# Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Hearing

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## FULL TEXT

"Department of Defense Missile Defense Activities in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY2024 and the Future Years Defense Program."

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U.S. Senate Documents

Chairman King, Ranking Member Fischer, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for the honor of representing the men and women of U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). From the day I assumed Command in August 2020, USNORTHCOM and NORAD have worked tirelessly to defend the homeland and North America in an extraordinarily challenging strategic environment requiring the commands to adapt new approaches to how we plan, prepare, and operate. That innovation and evolution is necessary to outpace our competitors and is a testament to the devotion of our military and civilian personnel who stand constant watch over the United States and Canada.

The commands have made tremendous progress in a short time, yet much work remains. While the United States military remains the most powerful and professional force in history, and our alliances and partnerships provide a vital strategic advantage over any potential adversary, it is clear that our competitive advantage is eroding. The successful defense of North America requires the Department of Defense to move beyond outdated assumptions and plans that do not fully reflect competitor capability, capacity, and intent to threaten the homeland. Likewise, continued action is required to build enduring advantages and outpace the gains made by competitors around the globe. This will require the Department to invest in modernization, implement innovative processes, prioritize our personnel and improve civilian hiring practices, and increase agile decision making at all levels.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Today's strategic environment is the most complicated and potentially dangerous in my 35+ years of service. Our competitors and potential adversaries, particularly the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia, continue to challenge the rules-based international order that has provided global stability and prosperity over the last seven decades. They seek to advance their interests and gain global advantages through political intimidation, economic coercion, cyber and information operations, asymmetric attacks on infrastructure, and the direct threat or actual employment of military force.

The People's Republic of China (PRC)

The PRC remains NORAD and USNORTHCOM's long-term pacing challenge. Beijing continues ambitious military modernization at an alarming pace. It would be naive to think their sprint to develop advanced cyber tools, maritime capabilities, and hypersonic technology has only regional applications, as the PRC continues to develop advanced long-range conventional and strategic capabilities and the infrastructure necessary to project military power at greater distances. Underpinning this growth is a rapid nuclear expansion that is on pace for the PRC to expand their nuclear stockpile from what DoD estimates is over 400 today to about 1,500 by 2035. While less observable, the PRC's aggressive efforts to exploit the information technology sector are accelerating an increasing threat to North America.

The PRC's aggressive actions in the Pacific in mid-2022 following Congressional visits to Taiwan illustrate how regional events create geostrategic ripple effects that can quickly reach our shores. President Xi is likely to use his next term in office to double down on the PRC's revisionist foreign policy, and is likely to include global efforts to undermine the United States and bolster partnerships with U.S. competitors, including Russia. In February 2022, Xi signaled his intent to follow this path when he declared the PRC-Russia friendship would have no limits in a public pronouncement just weeks before Russia's illegal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The PRC has almost certainly watched the war to draw lessons that will inform its next steps toward Taiwan.

Xi's statement also proved to be more than rhetorical when, in May 2022, the PRC and Russia conducted a combined bomber patrol over the Sea of Japan coinciding with the Quad Leaders' Summit in Tokyo. The May 2022 bomber patrol was followed by a second bomber patrol in November 2022. The cooperation is not confined to the air domain. PRC and Russian naval forces conducted a combined patrol in the fall of 2022 that covered 7,000 nautical miles in the Pacific, included a first-ever combined naval transit of the Aleutian Islands, and came on the heels of Xi sending scores of troops to Russia to participate in Moscow's largest annual military exercise. For years, the PRC has relied on Russian military materiel to build its armed forces, and I am aware of reports that the PRC has transferred materiel with military applications to Russia during Russia's war against Ukraine. These actions are more than symbolic and demonstrate the PRC's growing power projection capabilities, which will likely encompass the Arctic in the next decade--a region the PRC is eying with its self-proclaimed status as a near-Arctic state.

