”



United States Air Force Master Sgt. Cody Hallas of the 133rd Contingency Response Team builds an igloo in Crystal City, Canada, during a field training exercise. The U.S. and Canada's strong Arctic defense partnership includes bilateral training. 133RD AIRLIFT WING/U.S. AIR FORCE

Nevertheless, Canada's evolving policies on Arctic defense and security reflect changes in the geopolitical environment. Canada's defense policy update, *Our North, Strong and Free*, released in April 2024, placed an unprecedented focus on the Arctic as the most strategically important region for Canada in contributing to the defense of North America and of NATO's northern and western flanks. Russia, which was framed as a potential Arctic partner in Canada's 2019 policy framework, is now clearly acknowledged as a competitor with whom there can be no "business as usual" given its invasion of Ukraine and disregard for sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law. "It is clear that Russia has no red lines," Joly noted at the CAFF's December launch in Ottawa, and the "guardrails" that prevent conflict in the region are "increasingly under strain." This means that "the Arctic is no longer a low-tension

region, and to respond to threats from Russia and non-Arctic competitors such as the Chinese Communist Party, Canada must be strong in the North American Arctic, and it requires deeper collaboration with its greatest ally, the United States."

The key alignments between Canada's Arctic foreign policy and U.S. strategic documents make this a natural focus. Canada and the U.S. have a shared commitment to maintaining a secure North American homeland. The promise to reopen a Canadian Consulate in Anchorage, Alaska, and another in Nuuk, Greenland, reflects a desire to deepen east-west diplomatic relationships across the North American Arctic. In September 2024, Ottawa announced the launch of maritime boundary negotiations with Washington regarding the Beaufort Sea, opening the opportunity to showcase how good neighbors resolve long-standing legal disputes. Furthermore, Canada's intention to initiate an Arctic security dialogue among the foreign ministers of the seven like-minded Arctic states dovetails with U.S. designs to strengthen regional defense and security architectures. This new mechanism to strengthen

U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Jeremiah Wickenhauser works during a winter afternoon in Crystal City, Canada. He trained with the Canadian military to learn Arctic survival skills.

TECH SGT. AMY LOVGREN/U.S. AIR FORCE





coordination and dialogue with Arctic allies on security issues complements the existing Arctic Chiefs of Defence meetings, Arctic Security Forces Roundtable and other bodies in which key allies share information and improve their collective understanding of circumpolar threats.

“Canada is an Arctic nation, and we are at a critical moment. We live in a tough world, and we need to be tougher in our response,” Joly said at the news conference announcing the CAFPP. “I don’t think the Arctic will be the primary theater of conflict. I see the Arctic as the result of what is happening elsewhere in the world.” In short, Canada’s evolving Arctic strategic policies reinforce that Arctic affairs are not insulated from broader geopolitical competition.

The CAFPP flags the “continued deepening of Chinese-Russian military cooperation, particularly in the North Pacific approaches to the Arctic,” as worrisome given the desire of both strategic competitors

Airmen from the U.S. Air Force’s Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and medics from the Royal Canadian Armed Forces receive quick response training in a de Havilland Canada CC-138 aircraft over Resolute Bay, Nunavut, Canada.

STAFF SGT. MADISON SCARINGE/NEW YORK AIR NATIONAL GUARD

“to undermine the liberal rules-based international system.” Since the Cold War, Canada has traditionally focused on the North Atlantic-Arctic connection, including the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, as its primary area of focus. By broadening the aperture to include North Pacific-Arctic interconnections and explicitly recognizing the North Pacific and Bering Strait as another key approach to the North American Arctic, Canada is shifting its mental map. This opens the conceptual space for Canadians to contribute more fully to a defense partnership throughout the North American Arctic and work to deter Russian aggression and respond to China’s desire to enter the Arctic and enhance its regional profile and prestige. ■



COUNTERING CCP PRESENCE

Leveraging Canada's
new Arctic maritime
capabilities

DR. ADAM LAJEUNESSE/ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY

The U.S. Coast Guard was faced with an uncomfortable reality in 2024 when fire disabled its cutter Healy. Years ago, this absence would have passed without notice. In mid-2024, however, it took place within the context of a rapidly growing presence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the region. Indeed, Beijing set a new milestone in 2024 by deploying three ice-breakers to the Arctic.

While those Chinese ships posed no threat to North America, the country's growing Arctic capability presents the U.S. and its allies with a clear, long-term challenge in the region. That risk has been widely debated in recent years but is commonly misunderstood.

Chinese warships and submarines likely are less of a concern than the hybrid and unconventional threats manifesting elsewhere. Whether it is illegal fishing, cable cutting or proxy actors challenging state jurisdiction, the CCP's modus operandi suggests that it seeks to exploit regional weakness and power imbalances below the threshold of armed conflict.

The U.S. faces the challenge of monitoring the growing CCP presence in Chinese maritime scientific research and dual-purpose military/civilian drone and survey activity. Over the longer term, a lack of icebreaker capacity also will limit U.S. surveillance of Chinese fishing vessels, commercial activity, and even pleasure cruises through territorial waters

His Danish Majesty's Ship Triton follows the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Tahoma near the Eternity Fjord in Greenland.

CPL. DAVID VELDMAN/
CANADIAN ARMED FORCES





and the exclusive economic zone. Canada's recent discovery of a Chinese buoy in its waters suggests that a closer watch is needed.

The U.S. Coast Guard has a nearly \$12 billion program to acquire three heavy icebreakers and is expecting to produce its first ship in 2031. The CCP, meanwhile, is moving with speed. The construction of Ji Di and Tan Suo San Hao took only two years from first steel cutting to completion. The much larger Xue Long 2, China's first domestically built polar icebreaker, was completed in 2019 in less than three years.

A clear solution to meet these capability gaps is for the Coast Guard to leverage the partnership with Canada and develop a more integrated and joint Arctic capability to monitor and deter adversary activity.

Over the past decade, Canada has built significant new Arctic capabilities. While the Canadian Coast Guard boasts a fleet of nine heavy and medium icebreakers, steel has also been cut on a state-of-the-art Polar Class (PC) 2 vessel. In December 2024, the country also launched its sixth Arctic and offshore patrol vessel for the Royal

Canadian Navy — with two more slated for delivery to the Canadian Coast Guard by 2027. These PC5 ships (with a PC4 bow) can break up to 6 feet of ice and mount an Mk-38 25 mm machine gun system. While lightly armed for a warship, they are capable patrol vessels, designed to monitor and police activity in the region.

These Canadian ships were also developed with interagency cooperation in mind and can host entire teams of U.S. Coast Guard personnel and other U.S. shipriders with the mandate and power to enforce U.S. law.

For any country, the value of an alliance stems from the ability to leverage capabilities present in allied forces. In the Arctic, Canada has much to offer. Turning that capability into a real effect, however,



Northern lights flare above His Majesty's Canadian Ship Harry DeWolf during cold weather trials near Frobisher Bay.

CPL. DAVID VELDMAN/
CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

His Majesty's Canadian Ship Margaret Brooke sits on an ice floe while civilian contractors and the ship's crew take ice samples in the Davis Strait in the Arctic Ocean.

TAYLOR CONGDON/
CANADIAN ARMED FORCES



requires a new framework for North American defense. While the aerospace realm has long been well managed through the North American Aerospace Defense Command agreement, the maritime space has never been defended jointly. As adversary activity increases in the North American Arctic, a joint approach to surveillance and presence is becoming increasingly vital.

This joint approach should entail more structured, formalized and common Canadian-U.S. planning and coordination of exercises and operations to ensure persistent ship availability in the Western Arctic. This presence would provide the U.S. with the monitoring capability that it needs and even an enforcement capability in a pinch. Indeed, while lightly armed, Canadian Arctic and off-shore patrol vessels were designed to police civilian and hybrid state vessels. These Canadian ships were also developed with interagency cooperation in mind and can host entire teams of U.S. Coast Guard personnel and other U.S. shipriders with the mandate and power to enforce U.S. law.



In addition to the operational value that a larger, combined presence would offer, this joining of resources also would provide deterrent value. A strong and stable presence would deter illegal research or other activities that the CCP might otherwise be tempted to undertake. Over the long term, a well-coordinated, continentwide maritime presence would also deter illegal fishing or unsafe shipping activity, which might otherwise develop in a perceived power vacuum.