Russia

As USNORTHCOM and NORAD take necessary measures to defend against a growing PRC threat, the commands continue to defend the United States and Canada every day against Russian aggression in all domains. Russia's brazen and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 proved that Russia has the capability and capacity to inflict significant damage to infrastructure and other critical targets with its all-domain long-range strike capabilities. Russia also has a history of conducting clandestine operations in other nations to achieve its political objectives. While Russia has overplayed its hand, suffered significant losses to the heroic Ukrainian defense forces, and inadvertently helped to unify NATO, it has gained real-world combat experience as it enters its second year of the full-scale invasion. The meager performance of Russia's ground forces in Ukraine should not overshadow other capabilities it has showcased in Ukraine, including air- and sea-launched cruise missiles capable of striking North America, cyber activities, and economic coercion. For the first time, we also saw Russia employ its new KILLJOY air-launched hypersonic missile in combat.

Concurrent with its war against Ukraine, Russia has also continued to conduct major military exercises and test developmental capabilities that will compound the threat to North America once fielded. In April 2022, Russia tested the massive SARMAT ICBM, a highly capable strategic weapon that helps reinforce the critical importance of a modern and reliable U.S. strategic deterrent. Meanwhile, Russia is testing its special mission Belgorod nuclear submarine, a modern platform capable of carrying the nuclear-capable Poseidon torpedo, designed to hold the homeland at risk by striking coastal targets from thousands of miles away.

The test of the Belgorod followed Russia's Arctic military exercise that included live-fire cruise missile launches designed to test Moscow's readiness for a conflict in the high north. Last fall, Russia added its first SEVERODVINSK-class conventional and nuclear capable cruise missile submarine to the Pacific Fleet, which poses a new challenge to our defense of the western approaches to North America. In October 2022, in the midst of elevated international tensions stemming from Russian threats to escalate its already brutal campaign in Ukraine, Russia chose to proceed with its annual strategic forces exercise, including demonstrations of multiple nuclear strike capabilities. Finally, in January 2023, a Russian GORSHKOV-class frigate transited the western Atlantic while armed with Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missiles.

I believe it would be shortsighted to view Russia's war against Ukraine as a limited regional crisis. Russia's actions increase the very real risk of miscalculation and the conflict's expansion beyond its current boundaries--scenarios that could rapidly increase the risks to North America and continental defense. If Russia should seek to compel allies to reconsider their support for Ukraine through escalatory actions or follow through with the desperate threats to use

nuclear weapons in Ukraine, the risks to the Homeland would increase.

DPRK and Iran

The Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) tested at least 65 conventional theater and long-range nuclear capabilities over the last year. That number includes the first tests of a new larger, longer range, and more capable ICBM, adding another missile that can likely reach the entire homeland and one the regime claims is capable of carrying a hypersonic glide vehicle payload. The DPRK tested more missiles in 2022 than any time in its history, showing that the regime will continue to prioritize military capabilities at the expense of needed food and pandemic relief for its people. Public reports of renewed nuclear test preparations further highlight the grave danger this regime poses to regional and global stability. We must remain ready for multiple contingencies and potential crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

The DPRK's reckless pursuit of advanced nuclear capabilities and robust ballistic missile research, development, and testing threatens regional stability, our allies and partners, and potentially the homeland. However, today I remain confident in our current capability to defend the homeland against a limited DPRK ballistic missile threat. Looking forward, I am concerned about future capacity and capability to respond to advancing DPRK ballistic missile threats, making it crucial to field the Next Generation Interceptor (NGI) as funded in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-328).

Iran has not shied away from pursuing malign global activities, including in North America; the regime continues to pose a significant threat to the United States, as well as our partners in the Central Command region. The August 2022 disclosure of an Iranian plot to assassinate a former senior U.S. official on U.S. territory illustrated the brazenness of the Iranian government. The regime's decision to provide Russia with unmanned loitering munitions used to attack civilian infrastructure in Ukraine provides further evidence of Iran's embrace of destabilizing activity. A future decision by the regime to pursue an ICBM-class missile would add yet another threat vector capable of striking North America.

Regional Security Threats

I remain concerned about transnational organized crime in Mexico and the Western Hemisphere and the unrelenting violence it spawns and insecurity it creates, as cartels vie for control of lucrative illicit markets. Cartels control fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine trafficking as well as other drugs, and are demonstrating the capability to use improvised explosives and small-unmanned aerial systems against Mexican security forces in Mexico, which will likely embolden the cartels and challenge our partners. As USNORTHCOM supports our law enforcement and international partners in countering transnational criminal organizations in our area of operations, I remain steadfast in my commitment to our military partners in Mexico and The Bahamas.

I commend Mexico's arrest last summer of the cartel member who brutally murdered a DEA agent decades earlier, as well as the recent arrests of Ovidio Guzman Lopez, the son of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, and Jose Rodolfo Villareal-Hernandez, a Mexican cartel leader known as "El Gato." These arrests are examples of a shared commitment to justice, buttressed by shared values and our decades-long partnership, which stands in stark contrast to PRC and Russian malign and self-serving activities in the Western Hemisphere.

I am committed to deepening the already strong partnership with the Mexican and Bahamian militaries to advance our mutual goals, from upholding human rights to ensuring hemispheric defense. I was proud to host my counterparts from the Mexican Department of National Defense (SEDENA) and Department of the Navy (SEMAR) in early 2022 and visit The Bahamas in late 2021, and we will continue to work with Mexico and The Bahamas to stamp out attempts by the PRC or Russia to divide our countries and our partnerships.

Transnational challenges

USNORTHCOM's 20th anniversary offered a reminder of the transnational challenges that have shaped the Command from its inception. Foremost is the enduring transnational terrorist threat to North America, led by Sunni extremist groups and their supporters in North America. The arrest in August 2022 of an ISIS-inspired individual in New Mexico who had surveilled a U.S. military base is a stark reminder that military facilities remain attractive targets to terrorists. More broadly, the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan and violent extremist groups' ongoing

presence in the region indicate a renewed threat to the region that we cannot discount. This extremist threat transcends south Asia and extends to other regions with security challenges, including the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, where terrorists continue to operate, train, and plan.

Where We Are Today: 20 Years of USNORTHCOM and 65 Years of NORAD

USNORTHCOM was established on October 1st, 2002, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States, marking the first time since the colonial era a single commander was responsible for the defense of the U.S. homeland. Twenty years later, the likelihood of a major attack inside the United States by a foreign violent extremist organization has diminished following a generational, whole-of-nation effort. However, the primary threat to the homeland is now far more significant and consequential. Multiple peer competitors and rogue states possess the capability and capacity to threaten our citizens, critical infrastructure, and vital institutions. These competitors possess, or are developing, the modern capabilities that limit the time and options available to decision makers responsible for defending our interests. In addition to destructive kinetic and cyber capabilities, malign actors actively exploit our democratic society by spreading disinformation that drives wedges between our citizens, undermines democracy, and weakens our alliances.

In crisis or conflict, potential adversaries will likely seek to interfere with the Department's ability to project power abroad. Disruptions of military and civilian transportation infrastructure in North America could impede the ability of the United States and Canada to project combat power. Today I assess, as I have for nearly three years, that homeland defense is a potential limiting factor to ensuring rapid and effective implementation and execution of global contingency plans. This is due to my lack of domain awareness, limited timely access to forces that are ready to operate throughout my areas of responsibility, including the Arctic, and a lack of resilient infrastructure enabling the Joint Force to fight in and from the homeland while ensuring forward power projection.

Defending the homeland against an ever-growing array of kinetic and non-kinetic threats will continue to require a collaborative, whole-of-nation approach to assessing vulnerabilities and developing appropriate deterrence, denial, and defense strategies. Cyber risks to critical infrastructure remain a significant concern and a domain awareness gap. DoD is tasked only with defending defense networks, but military facilities and missions frequently rely on civilian lifelines such as energy grids, transportation infrastructure, and other critical infrastructure. USNORTHCOM, due to law and policy, has limited insight into potential risks to commercial networks, which could lead to uncertainty in planning for consequence management. DoD's establishment of policy regarding the defense of critical infrastructure is a necessary step forward, and USNORTHCOM will continue to work with the Department and key mission partners, to include agencies with critical infrastructure security and cybersecurity responsibilities, to ensure key defense infrastructure is defended from attacks.