A more joint approach to North American Arctic defense is a clear solution to the icebreaker gap now becoming visible. The value of alliances rests in this form of mutual support, and the U.S. partnership with Canada should be leveraged to fill that gap. ▣

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MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TRUSTED PARTNERSHIPS

NORDIC VISION 2030

Defense cooperation among NATO partners

LT. COL. MIKKEL PERLT/REPRESENTATIVE OF DANISH CHIEF OF DEFENCE



PVT. ANDREW ESTRADA/U.S. ARMY



Members of the U.S. Special Operations Mountain Warfare Training Center and Danish special operations forces use a hoist system to rescue a simulated casualty during Arctic training in the mountains of Greenland.

PVT. ANDREW ESTRADA/U.S. ARMY

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began in 2022, has challenged and subsequently changed security policies in Europe and for all NATO allies. The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO offers a unique opportunity for a strengthened Nordic defense cooperation to uphold credible deterrence and defense.

The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) originally was created in 2009, combining separate earlier cooperation initiatives under a single organizational umbrella to integrate Finland and Sweden, then non-NATO partners, in a Nordic security cooperation effort. On April 30, 2024, the defense ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden signed the new Vision for the Nordic Defence Cooperation.

Vision 2030 marks a new era for the development of Nordic defense cooperation, reflecting the reality of war in Europe and the accessions of Finland and Sweden to NATO. Denmark chaired NORDEF through 2024, a year that saw the forum

Members of the U.S. Special Operations Mountain Warfare Training Center and Danish special operations forces train together in the mountains of Greenland.

change and expand rapidly.

With Vision 2030, defense ministers defined eight overall objectives:

1. Strategic dialogue and consultations on current issues and the security situation, including cooperation on situational awareness and escalation management.
2. Ability to conduct and command combined joint operations through common operations planning, complementary to national and allied planning.
3. Host nation support and logistical support to enable common operations and facilitate allied military support and reinforcement.
4. Military mobility to, between and through the Nordic countries by ensuring minimal restrictions of movement.
5. Capabilities, based on strategic and operational requirements, in alignment with NATO processes, and opportunities in relation to European Union (EU) tools and initiatives.
6. Defense materiel cooperation for increased interchangeability, including joint acquisitions, based on capability development and requirements, in alignment with NATO processes, NORDEF operational needs, and opportunities in relation to EU tools and initiatives.



A 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Green Beret talks to a Danish special operations forces operator during the Arctic Edge 24 exercise in Alaska.

PVT. ANDREW ESTRADA/U.S. ARMY

7. Military security of supply for improved resilience by strengthening the Nordic defense industrial base.
8. Total defense to secure adequate support from all sectors of society to the defense sector in all threat scenarios and situations.

At the heart of the vision — and thereby the Nordic defense cooperation — are the aims of facilitating and enabling strategic dialogue, common situational awareness and escalation management, and creating the ability to conduct and command combined joint operations.

To that end, the Nordic chiefs of defense have agreed to a Nordic Defence Concept, which will coordinate and synchronize national defense planning across the Nordic region and ensure seamless transition to NATO plans. In accordance with the vision, cooperation is expanding into all aspects of defense planning, including operations, logistics and acquisitions, as well as societal resilience based on the Nordic model of total defense. In the area of sustainment, the Danish Acquisition and Logistics Agency has led an effort to enable joint production and procurement of ammunition among the NORDEFCO nations, and a strategic partnership agreement has been signed with Norwegian aerospace and defense company Nammo.

The Nordic Air Chiefs have already committed to integrating their forces with a joint declaration in 2023. The Nordic Air Forces will operate a combined fighter force of more than 250 aircraft and will be able to flow forces seamlessly across a joint operations area that covers the Nordic countries.

Symbolizing this new cooperation, the other

Nordic countries joined the Swedish Air Force in their traditional Christmas tree formation for the holiday season in 2024.

As the Nordic countries work bilaterally to increase cooperation and integration, NATO is also changing to reflect the inclusion of Finland and Sweden, with the Nordic region transferring from Joint Force Command Brunssum in the Netherlands to Joint Force Command Norfolk in the United States.

All these changes reflect a strong commitment to reinvest and take responsibility for the security of the northern flank of the alliance on the part of the Nordic countries, which have all increased defense spending significantly in the face of an increasingly threatening security environment. Denmark will increase its defense budget by \$7 billion over the next two years, bringing its defense spending to over 3% of gross domestic product (GDP), exceeding the NATO goal of at least 2% of GDP on defense spending. This is in addition to the already planned increase of \$28 billion allocated over the next 10 years.

At the same time, the Nordic countries are among the staunchest supporters of Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, with Denmark supplying to Ukraine mostly military aid that exceeded 2% of GDP. Together, the Nordic countries have supplied over \$18.7 billion in aid to Ukraine, only surpassed by the United States. The Nordic countries have supplied tanks, artillery, infantry fighting vehicles and even fighter jets, with Denmark leading the coalition to donate F-16 fighters to Ukraine.

Denmark turned over the chairmanship of NORDEFCO to Finland on January 1, 2025. ■



Members of the U.S. Special Operations Mountain Warfare Training Center and Danish special operations forces trek through heavy snow in the mountains of Greenland in March 2024.

PVT. ANDREW ESTRADA/U.S. ARMY



STRENGTHENING THE SWEDEN-U.S. PARTNERSHIP

STEFAN LUNDQVIST AND MARIA JONTÉN/SWEDISH DEFENCE UNIVERSITY

In the early phase of the Cold War, states on the Scandinavian peninsula — guided by a shared set of democratic values — were integrated into the U.S.-led Western security system. Denmark and Norway became founding members of NATO in 1949. Sweden, motivated by its concern that the Soviet Union might respond by invading neighboring Finland if it joined NATO, maintained a progressive policy of nonalignment but formed close military ties to the United States from 1949 through 1952. Through a convincing move in response to the start of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, Finland persuaded Sweden to jointly apply for NATO membership. In 2024, 40 years after joining NATO's Partnership for Peace program, Sweden became a member of the most powerful alliance in the history of the world.

In 2025, forums that have long successfully fostered cooperation, coordination and interaction on sustainable development — e.g., the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council — are withering in a region increasingly marked by geostrategic and socioeconomic competition. Nevertheless, bi- and

multilateral cooperation remains imperative to Sweden's security. In 2023, the Swedish presidency of the ever-deepening Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) focused on support for Ukraine and adaptation to the new security situation in Europe.

Through a convincing move in response to the start of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, Finland persuaded Sweden to jointly apply for NATO membership. In 2024, 40 years after joining NATO's Partnership for Peace program, Sweden became a member of the most powerful alliance in the history of the world.

The bi- and multilateral agreements of NORDEFCO complement its member states' obligations to NATO. The organization benefits from its increased capacity to conduct joint operations, primarily at the onset of a regional crisis or conflict. The fact that all Nordic states are NATO members improves the military strategic situation in northern Europe.





Representatives of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies traveled to Stockholm in February 2025 to kick off a two-day engagement with the Swedish Defence University.

TED STEVENS CENTER



The Swedish Defence University participates in and hosts numerous security dialogues, such as this speech about deterring Russia delivered by French President Emmanuel Macron in January 2024. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A VIBRANT, EXPANDING SWEDISH DEFENCE UNIVERSITY

The Russia-Ukraine war threatens Europe. Accordingly, the Swedish Parliament in October 2024 approved increasing Sweden's defense expenditure for 2025-2030, estimated to correspond to 2.4% of its GDP in 2025 and 2.6% in 2028. The demand for well-educated officers increases in step with the growth of the Swedish Armed Forces. Official Swedish Defence University (SEDU) statistics state that 298 cadets commenced their three-year

education in the Officers' Program — a 43% increase over 2022, and 243 officers and reservists were pursuing studies in SEDU's Command and Staff Course and Joint Advanced Command and Staff Program in December 2024, including five officers from Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Norway and South Korea. These military education programs — core to SEDU's mission — are adjusting to support Sweden's full integration into NATO. This involves a disparate set of issues:

- Ensure that all involved hold national security clearances.
- Leverage the use of the English language.
- Apply NATO standards, doctrines and procedures.
- Strengthen cultural awareness of NATO and its member states.
- Adopt a focus on military operations relevant to defending NATO's northern flank.