NORAD, the unique U.S. and Canadian bi-national command, was established in May 1958 to defend North America from Cold War-era Russian strategic bombers entering U.S. and Canadian airspace from the Arctic approaches. Sixty-five years later, Russia has restored its capability to threaten North America with modernized bombers, surface ships, and submarines armed with long-range, highly precise nuclear and conventional cruise missiles. The PRC is making rapid progress in developing similar capabilities, which will further complicate NORAD's warning missions and affect national strategic decision making.

While NORAD's missions to provide aerospace warning, aerospace control, and maritime warning remain critical to homeland defense, action and investment are needed to keep pace with competitors that clearly seek to hold North America at risk above and below the nuclear threshold. For decades, NORAD has relied heavily on the North Warning System arrayed along the Arctic coasts of Canada and Alaska to detect potential airborne threats to North America. It is clear that our competitors possess long-range strike capabilities that could be used to attack the United States and Canada from outside the detection range of legacy sensors.

In order to maintain domain awareness and ensure integrated threat warning and attack assessment to national leadership, the United States and Canada must continue to move swiftly to field Over the Horizon Radar (OTHR), as funded in the FY23 Consolidated Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-328). OTHR is a proven, affordable technology that will ensure our ability to detect threats from surface to space in the approaches to North America. I

commend both the Department of Defense and the Canadian Department of National Defense for their commitment in FY23 to investing in OTHR, and I respectfully urge both Governments to ensure this vital capability is fielded as quickly as possible.

NORAD's contributions to homeland and continental defense will remain vital for many years to come, and will continue to rely on strong cooperation and shared investment between the United States and Canada. The U.S. and Canadian continental defense framework has an unrivaled legacy of success and serves as an international model of defense cooperation. I remain encouraged by the bi-national commitments to modernizing the platforms, sensors, and capabilities necessary to execute NORAD's missions; this collaborative approach to deterring and defending against threats to North America is critical. NORAD must continue to look to the future and take necessary measures today to counter the threats of tomorrow, and investments by the United States and Canada must address kinetic and non-kinetic threats to our nations.

Potential threats to North America routinely transit international borders and the boundaries between U.S. geographic combatant command areas of responsibility. NORAD's ability to provide timely aerospace warning and control and maritime warning will be bolstered by the United States and Canada's joint commitment to improving global domain awareness, modernizing command and control systems to provide faster, better-informed decision making, and continuing collaborative research, development, and innovation. These efforts will ensure NORAD's ability to compete with the PRC and Russia for years to come while clearly signaling a lasting commitment to a robust, modern, and effective defense of North America.

USNORTHCOM and NORAD Priorities

My priorities for NORAD and USNORTHCOM directly reflect the need to inform the rapid, agile decisions required of senior leaders in this dynamic and complex strategic environment. Our competitors continue to field capabilities specifically intended to strike with limited warning, which decreases the time and options available to national leaders in a crisis. Continuing to trust legacy processes and capabilities increases risk to the homeland and compounds the risk of miscalculation and inadvertent escalation. USNORTHCOM and NORAD are working urgently to increase the domain awareness, information sharing, and global integration necessary to ensure national leaders have as much time and as many options as possible.

As competitors and potential adversaries continue to field advanced all-domain capabilities with the potential to create significant effects in the homeland, it is imperative that the United States and Canada move quickly to improve domain awareness from the seafloor to space and cyberspace for all approaches to North America. The Over-the-Horizon Radars (OTHR) funded in the FY23 President's Budget, along with the OTHRs announced by the Government of Canada as part of NORAD modernization, will leverage proven technology and will significantly improve the ability of USNORTHCOM and NORAD to detect and track potential threats to North America and the homeland from the Earth's surface to space. That capability, in turn, will directly correlate to more time available to leaders at all levels, enabling the creation and employment of better deterrence options and if required, defeat options.

U.S. Space Force investments in advanced space-based missile warning sensor capabilities show great promise with particular regard to hypersonic and advanced missile threats. These future systems will detect, track, and identify threats, including hypersonic threats, enable better warning and assessment, and develop actionable targeting solutions, at a much faster pace than we currently experience, while also delivering an inherent operational resilience. Given our competitors' advanced maritime domain capabilities, I fully support the Navy's investment in a modernized Integrated Undersea Surveillance System. These capabilities, in turn, will directly correlate to more time and options available to produce a favorable outcome for the United States and Canada.

Canada's plans to fund a layered surveillance system that will improve shared domain awareness in the northern air and maritime approaches to North America will have significant, long-term benefits for both NORAD and USNORTHCOM's missions. Planned Canadian investment in Arctic and Polar radars and spaced-based surveillance systems, along with advanced munitions, communications, and infrastructure clearly demonstrates shared commitment to NORAD and the combined defense of the United States and Canada.

In addition to the investment in OTHR, NORAD and USNORTHCOM have also demonstrated the potential for linking existing platforms and sharing data with multiple commands, interagency and international partners. By sharing data previously trapped in bureaucratic and organizational stovepipes through innovative programs like Pathfinder, Northstar, and the Global Information Dominance Experiments (GIDE), USNORTHCOM and NORAD have proven that it is possible to rapidly improve domain awareness and streamline global information sharing without the costs associated with fielding exquisite new capabilities. It is crucial that the Department of Defense and the Services, as well as the Canadian Department of National Defense, continue the work to unlock the remarkable potential of these initiatives.

I am encouraged by the establishment of the Department's Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO), and I believe that the CDAO must be empowered to rapidly integrate systems, software and platforms in order to maintain our competitive advantage across the Joint Force. Over the past several years, actions by each of our competitors and potential adversaries have made it clear that regional actions have global diplomatic, economic, and military ramifications. It is simply unrealistic to assume that crises will remain confined by artificial boundaries, and we must adapt plans and perspectives to account for that global reality.

The feasibility of every other Geographic Combatant Command's plans will require active campaigning in and from North America, and successful defense of the homeland is necessary to deter adversaries and assure allies and partners. Therefore, I have also directed that USNORTHCOM and NORAD prioritize homeland defense campaigning to demonstrate our readiness, capabilities, and resiliency. I am also operationalizing the commands to accelerate the flow of information from sensor to decision maker. Our competitors and potential adversaries have shown that they will hold the homeland at risk in a conflict, and USNORTHCOM and NORAD are acting today to ensure homeland defense plans are understood, exercised, and resourced.

While USNORTHCOM and NORAD have made strides in the homeland defense mission, building a resilient Joint Force is a fundamental element of all Department planning, exercises, and operations. The DoD's worldwide missions and responsibilities must evolve from regionally focused approaches to globally integrated efforts that account for finite resources and associated risks. At present, I am concerned for the commands' ability to execute assigned missions--including contingency and operations plans in support of homeland defense. I am limited by a lack of timely access to forces that are organized, trained, and equipped to operate throughout the NORAD area of operations and the NORTHCOM area of responsibility, as well as by insufficient supporting infrastructure.

A strong homeland defense is the foundation of our nation's ability to project power globally while deterring aggression and achieving our strategic objectives in competition, crisis, and conflict. As such, every plan, exercise, and policy decision must consider the necessity of defending the homeland when evaluating competing demands for forces and threats to global campaigning. That, in turn, will require the Department of Defense and the Canadian Department of National Defense to place greater focus on developing the depth, flexibility, advanced technologies, and supporting infrastructure required to respond to future challenges while addressing growing threats to the homeland.

Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA)

When directed by the Secretary of Defense, USNORTHCOM provides Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) in the Continental United States, Alaska, and Puerto Rico. In preparing for and responding to major natural and human-caused disasters, USNORTHCOM serves as the DSCA synchronizer to support assessment and recovery while simultaneously acting as the supported combatant command in the command's area of operations. USNORTHCOM often supports federal, state, tribal, territorial, and local (FSTTL) disaster relief efforts. These collaborative, whole-of-government efforts demonstrate national resilience that should reassure the American public, while also making clear to potential aggressors, that the United States routinely executes interagency domestic relief operations that allow our nation to recovery quickly following even large-scale disasters. It is equally important for our FSTTL partners to identify and address their capabilities and capacity gaps to fully perform the roles, missions, and operations under their authorities. This kind of response, particularly when it is accomplished with little or no military support, can generate a deterrent effect by casting doubt in competitors' minds about their ability to produce

significant effects from an attack on the homeland.
USNORTHCOM is uniquely suited to support our federal partners in the aftermath of a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) attack. The Department must remain committed to this crucial mission to ensure these highly trained, specialized elements stand ready to respond immediately in the event of a weapon of mass destruction event in the United States.
I continue to stress the importance of USNORTHCOM's defense support of civil authorities, as rapidly executed, well-planned, multi-agency responses to wildfires, hurricanes, pandemics, and other significant disruptions are perhaps the most visible demonstration of the military's support to the American people. USNORTHCOM works year-round with our mission partners at every level to strengthen relationships, improve communications, and incorporate lessons learned from previous responses in order to deliver rapid and effective support to lead federal agencies. Our command takes tremendous pride in supporting our FSTTL partners, while helping to highlight the resourcefulness and solidarity of the American people in the face of adversity. It should be clear to competitors and potential aggressors that the United States routinely responds to and recovers quickly from large-scale disruptions--and USNORTHCOM is always ready to support those efforts with military capabilities as directed by the Secretary.
USNORTHCOM support to civil authorities includes the command's ongoing support of federal law enforcement efforts to counter the transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that have caused so much harm to our nation. Illicit drugs trafficked by transnational criminal enterprises kill more than one hundred thousand U.S. citizens each year, and the number of fatal overdoses have risen dramatically as cartels have increased the volume of fentanyl smuggled into the United States. As directed by the Secretary of Defense and in accordance with my direct guidance, USNORTHCOM's subordinate command, Joint Task Force North (JTF-N), provides U.S. federal law enforcement partners with intelligence and counter-threat finance analysis and other support as requested to disrupt the sophisticated financial and physical networks used to infiltrate illicit goods and exploited human traffic into the United States. The important work done by USNORTHCOM and JTF-N in countering transnational criminal organizations and disrupting the flow of illegal drugs into the United States is a national security imperative that directly supports homeland defense.
Natural disasters, public health threats, and transnational irregular migration will likely continue to require DoD support for our lead federal partners. Environmental change will also continue to have a direct impact on military readiness and resources, as was made clear by the massive destructive power of Hurricane Ian in September 2022 and by western wildfires that are growing in scale and frequency as fire seasons now extend throughout most of the year. It is necessary to plan and account for the growing likelihood of natural disasters that disrupt military operations and damage critical infrastructure, while units involved in response operations require time to reset and recover after completing their missions. The long-term consequences of extreme weather, rising sea levels, and increased flooding will continue to affect DoD missions, infrastructure, and personnel, especially those in the homeland.
Security Cooperation
In addition to our more visible homeland defense and DSCA operations, USNORTHCOM continues to reap tremendous benefits from our military-to-military relationships with our allies and partners in Canada, Mexico, and The Bahamas. Security cooperation with our neighbors is crucial to regional security, countering the influence of peer competitors, and addressing shared challenges. Security cooperation provides a critical and lasting advantage over our more isolated competitors, and I am grateful to the Department and to this Committee for your ongoing support of USNORTHCOM's vital work with our allies and partners. I am proud to work with my military counterparts in Canada, Mexico, and The Bahamas as we support one another's efforts to defend our nations and stand united against malign actors seeking to expand influence and presence in the Western Hemisphere.
The military-to-military relationship between the United States and Canada remains extraordinary and vital. In addition to standing side by side as partners in NORAD for nearly 65 years, Canada has been a stalwart ally in continental defense and operations overseas for decades. The unique trust between our militaries is immediately apparent within the USNORTHCOM and NORAD headquarters, as U.S. and Canadian personnel work side-by-side

in pursuit of shared missions and objectives. The Canadian Armed Forces' shared commitment to improved domain awareness, information sharing, and modernization of the capabilities necessary for deterrence and continental defense is essential to our united efforts to defend North America, and I am fortunate to serve alongside such steadfast and trusted allies.