In its military education programs, SEDU nurtures military leaders' ability to solve complex problems, plan, lead and make decisions. This requires giving individuals the ability to think critically. To this end, these programs offer a mix of theoretical studies, seminars, exercises, study trips and thesis courses. Select courses in SEDU's Joint Advanced Command and Staff Program integrate workshops, tabletop



King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden speaks at the Swedish Defence University in January 2024.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

In its military education programs, SEDU nurtures military leaders' ability to solve complex problems, plan, lead and make decisions. This requires giving individuals the ability to think critically.

exercises and war games organized with the U.S. National Defense University (NDU). SEDU regularly exchanges lecturers with the U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Marine Corps University, the U.S. Naval Post-Graduate School and the U.S. Naval War College.

SEDU takes pride in its thriving research environment, spanning the Departments of Political Science; War Studies; Military History; Systems Science for Defence and Security; Leadership and Command and Control; and International and Operational Law. All departments but Political Science contribute to SEDU's military education programs. SEDU also organizes the Centre of Special Operations Research, the Center for Wargaming, the Centre for Societal Security and the Strategic Implications and Innovations Center (SIIC). These centers contribute to research, analysis support and education in their respective fields of expertise, e.g., total defense, societal security, crisis management, security and defense.

The SIIC strengthens the U.S.-Sweden partnership by offering venues for academia, corporations and public

authorities to jointly develop common abilities in crisis management, defense and security. By gathering people with different skill sets and employing interdisciplinary methods, it contributes to innovation and development within research, education and business. Jointly with the NDU, the SIIC arranged two series of deterrence war games in the Baltic Sea region in 2019-2021 and the High North Deterrence Game in 2023-2024. Both series delivered tangible research and policy outputs.

SEDU has contributed to seminars, workshops and courses organized by — or co-organized with — the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies since 2018, and since 2022 also to those organized by the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC). SEDU and the TSC signed a letter of intent for institutionalized cooperation in 2024, to be deepened by a memorandum of understanding. ■

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Swedish Defence University.

REGIONAL COOPERATION



MARITIME MUSCLE

Canada, Mexico, U.S.
collaborate on security
issues with NAMSII
exercises

THE WATCH STAFF

Maritime security forces from Canada, Mexico and the United States gathered last year for two exercises designed to increase the effectiveness of the North American nations in tackling illicit activity in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSII) exercises, held a few weeks apart and based out of U.S. Coast Guard facilities in San Diego, California, and Corpus Christi, Texas, better acquainted the Canadian maritime forces, Mexican Navy (MARINA) and the U.S. Coast Guard with the best practices and protocols of the 17-year-old agreement to bolster the “maritime interoperability and the capabilities of the Canadian, Mexican and United States maritime forces to react jointly against a security threat,” according to a Coast Guard after action report. All three nations participated in the first exercise. Mexico and the U.S. attended the second.

The first event in San Diego was a tabletop exercise designed to familiarize participants with the NAMSII handbook and best practices. In the fictional scenario, the partners were trying to apprehend two transnational criminal organization (TCO) members attempting to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics to the North American Pacific Coast, according to the report. “There was great coordination, collaboration and teamwork during the planning, design and conduct of the exercise by the NAMSII exercise planning team. The exercise was attended by 32 participants from Mexico, Canada, and the U.S.,” the report stated.



Cmdr. Brian Tesson, left, then commanding officer of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Active, and Vice Adm. Vicente Andrade, director of the Center for Higher Naval Studies of the Mexican Navy, greet each other during the North American Maritime Security Initiative Pacific Exercise in 2023. U.S. COAST GUARD

A few weeks later, rough seas off the Texas coast prevented the maritime portion of the operation, but the three-day event provided opportunities for the exchange of ideas and best practices on how to combat illegal fishing. “The exercise was very successful in that it provided all participants from MARINA, the USCG, and Texas Parks and Wildlife (a first-time participant in a NAMSII exercise), with the opportunity to share and

The exercise was very successful in that it provided all participants from MARINA, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Texas Parks and Wildlife (a first-time participant in a NAMSI exercise), with the opportunity to share and exchange their Maritime Interdiction Operations experience involving illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Mexico-U.S. border area.



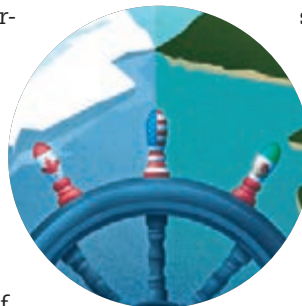
Senior leaders from the Royal Canadian Navy, Mexican Navy, U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy listen to their respective national anthems during the opening ceremonies of the 2023 iteration of the North American Maritime Security Initiative Pacific exercises. PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS JUSTIN UPSHAW/U.S. COAST GUARD



exchange their Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) experience involving illegal unreported & unregulated fishing (IUUF) in the MX/U.S. Border area,” the after action report said.


The exercise covered how Mexico and the U.S. interdict and seize fishing boats involved in IUUF activities, and the legal steps required to improve the chances of a successful prosecution, as well as the differences in Mexican and U.S. law on the issue, the report stated.

The Mexican Navy released a statement praising the latest iteration of the long-standing collaboration. “Part of the capabilities to be strengthened among the friendly armed forces during the development of the ‘NAMSI GOMEX PHASE 1’ are exercises of Search and Rescue at sea, Maintenance of the Rule of Law and application of Law at sea, formations and tactical evolutions, maritime detection and interdiction, with the participation of observers and controllers from both nations, and to also carry-out exercises to eliminate language barriers through simulated scenarios in which interoperability between the two nations can be



Sailors from the Mexican and U.S. navies gather for the closing ceremony of the North American Maritime Security Initiative Pacific Exercise 2023. CMDR. DAN SLEDZ/U.S. NAVY

perfected. In this way, the Ministry of the Navy, through the Mexican Navy, shows its commitment to the citizenry to strengthen the operational capabilities of its personnel through the exchange of knowledge and techniques carried out during this multinational interaction between friendly nations, with the sole purpose of strengthening the security and protection of the seas and coasts,” the statement said, according to seawaves.com, a maritime website.

NAMSI, launched in 2008, is an inter-agency and trilateral forum among Canadian, Mexican and U.S. maritime commands to develop and refine maritime operations, as well as synchronize training among forces of the three nations. “The three participating nations actively seek opportunities to operate together and strengthen their cohesive approach to enhance regional maritime security in North America,” stated a 2023 Coast Guard news release. 



ADVANCING ARCTIC COLLABORATION

Anchorage Security and Defense Conference

DR. KELSEY FRAZIER AND CAPT. JAMIE DELCORE

THE ARCTIC TOOK CENTER STAGE as Gen. Gregory M. Guillot opened the inaugural Anchorage Security and Defense Conference (ASDC), a collaboration involving the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, the Arctic Domain Awareness Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage and the U.S. Department of State. Gen. Guillot, commander of U.S. Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, kicked off the November 2024 conference, which was framed around the theme “The ‘Decisive 2020s’ in Allied North Perspective.” The event provided a comprehensive look at the evolving security challenges of a region with increasing geopolitical tensions and heightened activity. The Arctic is quickly becoming a focal point for global security.

The conference shed light on a range of key issues, from vulnerabilities in Arctic infrastructure to the growing threats throughout the Arctic. These discussions led to actionable recommendations for building long-term readiness in the Arctic, ensuring that security needs are met through cooperative and innovative solutions.

A central topic was the vulnerability of Arctic infrastructure, particularly as the region faces increasingly sophisticated hybrid threats, such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and sabotage. The Arctic’s limited infrastructure capacity exacerbates these threats, especially in remote areas where response times to critical incidents can exceed 48 hours. The growing presence of Russian surveillance and cyber intrusions, especially targeting Arctic infrastructure in Nordic countries, was brought up as a key concern. Experts stressed the need for multilayered defense strategies that integrate both military and civilian approaches to find resilient, multiuse and adaptable solutions.

Advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and unmanned systems, were highlighted as essential tools for enhancing situational awareness and bolstering Arctic defense capabilities. Collaborative multiagency exercises were identified as crucial for testing these new technologies and building robust defense frameworks.

Another aspect of building Arctic readiness is the importance of societal trust, experts said. Effective govern-

ance and public collaboration are crucial for addressing the region’s security challenges. Trust in government institutions is especially important in remote Arctic communities, where it is essential for the successful implementation of infrastructure projects, emergency response efforts and sustainable resource management. However, participants noted that resource shortages and inadequate funding for municipal services often erode this trust and leave communities vulnerable to external influences such as disinformation.