The Mexican Department of National Defense (SEDENA) and Department of the Navy (SEMAR) continue to meet daunting internal and external security challenges with professionalism and resiliency. Keenly focused on enhancing regional defense, our Mexican military partners continue to make major investments in a modern, capable, and reliable force capable of interoperability with the U.S. and other partners. In light of that important effort, USNORTHCOM strongly supports SEDENA and SEMAR modernization initiatives, including the potential divestment of their fleet of MI-17 helicopters in favor of Western helicopters.

In April 2022, it was my honor to host the Secretaries of SEDENA and SEMAR at USNORTHCOM for the Bilateral Military Cooperation Roundtable (BMCR). During this important annual dialogue, USNORTHCOM and our Mexican military partners conducted a candid and highly productive assessment of our mutual security challenges, associated requirements, and shared commitment to addressing threats to our nations. Over the course of three days, Secretary General Sandoval, Secretary Admiral Ojeda, and I reaffirmed our military-to-military relationship and committed to a number of concrete steps that will have significant and lasting positive impacts on regional security.

Our partners in the Royal Bahamian Defense Force (RBDF) continue to punch above their weight as they continue to provide important contributions to regional security. USNORTHCOM and the RBDF operate maritime surveillance systems at Great Inagua and Coral Harbour, and plans are on track to add a third site in the coming years. That shared capability has significant benefits for domain awareness in the southern approaches to North America and demonstrates The Bahamas' ongoing commitment to security cooperation with USNORTHCOM. Our collaboration has taken on added importance as the PRC's diplomatic corps in Nassau continues to produce anti-U.S. public statements while highlighting Chinese economic investment and humanitarian relief efforts in The Bahamas. USNORTHCOM is strongly committed to a long-term partnership with the RBDF, and continued whole-of-government engagement and investment by the United States. As you know, the United States has been without a confirmed Ambassador to The Bahamas since 2011. No action was taken on the President's nominee last year, and the nomination was resubmitted in January 2023. This senior diplomatic position is critical to demonstrating the importance of the relationship between the United States and The Bahamas and to mitigating the PRC's efforts to gain a foothold only 50 miles from the U.S. east coast.

The Arctic

The ability of the joint force to operate and campaign in the Arctic remains a pressing concern for USNORTHCOM and NORAD. The PRC and Russia continue to invest in Arctic capabilities as both seek to increase presence and influence in the region while shifting the rules-based international order to their advantage. More than 50 percent of USNORTHCOM's area of operations is in the Arctic, and USNORTHCOM and NORAD's priorities in the region continue to focus on increased presence, campaigning through joint training and exercises, and close collaboration with allies and partners.

The effects of environmental change in the Arctic will have significant impacts on accessibility, infrastructure, and competition for the foreseeable future, and the region remains the most unforgiving operational environment on earth. As the Department balances the demands of global mission requirements with difficult budgetary choices, USNORTHCOM and NORAD require access to trained and ready forces capable of operating throughout the commands' areas of responsibility--to include the Arctic. The Joint Force must keep sight of the fact that special training and purpose-built equipment are necessary to operate in a region in which extreme climate, distance, and geography quickly overtake the unprepared.

Over the last year, USNORTHCOM and NORAD collaborated with USEUCOM, USINDOPACOM, USTRANSCOM, USSOCOM and the military Services while conducting joint exercises in Alaska, Greenland, and northern Canada. These demanding events expose Joint Force participants to the demands of the Arctic operating environment and help to reinforce the necessity of a force trained and equipped to survive in the extreme cold and remoteness that

defines much of the region. I am encouraged by the strategic objectives stated in the U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic that support better understanding of the region, exercising presence, and capitalizing on the definitive advantage of our international alliances and partnerships.