To address these issues, conference discussions emphasized the need for transparent governance and community input in decision-making processes and resource allocation. By fostering trust between governments and local communities, the Arctic region can better withstand the ever-increasing stresses.

Another significant theme was the integration of local Arctic knowledge into security strategies. Local communities possess valuable expertise on the environment, ice dynamics and homeland security — knowledge that is critical to effectively operate in the Arctic. Examples like Canada’s Ranger program and Greenland’s Arctic Basic Education program were cited as successful models of local involvement in security frameworks. However, communication barriers, particularly in higher latitude communities, remain a challenge. The conference underscored the need for improved communication networks and trust-building mechanisms between state and local groups and defense organizations. Recognizing local Arctic expertise not only enhances defense operations but also provides training and education to bolster military readiness in Arctic regions.

The growing collaboration between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Russia in the Arctic was another area of concern. As Russia advances its military capabilities, the pace at which it poses a challenge to NATO and its allies is increasing. The joint efforts of China and Russia in Arctic shipping, particularly under the CCP’s Polar Silk Road initiative, underscore the shifting geopolitical dynamics in the region. With Russia’s dominance in Arctic shipping, and the growing militarization of the region, the collaboration between



Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, commander of U.S. Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, delivers the keynote address during the Anchorage Security and Defense Conference.
TECH SGT. DONALD HUDSON/U.S. AIR FORCE

these two powers raises serious concerns for allies and partners in the Pacific and in NATO.

Participants agreed that robust intelligence-sharing frameworks among NATO allies are critical to counter these developments. Moreover, the integration of Arctic scenarios into NATO exercises, along with joint task force mechanisms, was recommended to maintain security cooperation and regional stability.

Some of the Arctic's most significant defense readiness challenges identified were risks to infrastructure caused by permafrost degradation and coastal erosion. These challenges will exacerbate competition for resources, increase migration pressures and heighten infrastructure demands as resources and new maritime routes are exposed. Participants stressed that adaptive design approaches, such as the use of materials and technologies suited for the Arctic's conditions, are essential for mitigating these operational risks. Panel experts also recommended integrating scientific exploration with military operations, providing valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of the region.

To address the region's unique challenges, the conference highlighted the importance of public-private partnerships. Collaborative efforts provide valuable lessons for building resilience. For example, Greenland implemented microgrids to reduce energy costs and enhance network stability. Panelists emphasized the integration of innovative energy systems, cybersecurity measures and hardened infrastructure as essential to address the

Arctic's infrastructure gaps.

The private sector plays a pivotal role in innovation, particularly through the development of hybrid power systems and advanced technologies like AI for real-time monitoring. Long-term planning that integrates these technologies will be crucial to ensure the region's resilience.

The final takeaway from the conference was the urgent need to treat the Arctic as a distinct security domain within defense strategies. The role of Alaska as NATO's western flank was underscored, highlighting the importance of integrating military and civilian operations to enhance regional security. Participants recommended the expansion of Arctic-focused military exercises and the inclusion of non-Arctic nations like Australia and Japan, which bring valuable maritime expertise to Arctic security discussions.

The inaugural ASDC made clear that the Arctic is no longer a remote, peripheral region but has developed into a central theater of global security. As geopolitical tensions rise and reshape the region, the Arctic's security landscape is becoming increasingly complex. To navigate these challenges, the conference called for a collective, NATO-centric approach that emphasizes collaboration across governments, local communities and the private sector. Building Arctic readiness requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses infrastructure, security and governance issues in tandem. Only through proactive engagement can the Arctic be secured as a space for cooperation, innovation and stability in the face of growing uncertainty. ▣



WHINSEC

SUPPORTS HOMELAND DEFENSE

ADELA GARCIA DUNCAN AND MAJ. MATTHEW A. HUGHES/WHINSEC

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) plays a vital and growing role in homeland defense through its partnerships and support in security cooperation activities. The institute's ties with academic, joint, interagency and international entities and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) facilitate training, combined exercises, conferences, subject matter expert exchanges and other interactions to advance homeland defense.

WHINSEC's academic partnerships contribute to homeland defense and collective security through specialized educational tracks and degrees for students, continuing education opportunities for faculty, and guest speaker seminars and research collaboration. Since its establishment at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 2001, WHINSEC has trained and educated more than 24,000 students from 36 countries representing the military, law enforcement and civilian sectors. Its students and faculty have earned 219 graduate degrees — 141 through civilian university partnerships and 78 Master of Military Arts and Science degrees through the Command and General Staff College of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In resident courses that include partner nation and U.S. students, curricula emphasize important security themes. Recent student articles and master's theses have addressed irregular migration, security of maritime commercial routes, great power competi-

tion and other topics.

Activities with joint and interagency partners and security forces of other countries also promote homeland defense and hemispheric security. Subject matter expert exchanges involving WHINSEC faculty promote operational compatibility, such as an exchange in coordination with U.S. Army North focused on



U.S. Army Sgt. Brian Vazquez loads construction materials onto a Black Hawk helicopter during PANAMAX-Alpha in Panama.

STAFF SGT. TRISTAN BIESE/U.S. AIR FORCE

noncommissioned officer development with partners in Puebla, Mexico. The institute's interagency partnerships include the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, FBI and others. These partnerships



also have strengthened WHINSEC's ability to promote civil-military relations and whole-of-government approaches to regional security challenges.

Collaboration enhancing homeland defense and hemispheric security, however, is perhaps best exemplified in the strong partnership between WHINSEC and the government of Panama during the PANAMAX-Alpha exercise. PMX A, a bilateral exercise with Panama supported by U.S. Southern Command, brings together military personnel, law enforcement officials and civilian experts to practice and refine their skills in responding to various security scenarios. This partnership, built on mutual benefit, combines WHINSEC's expertise and resources with Panama's unique perspective and experience in regional security.

Faculty and staff train and mentor participants, focusing on topics such as counterterrorism, disaster response and humanitarian assistance. "WHINSEC plays a vital role in offering education and training to our partners in the Western Hemisphere. As part of the PANAMAX-Alpha training exercise, we provide academic assistance in the military decision-making process, enabling commanders and their staffs to develop detailed and effective plans," said Maj. George Chacon, WHINSEC School of Professional Military Education instructor. The partnership between WHINSEC and Panama through PMX A started in 2004. It is a model for future security cooperation

Residents of La Esmeralda, off the coast of Panama, load food into a truck during PANAMAX-Alpha in March 2025. The exercise provides Panama and the U.S. the opportunity to strengthen their relationship in security, humanitarian and logistical fields. STAFF SGT. TRISTAN BIESE/U.S. AIR FORCE

between the U.S. and its regional partners.

Finally, WHINSEC champions human rights and democracy through engagements with international organizations and NGOs. WHINSEC has collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross on law and human rights. Additionally, graduates of WHINSEC's Human Rights Instructor course use educational materials produced by the NGO Human Rights First during classroom instruction. The institute has hosted panels with experts who included a human rights advocate at the Washington Office on Latin America to speak on human security issues. Such partnerships have strengthened WHINSEC's role in security initiatives and scholarship on human rights and democracy, promoting a sustainable approach to security in the Western Hemisphere.

As a premier institute for security cooperation and education, WHINSEC's partnerships have contributed significantly to homeland defense and hemispheric security. Continued collaboration with academic, joint, interagency, and international entities and NGOs will remain essential to promoting a more peaceful and prosperous Western Hemisphere. ■



GUARDIANS OF THE ARCTIC

YOUSSEF MANI/CANADIAN COAST GUARD

PHOTOS BY THE CANADIAN COAST GUARD

With the longest coastline in the world, borders along three oceans and the longest inland waterway, Canada is undoubtedly a maritime nation. For more than 60 years, the Canadian Coast Guard has delivered critical services on these waters, saving lives, keeping the economy moving and supporting Canada's sovereignty — especially in the North.

The Canadian Arctic is unique and ever evolving. It covers 75% of Canada's coastline and is ripe with opportunities and challenges. Due to its vastness, harsh conditions and limited infrastructure, the region is particularly susceptible to weather events, foreign interests and increased vessel traffic.

Within the government of Canada, several departments and agencies are responsible for ensuring a vibrant and resilient North. However, the Canadian Coast Guard is often the most visible government presence in the North, with its fleet of ships and helicopters playing a key role in gathering maritime domain awareness. Several bases in the region, as well as numerous partners, including volunteers from the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, help to serve as Canada's eyes and ears on the water.



Given its heightened presence, the Canadian Coast Guard dedicates great time and effort to support Northern communities in addressing distinct, regional challenges. This includes working closely with communities to advance key priorities, such as maritime safety and security, reconciliation with Indigenous people, and science and research.

This collaboration is key to the Coast Guard's vision for the Arctic, which is to enhance its services to meet the unique needs of the North and to evolve the organization's role as the landscape shifts.

That's why, in 2018, the Coast Guard established a dedicated Arctic Region to focus on Northern priorities. This was followed by the release of the Arctic Strategy in 2024, which sets out a vision for the Canadian Coast Guard for the next 10 years. This strategy builds on a strong foundation of engagement with Inuit, First Nations, Métis and other Northern partners, and focuses on how the Coast Guard will adapt and enhance its service delivery model over the next decade.

A crucial component of building capacity is investing heavily in the Coast Guard's fleet of the future. While the Coast Guard currently has icebreakers in the North for six months out of the year, it is

Given its heightened presence, the Canadian Coast Guard dedicates great time and effort to support Northern communities in addressing distinct, regional challenges. This includes working closely with communities to advance key priorities, such as maritime safety and security, reconciliation with Indigenous people, and science and research.



The Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) Pierre Radisson escorts a commercial vessel through ice in Ungava Bay, Canada.

The Canadian Coast Guard and the U.S. Coast Guard work closely on a wide range of services at the national level, including environmental response, search and rescue, icebreaking, marine traffic management, and navigation aids.



The CCGS Terry Fox breaks ice ahead of the CCGS Louis S. St-Laurent during a science mission to chart Canada's Arctic continental shelf.

The CCGS Henry Larsen provides icebreaking assistance to a commercial vessel near Rankin Inlet, Nunavut.



working to build two new polar icebreakers, which will allow year-round coverage across the Arctic, including the high Arctic. Work has also begun to procure six new program icebreakers, two Arctic and offshore patrol ships, and up to 16 multipurpose vessels. These modern, ice-capable ships will support Northern residents through a range of critical missions, including assisting the annual resupply of goods to Arctic communities and expanding Canada's patrol capability in the low Arctic.

Besides new ships and capabilities, the Coast Guard also is building its cooperative relationships with international partners and coast guards. The Arctic is an important region to many like-minded Arctic states, and the Canadian Coast Guard works closely with them, through forums like the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, to advance shared objectives. This includes establishing several agreements with partners, including the United States Coast Guard.

For many decades, Canada and the U.S. have collaborated to ensure safe and efficient marine navigation on our shared waters. This is vital to both countries' supply chains and economies. The Canadian Coast Guard and the U.S. Coast Guard work closely on a wide range of services at the national level, including environmental response, search and rescue, icebreaking, marine traffic management, and navigation aids.

Joint exercises are common, such as in July 2023, when the Canadian and U.S. Coast Guards carried out a passing exercise in the Arctic, near Point Barrow, Alaska, to test communication methods, small-vessel exercises and sailing maneuvers. It is the Canadian Coast Guard's strong collaboration with partners that will play a vital role in Canada's goal to protect and preserve the Arctic.

In 2024, the government of Canada released its updated defense policy, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*, and the Arctic Foreign Policy. These policies call for greater "presence, reach, mobility and responsiveness" in the Arctic and signal a renewed commitment for Canadian departments and agencies to align their priorities in the North. Both documents offer the potential to leverage the inherent capabilities of the Canadian Coast Guard.

Collaboration with international partners, Canadian provinces and territories, and Indigenous people will be crucial to advance shared objectives toward a resilient and thriving Arctic. The opportunities ahead are numerous, and they are expected to lead to a bright future for the region. For the benefit of all Canadians, the Canadian Coast Guard looks forward to being part of the effort that will help strengthen security and promote a prosperous Arctic. ■

U.S. SHARES MILITARY CAPABILITIES



OPERATION GLOBAL GUARDIAN

THE WATCH STAFF

U.S. and Allies Conduct Integrated Arctic Air Operations

European and North American allies conducted Operation Global Guardian to demonstrate the advantage of global alliances, integrated deterrence, layered defense, readiness and the seamless integration of air forces from North America and European nations in support of Arctic defense and NATO's northern flank. The air forces from eight nations participated, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, in June 2024. The operation was part of the Global Guardian series of biannual enhanced vigilance activities that demonstrate how the U.S. and allied nations through global integration can provide continuous and coordinated air defense cover against adversary long-range aviation threats to Europe and North America.

In his posture statement delivered to the House Armed Services Committee on March 12, 2024, Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, commander of U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), emphasized the importance of international cooperation, stating, "Global alliances and partnerships based on mutual trust and interoperability provide the United States and our allies with a distinct advantage over our competitors. Our com-

petitors continue their relentless efforts to increase presence, economic leverage, and influence in our region, proving the necessity of security cooperation with USNORTHCOM's exemplary military partners time and again."

Operation Global Guardian supports the Department of Defense global exercise series, with U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) as the lead combatant command for 2024. USEUCOM's Large Scale Global Exercise 24 is designed to strengthen agility and interoperability with allies and partners and demonstrate joint military cooperation. Other participating combatant commands in Operation Global Guardian included U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Transportation Command.

A key contributor to Operation Global Guardian is the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), consisting of 10 Northern European nations committed to coordinated exercises and defense activities to preserve peace and security, reassure allies and partners, and deter malign influence activities in the High North, Scandinavia, the Baltic Sea region and northern Atlantic. The JEF includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the U.K. Since Finland and Sweden's accession, all JEF participant nations are also NATO members. The U.K.



Operation Global Guardian demonstrates global integration through coordinated air operations, sensor networks and Quick Reaction Alert fighter and tanker readiness in defense of the Arctic and NATO's northern flank.



A Royal Danish Air Force F-16 pilot participates in Operation Global Guardian.

ROYAL DANISH AIR FORCE



provides the permanent operational headquarters for the JEF at Standing Joint Force Headquarters in Northwood, England, with Maj. Gen. Tom Bateman as commander.

“Global Guardian is exciting,” said Royal Air Force Group Capt. Kevin Latchman, former JEF director of communications in Northwood. “Not only does it leverage high-end B-52 capability from the U.S. but it also provides a unique opportunity to work together across the vast geography of the High North and North Atlantic and test our operational and tactical linkages across a number of domains.”

Operation Global Guardian began at 7:25 a.m. June 18, 2024, when two U.S. Air Force B-52 bombers took off from Royal Air Force (RAF) Fairford station in Gloucestershire, U.K. At 8:55 a.m., the Bomber Task Force (BTF) was intercepted by two RAF Typhoon fighters for escort. At 10:25 a.m., the BTF was joined by two F-35 fighters from the Royal Netherlands Air Force. Fifteen minutes later, two F-16 fighters from the Royal Danish Air Force joined in providing BTF air support. At 11:15 a.m., the BTF was joined by two JAS 39 Gripen fighters from the Swedish Air Force. At 11:50 a.m., the BTF was intercepted by two F-35 fighters from the Royal Norwegian Air Force. At 12:25 p.m.,

The U.S. Air Force B-52 Bomber Task Force conducts joint air operations with Royal Norwegian Air Force F-35s and Finnish Air Force F/A-18 fighters. U.S. AIR FORCE

the BTF was intercepted by two FA-18 fighters from the Finnish Air Force. Both Finland and Sweden are new NATO members with robust air power capability. Finally, at 1:10 p.m., the B-52 BTF split over North America’s eastern and western flanks.

Operation Global Guardian demonstrated global integration through coordinated air operations, sensor networks and Quick Reaction Alert fighter and tanker readiness in defense of the Arctic and NATO’s northern flank. Participating nations connected their air forces through shared command and control centers, executed intercepts, and coordinated handoffs to successive defense layers. This collaborative effort unified European and North American allies into a cohesive front against long-range aviation threats. Finally, the U.S. and allied air forces from Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the U.K. demonstrated the credibility and flexibility of allied forces to address the complex, dynamic and unpredictable nature of the global security environment. ■



OPERATION POLAR DAGGER

U.S. Navy and special operations forces train for Arctic campaigns

THE WATCH STAFF

United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), U.S. Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH) and the U.S. Navy rapidly deployed 150 U.S. special operations forces (USSOF) aboard the USS John L. Canley to conduct multidomain maritime operations in the North American Arctic as part of Operation Polar Dagger 24 (OPD24) in July and August 2024.

Operating in the Bering Sea, Arctic Circle and St. Lawrence Island, OPD24 demonstrated the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) commitment to Arctic campaigning with joint USSOF demonstrating long-range movements, maritime interdiction operations, over-the-beach operations, medical evacuation and personnel recovery, while also engaging with Alaskan Native people and communities.

About 150 joint USSOF participated in OPD24, including: U.S. Naval Special Warfare Combat Crewmen, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs), the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), the U.S. Army 528th Special Operations (Airborne) Sustainment Brigade Austere Resuscitative Surgical Team, the 524th Special Operations Squadron, and members of SOCNORTH.



Polar Dagger 24 provided Special Operations Command North with the opportunity to refine a range of capabilities and responses to deter, disrupt, degrade and deny competitor activity in the Arctic.

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOHNNY DIAZ/U.S. AIR FORCE

In his 2024 posture statement delivered on March 12, 2024, Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, commander of USNORTHCOM and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), emphasized the importance of Arctic campaigning, stating, "The success of homeland and continental defense requires capability and capacity to conduct sustained multidomain operations in the Arctic."

“The success of homeland and continental defense requires capability and capacity to conduct sustained multidomain operations in the Arctic.”



U.S. Army MH-60M Black Hawk helicopters hover above the USS John L. Canley during Operation Polar Dagger 24. AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOHNNY DIAZ/U.S. AIR FORCE

According to U.S. Army Col. Matthew Tucker, commander, SOCNORTH, OPD24 directly supports the DOD Arctic Strategy (June 21, 2024), which states, “Military forces must effectively

U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators conduct a maritime interdiction off the USS John L. Canley during Operation Polar Dagger 24.

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOHNNY DIAZ/U.S. AIR FORCE

strengthen their ability to survive and operate in austere environments with honed expertise and specialized equipment to overcome the challenges presented by the Alaskan Arctic and High North.” OPD24 provided SOCNORTH the opportunity to conduct sustained Arctic multidomain operations, evaluate disruptive capabilities, and expand operational reach as part of the defense of Canada and the U.S.

In summary, OPD24 strengthened joint USSOF and U.S. Navy Fleet integration for rapid deployment of USSOF in the Arctic maritime domain. Since 2021, Operation Polar Dagger has provided USNORTHCOM and SOCNORTH with an opportunity to enhance deterrence posture and domain awareness and validate USSOF proficiency to operate in cold weather and austere environments in the Alaskan Arctic and High North. ■



JOINT EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

A Decade of Strategic Excellence

LT. COL. BOBBY BRYAN/JOINT EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) stands as a testament to a regional multinational framework that has demonstrated adaptive flexibility, retaining relevance in the fast-changing Euro-Atlantic security landscape. As it looks back at its 10-year anniversary, it is an opportune moment to reflect on its history, achievements and value to security in the High North and North Atlantic regions.

The JEF was launched at the NATO Wales Summit in September 2014, under the leadership of the United Kingdom, via the NATO Framework Nation concept, which was made up of NATO members Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway. The initial concept was to create a flexible political and military framework that could quickly deploy a multinational force in response to a crisis, particularly in the strategically significant areas of the Baltic Sea, High North and North Atlantic regions. Finland and Sweden, then not in NATO, joined the JEF in 2017, and Iceland in 2021, bringing JEF membership to 10 nations, as it remains today. The backdrop to all of this was the like-minded approach of neighboring nations to enhance their regional security and stability, particularly in the face of emerging threats from Russia.

The JEF's most significant achievement has been its ability to provide a high-level forum both militarily and

politically for neighboring countries to consult and cohere their positions quickly on defense and security challenges in their home region. This forum has facilitated the sharing of intelligence, the development of military JEF Response Options (JRO), and the enhancement of interoperability among its member nations. The JEF's opt-in nature for all activity has allowed member nations to contribute forces on a case-by-case basis, ensuring efficiency, flexibility and responsiveness in addressing emerging threats. Since the start of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, the JEF has been tasked to particularly focus on countering hybrid threats.

The JEF has stepped up to the mark by developing response options and conducting exercises to enhance its capabilities in this area, for instance, activating a JRO in December 2023 that involved deploying naval units to protect critical underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. In June 2024, building on lessons identified on the December 2023 JRO, the JEF activated a trial period of enhanced monitoring of shipping activity near important undersea energy and communications routes, coordinating the detection and interdiction of any unusual or suspicious activity in these areas by JEF nation assets. More recently, the JEF was pleased to see Ukraine observe their signature JEF exercise of 2024, Joint Protector. This exercise took place in Latvia as a large-scale command-post exercise, which saw the Ukrainian Armed Forces contribute via a series of operational deep dives.



A Norwegian Navy Skjold-class corvette is tracked by air assets during a JEF surface exercise in Norway in September 2023.

CHRIS SELLARS/U.K. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF THE JEF

The JEF's achievements over the past decade have laid a strong foundation for its future role in regional security. Going forward, the JEF will continue to develop its ability to respond to security challenges, with a particular focus against but not limited to subthreshold threats in all domains. The High North, North Atlantic and Baltic Sea regions are of immense geostrategic importance to Europe, due to the sea lines of communication and supply routes the region provides. Melting Arctic ice opening new shipping lanes further increases the potential for both economic and military opportunities and security challenges in this region. The like-minded outlook, similar appreciation of security protocols, and comparatively similar technical capabilities make the JEF an attractive forum to focus on collaboration, with agreed JROs being the vehicle to achieve this.

In its second decade, the JEF is set to accelerate its participant nation cooperation in tackling hybrid threats and deterring and defending against threats to critical national infrastructure, including particularly shared communications and energy infrastructure, where a high degree of interconnectedness will frequently require a

The 10 nations of the JEF participated in Nordic Warden, which included air and sea assets tracking vessels of interest in northern Europe. The goal of the exercise was to hone skills to protect critical undersea infrastructure. DANISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

coordinated response. The JEF+ concept sees the JEF enhancing its operational capabilities by expanding JEF activities to include participation by other nations, without losing the agility of decision-making to initiate such activity that a broader membership would entail. For all JEF participant nations, NATO is the foundation of collective security in the Euro-Atlantic area, with the JEF, from its inception, designed to complement both NATO and participant nations' response capabilities. Additionally, the JEF, with its JROs, opt-in commitment to activity and JEF+ concept to broaden coalition participation for specific activity, is destined to continue to be a valuable Euro-Atlantic-based security framework. Its focus will remain providing flexible and tailored responses, which nevertheless align with national plans and NATO's regional plans, further strengthening its utility in responding to security challenges, particularly now that all members are once again in NATO. ▣



SAFEGUARDING THE ARCTIC

Operation
Nanook-
Nunavut

MAJ. ANDREW R. COLPITTS/CANADIAN JOINT OPERATIONS COMMAND

Jutting northward from the continent of North America, the iconic shape of Canada's Arctic Archipelago not only makes Canada's Arctic unmistakable on a world map, but it also makes this region unique in the world. The rapidly changing Arctic is increasingly becoming an arena of both opportunity and risk. Shrinking sea ice, emerging sea lanes and interest in natural resources have amplified the strategic importance of the North, drawing the attention of Arctic and non-Arctic nations alike. Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence (ONSAF), the update to Canada's defense policy published in 2024, makes it clear that safeguarding the Arctic is a primary focus for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and that Canada's domestic and foreign policy is predicated on a secure Arctic.

Canada's Arctic lands, islands and waters are vast, remote and sparsely populated. They possess a harsh climate and limited infrastructure. Operating in and defending Canada's Arctic presents unique challenges for the CAF that require innovative solutions. Canada's internal and external partnerships are a key component in meeting these security objectives.

Effective deterrence requires both capacity and persuasion. The side enforcing deterrence must have a capacity to respond to threats by imposing a cost on an aggressor. The capacity for imposing such costs should be demonstrable, repeatable

and deliberately controlled by the deterring party. Equally important is the ability of that deterring party to convince any potential aggressor that a strong and swift response will be taken against any aggression. The security situation in the region has become increasingly critical, rivaling other regional hot spots of strategic importance. Credible deterrence in the Arctic is a persistent and growing need due to the following factors:

1. The Arctic is an important approach to North America. While Canada has in the past collaborated with the United States on continental defense primarily through the North American Aerospace Defense Command, threats through the Arctic no longer are limited solely to the aerospace domain.
2. The danger of conflict in other regions spilling over into the Arctic is a growing concern.
3. Natural resources in the Arctic must be safeguarded against exploitation by foreign competitors.
4. Reinforcing deterrence therefore requires a balance of two processes, both of which must be supported by effective communication.
5. Improving capabilities, including platforms, infrastructure, equipment, sensors and personnel.
6. Taking action to practice and demonstrate existing capabilities, improve techniques and foster interoperability.

Enduring partnerships between Canada, the U.S. and other allies support both capabilities and actions. While much public attention is paid to the acquisition of capabilities, the effective and collaborative employment of those capabilities makes an outsized impact on operational effectiveness. Through these enduring partnerships, we reduce and eliminate potential seams and divisions in our collective defense.

As such, Operation Nanook is Canada's premier Arctic defense and security operation. It comprises several annual activities across Canada's North. One of those activities is Operation Nanook-Nunalivut (Op NA-NU). "Nanook" means "polar bear" and "Nunalivut" means "land that is ours" in Inuktitut. Op NA-NU, which takes place in February and March in various locations, demonstrates, develops and conducts research related to deploying, operating and fighting in Arctic winter conditions. In line with ONSAF, the CAF are expanding the scope of Op NA-NU from 2025 onward to include more participation from across the CAF and from allied nations. Some examples of this increased international participation include the 109th Airlift Wing, the Montana Air National Guard,


U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal and several researchers from the International Cooperative Engagement Program for Polar Research.

Canada is also looking to expand several of its other Operation Nanook activities and add new ones to strengthen its year-round presence and adopt a pan-domain approach to Arctic security. As warming waters continue to reshape the Arctic, Canada's commitment to a secure and stable North

Enduring partnerships between Canada, the U.S. and other allies support both capabilities and actions.

has never been more critical. Safeguarding sovereignty and security in this vast, challenging region requires a multifaceted approach that leverages national will, resources and the strengthening of enduring partnerships. Canada's integration of internal partnerships, including collaboration with local communities, alongside robust alliances with the U.S. and like-minded nations, demonstrates a comprehensive strategy to maintain Arctic security.

In the face of emerging threats and a rapidly changing environment, Canada's approach — built on internal resilience and international cooperation — ensures the Arctic remains a secure, prosperous region for generations to come. This ongoing focus on partnerships, reinforced by credible deterrence and operational readiness, will be essential as Canada continues to fulfill its responsibility to protect this vital and unique part of the world. ▣



His Majesty's Canadian Ship Harry DeWolf encounters a 25-story iceberg in the Southern Davis Strait, Nunavut.

PVT. BRENDAN GAMACHE/CANADIAN ARMED FORCES



THE WATCH STAFF

OPERATION AMALGAM EAGLE

DEFENSA, AFNORTH
conduct live-fly air
defense exercise

Showcasing the close partnership and shared interests of Mexico and the United States in air defense and security, the Mexican Armed Forces, the U.S. Department of Defense and federal agencies from both countries participated in a live-fly exercise November 13-14, 2024, at locations throughout Mexico and the U.S. The Amalgam Eagle 2024 air exercise, organized by the U.S. Northern Command's (USNORTHCOM) Air Forces Northern (AFNORTH) and Mexican Secretariat of National Defense (DEFENSA), brought together interagency partners to strengthen readiness and improve coordinated responses, contributing to a more secure air domain for both nations.

"Amalgam Eagle is a testament to the enduring partnership between Mexico and the United States," said Lt. Gen. Luke Ahmann, Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense Command Region – First Air Force (CONR-1AF) for AFNORTH & Air Forces Space (AFSPACE) commander. "This annual exercise not only bolsters our shared commitment to air defense but also reinforces the critical relationships that underpin our joint mission. By working together, we continue to fortify our partnership and elevate the air defense capabilities of both nations."

Various aircraft, including U.S. F-16 fighter jets and Mexican T-6C+ planes, participated in the exercise. The T-6C+ is a turboprop military trainer used by the Mexican Air Force (FAM) and Mexican Navy (MARINA). It's an enhanced version of the T-6 military trainer and can carry rocket pods and practice weapons.

A Beechcraft King Air turboprop acted as a track of interest (TOI) aircraft. An aircraft is designated as a TOI when there seems to be a discrepancy between its track and flight plan. The aircraft flew along the Mexico-U.S. border, simulating real-world scenarios to test combined air defense capabilities of both nations.

THE SCENARIOS

- An aircraft losing communications with air traffic control.
- A King Air plane changing course without proper clearance.
- A plane taking off from the U.S. changes course toward Mexico without proper notifications.
- Two aircraft having midair emergencies that require a search and rescue.

The exercise also included personnel exchanges: One U.S. representative visited Mexico's national air traffic control center, and two Mexican representatives visited the U.S. Customs and Border



Protection Air and Marine Operations Center. “Training together in binational exercises like Amalgam Eagle provides invaluable experiences and insight to enhance our compatibility and ability to address shared security concerns, improve readiness, and facilitate coordinated response protocols,” said Pat Glynn, an exercise planner for CONR-1AF (AFNORTH & AFSPACE).

Exercise participants from Mexico included members of the defense forces, Federal Civil Aviation Authority and Air Traffic Control Agency. From the U.S., AFNORTH, the 601st Air Operations Center, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Customs and Border Protection’s Air and Marine Operations participated.

AFNORTH is responsible for homeland defense, defense support of civil authorities and security cooperation. It is responsible for planning, preparing and executing aerospace-based missions for the USNORTHCOM commander. AFNORTH also provides Department of Defense capabilities for disaster response in support of the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, the



A member of AFNORTH participates in Amalgam Eagle 24. MICHAEL DOUGHERTY/U.S. AIR FORCE

National Interagency Fire Center, and state and local officials.

In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on March 12, 2024, Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, commander of USNORTHCOM and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, said: “It is already apparent the military-to-military relationship between the United States and Mexico is robust and expanding as both nations address the challenges posed by common threats to our citizens and shared interests. The bonds between USNORTHCOM and our Mexican military partners are broad, resilient and focused on expanding our combined capability to defend and secure North America from myriad state and nonstate threats. Countering competitor influence in the region remains a key priority for USNORTHCOM and our Mexican military partners, and as a direct result, the U.S. and Mexican militaries are more operationally compatible than at any point in our shared history.” ■



FUERZAS AMIGAS

**DEFENSA and U.S.
military conduct
joint disaster
response exercise**

THE WATCH STAFF

PHOTOS BY CATHRYN LINDSAY/U.S. AIR FORCE

For the first time, members of the Mexican and United States militaries conducted a joint disaster response exercise outside a military base as Fuerzas Amigas 24 broke new ground in cross-border collaboration. In June 2024, downtown Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, filled with smoke and 30 mock victims lying on the streets as Mexican authorities requested cross-border assistance from the U.S. to help contain a chemical fire from tank cars on a rail line connecting Ciudad Juárez to El Paso, Texas. The annual exercise demonstrated the increasing operational compatibility of Mexican and U.S. Armed Forces and the practical benefits of mutual aid in cross-border disasters.

About 220 U.S. and 280 Mexican service members participated in the five-day exercise, which had previously been

conducted on Mexican and U.S. military bases. Mexican Army Maj. Jose Luis Cora Torres said the scenario called for the Mexican Army to relieve overwhelmed local first responders. “We proceeded to take over. We determined the fire to be intense, so we called for air support,” Cora Torres told Border Report, a U.S. website dedicated to border issues.

U.S. forces deployed two UH-60 Black Hawks and a CH-47 Chinook to Mexico, along with essential lifesaving equipment, including breaching and breaking equipment, rope rescue, and a Jaws of Life. A unit specialized in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense from Joint Task Force Civil Support (JTF-CS) was equipped with tools to respond to a chemical spill, according to the El Paso Times website, citing information from U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM).



Mexican and U.S. military personnel discuss exercise Fuerzas Amigas 2024 with officials from the U.S. Consulate.



Participants in Fuerzas Amigas 24 transport a victim of a simulated earthquake.

U.S. Army personnel practice search and rescue techniques in a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during Fuerzas Amigas 2024.



Earlier in the week, participants responded to scenarios such as a stadium collapse, a chemical spill at a wastewater treatment plant, and the collapse of an airport terminal, and practiced medical evacuations using transport helicopters in Ciudad Juárez, according to the El Paso Times. The exercise concluded with a review of the training and an action plan to deal with future responses to disasters. If a disaster were to strike on the U.S. side of the border, Mexican forces are prepared to assist and support a U.S. response, Cora Torres told Border Report.

Fuerzas Amigas is designed to increase collaboration between the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense, U.S. Army North and JTF-CS — components of USNORTHCOM. Fuerzas Amigas supports each nation's humanitarian assistance and disaster response policies and plans: Mexico's National Defense Plan-III and U.S. Defense Support of Civil Authorities.

"The main purpose of [these exercises] is to improve our procedures," Mexican Gen. Rubén Zamudio, the Mexican commander of the 5th Military Zone, said when the exercise began. "Our teams are working together to perfection. Year after year, we will continue to improve." U.S. Brig. Gen. Tomika Seaberry said Fuerzas Amigas deepened the bonds between the militaries. "The Mexican Army is our partner ... our friend," she said, according to the Times. "It is rewarding for us to save the lives of



Members of the Mexican and U.S. militaries practice extinguishing fires during Fuerzas Amigas 2024 in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

our citizens and use our combined resources to do that."

Fuerzas Amigas, which means "friendly forces," began in 2011 and has occurred yearly except during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2024 iteration was the first time the exercise scenarios had been conducted in public view, sparking considerable interest among residents of Ciudad Juárez, the Times reported. "Fuerzas Amigas has enhanced humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities for both nations," a USNORTHCOM spokesperson told the Times. "In recent years, the U.S. has assisted Mexico in responding to earthquakes and hurricanes, while Mexico has assisted the U.S. with wildfire operations." ■



OPERATION FENIX

MARINA, MARFORNORTH conduct amphibious training operation

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY MARINA

The Mexican Navy (MARINA) and U.S. Marine Corps conducted the second edition of the bilateral amphibious exercise Operation Fenix on Santa Margarita Island in Baja California Sur in March and April 2025. Practicing scenarios that ranged from medical evacuations to live-fire events, Fenix demonstrated the operational

compatibility of the partner nations.

An initial planning conference was held in October 2024, involving a team designated by the General Staff of the Mexican Navy, liaisons from the Office of Defense Coordination of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico and representatives from U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM).

This is not the first time an amphibious training operation has taken place between the countries on Santa Margarita Island. In 2018, a training exercise led by Marine Forces Northern Command (MARFORNORTH) included instructors and was executed by Mexican Marine Infantry and Army troops, as well as ships and aircraft from the Navy and a helicopter from the Mexican Air Force.

In 2023, Mexico's secretary of the Navy authorized the exercise to be conducted on Santa Margarita Island with the mission of enhancing amphibious response capabilities and operational compatibility, strengthening bilateral cooperation

A Zodiac boat launches from the Mexican Navy ship ARM Usumacinta during an amphibious landing exercise.





I Mexican and U.S. Marines board a Panther helicopter.



I Marines from Mexico and the U.S. conduct an exercise on the island of Santa Margarita to improve amphibious response capabilities.



I Mexican Marines load a 105 mm shell during a live-fire exercise.

between the Mexican Navy and MARFORNORTH. The exercise involved the fictional recovery of Santa Margarita Island, occupied by rebel forces.

A PLANNING SUCCESS

Hosting this exercise presented logistical challenges for the Mexican Navy, such as increasing accommodation, food, water and energy supplies on Santa Margarita Island, home to the Naval Sector of Puerto Cortés. This required the planning team to issue instructions promptly to prepare troops at least a month in advance and to conduct training exercises that standardize amphibious tactics, techniques and procedures, including combined arms operations (surface, aviation, field artillery) with live-fire exercises.

The exercise planning and execution involved MARFORNORTH staff and troops and featured an amphibious raid with reconnaissance, shaping operations to neutralize enemy antiaircraft threats and indirect fire, as well as surface and air-landed assaults on targets near the beach and deeper inland.

In addition to fulfilling the exercise's fictional mission, the Mexican Navy aimed to achieve other training objectives, such as:

- Training tactical fire support controllers.
- Live-fire exercises with the 105 mm artillery battery.
- Naval surface fire support with high ballistic trajectories by surface units.
- Effective use of the Wave system at the operation's command and control center.
- Close air support with helicopters and planes using live fire.
- Helicopter crew training for shipboard operations and medical evacuation.

In the previous exercise, the Mexican Task Force consisted of four surface units, six aircraft, one Marine infantry company, one field artillery battery, one special forces team, and one team to search, locate and neutralize explosive devices, totaling 452 people.

MARFORNORTH's task force included an exercise control group (six people) stationed on land at the Puerto Cortés Naval Sector with a combat operations center, while the landing force operations center (11 people) was set up aboard the Mexican Navy ship ARM Usumacinta for tactical planning and operations monitoring. Also, two special forces reconnaissance teams (seven people each) participated, bringing the total to 31 participants.

The 2025 edition of the exercise involved more naval units from each nation, as well as the participation of observers from other countries in the hemisphere. **III**



MEXICO'S CYBER FORCE

Armed forces expand AI use in military operations

LT. ALEJANDRO SÁNCHEZ JUÁREZ/MARINA

Governments and societies worldwide have become increasingly dependent on algorithms with autonomous intelligent machines facilitating daily tasks and decisions previously made by humans. Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to grow exponentially, bringing innumerable advantages for large-scale information gathering. It learns from itself by continuously improving its algorithms in increasingly complex situations.

The Mexican Navy's (MARINA) General Coordinator of Cyberspace trains and develops the cyber force and acquires advanced technologies. It adapts to current needs in cyber defense and cybersecurity operations, establishing itself as one of Mexico's key institutions with highly qualified personnel in the fifth domain of warfare: cyberspace. These efforts help maintain the integrity, stability and permanence of the Mexican state.

AI's applications are extensive, but one of the areas of greatest impact is in global security and defense in cyberspace. In a universe where conflicts have become constant, where threats are transferred to cyberspace, and where invisible cybercriminals can attack and breach technological systems and critical

infrastructure, AI becomes a fundamental cybernetic weapon for military strategies and operations. That leads to important questions for the development of military operations in cyberspace and the possible ethical consequences — including regulation of the legal framework — that must be studied and approved by organizations and governments of the world to protect the fundamental rights of humanity.

AI's ability to rapidly analyze and process information from various physical and virtual sources — including the web, deep web, dark web, satellites, internet-connected devices, smart cameras and drones — enhances real-time decision-making. This analysis leads to a reduction of risk. Also, AI supports the development of new cyber weapons for defense, capable of inflicting massive damage on enemy entities, including criminal organizations and cyber terrorists.

The military arms race in cyberspace has begun, driven by AI's ability to predict, identify, and respond to and learn from conflicts and vulnerabilities that affect civilian, governmental and academic actors.

"States and industry alike have intensified their efforts to develop increasingly sophisticated systems





Mexico's Secretariat of the Navy oversees the country's cyber force and focuses on the growing use of artificial intelligence in the defense sector.

Wars and conflicts are evolving with the emergence of new technologies and autonomous entities. Cyberspace is becoming the main battlefield of our time, where the main conflicts between nations will take place as a result of the extraordinary capacity and adoption of these technologies.

at an exponential rate and without the necessary guardrails, creating a de facto arms race for AI superiority,” Jimena Sofía Viveros Álvarez, a Mexican lawyer and member of the U.N. secretary-general’s High-Level Advisory Body on AI, wrote in a November 2024 post on *Opinio Juris*, a blogging website that focuses on international law.

However, the same AI technologies that enhance defense and security also are available to cybercriminals. It provides the opportunity to develop malware to attack, penetrate, and take control of all kinds of systems, devices and critical infrastructures, which leads to another field of study — cyber criminology.

Wars and conflicts are evolving with the emergence of new technologies and autonomous entities. Cyberspace is becoming the main battlefield of our time, where the main conflicts between nations will take place as a result of the extraordinary capacity

and adoption of these technologies.

Ethical and legal systems have traditionally evolved to maintain societal control, not to address challenges posed by machines. Therefore, many ethical and legal questions persist. How can autonomous and intelligent weapons be held responsible? Who is to blame if a robot or system commits war crimes? Who — or what — should be prosecuted: the weapon itself, the Soldier operating it, the commanding officers or the corporation that manufactured it?

Viveros also warns that some AI technologies “risk lowering the threshold of the use of force and raise challenges for compliance with international humanitarian law as well as human rights violations.”

There is an ethical need to maintain a constant level of human control, ensuring that there is always a responsible individual, and that accountability for their actions and decisions is verifiable. ■



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