While the military Services' respective Arctic strategies acknowledge the importance of the Arctic and the need to develop the capabilities needed to operate and compete in the region, direct investment in Arctic-capable platforms, training, and infrastructure continues to lag. It is necessary that the Joint Force has the ability to compete, fight, and win in the Arctic in the coming years, and the time for the Services to invest in the required equipment, infrastructure, and training is now. The PRC and Russia have clearly demonstrated their intent to expand their Arctic presence and operations, and I urge the Department of Defense, the Services, my fellow combatant commanders, and the Canadian Department of National Defense to move faster toward improving our collective ability to succeed in this strategically vital region.

Conclusion

Homeland defense remains the core mission of both USNORTHCOM and NORAD. The one constant throughout my time in command has been the extraordinary pace at which our competitors have advanced their capabilities to threaten the homeland. Despite those clear risks, the processes used by the Department of Defense and the Canadian Department of National Defense for planning, acquisitions, personnel hiring, technology development, and other activities necessary to the success of the defense enterprise remain largely unchanged from when I received my commission nearly 36 years ago.

As competitors develop greater capability, capacity, and intent to challenge the United States, Canada, and the rules-based international order, I believe that the greatest strategic risk for the United States stems from our own inability to adapt at a pace required by the changing strategic environment. In an era of incredible innovation and technological achievement, inflexible, outdated processes are a greater impediment to success than many of our competitors' capability advancements. We cannot continue to rely on Industrial Age practices and legacy platforms to compete in a digital age, and if we fail to evolve at the pace demanded by the strategic environment, our competitive advantage will continue to erode.

The Department and Congress must also be more willing to accept the relatively low risks associated with retiring legacy platforms in order to ensure our ability to fight and win against advanced and well-resourced competitors. Over the last decade, the PRC and Russia have made extraordinary technological advancements while the Department remains encumbered by obsolete capabilities and associated costs. To defend the homeland, USNORTHCOM and NORAD require a modern force with the capacity and capability to deter and if required defeat advanced peer competitors. Retiring systems that have exceeded their operational lifespans--to include fighters and command and control platforms at the end of their service lives--is necessary to accelerate the arrival of next generation capabilities.

Along with faster, more flexible development and acquisitions, the Joint Force requires predictable and timely funding to maintain readiness and increase capability, capacity, and resilience. The Continuing Resolutions that have become commonplace over the last decade have direct and lasting adverse consequences for military readiness, modernization, and planning. Predictable, on-time annual budgeting and appropriations, along with streamlined Department processes and greater tolerance for risk in developing and testing new capabilities, are essential to maintaining our competitive advantage.

The need to move faster is clear. The PRC and Russia have already fielded highly advanced hypersonic capabilities, while the United States' hypersonic program, although accelerating, still languishes well behind our competitors' efforts. Further, DoD faces operational challenges with civilian hiring processes for recruiting and hiring the innovative and experientially diverse workforce needed to drive innovation and advancement on pace with the civilian tech sector. Simply put, the Department must continue to strategically tackle hiring and personnel management improvements to move its workforce goal of being an employer of choice forward.

Finally, the PRC high altitude balloon (HAB) incursion into our national airspace was obviously a significant event that shined a light on the PRC's brazen intelligence collection against the United States and Canada. It was the first

time USNORTHCOM conducted an engagement over the United States in our history, and it made it clear that our competitors have the capability and intent to reach the homeland. The three Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAPs), also shot down days later by USNORTHCOM and NORAD, clearly demonstrated the challenges associated with detecting and identifying unmanned objects in U.S. airspace. As for NORAD and NORTHCOM, I commit to you that this event has already generated critical lessons learned for my commands and our mission partners, and I can guarantee that NORTHCOM and NORAD are going to continue to learn from it and do whatever is necessary to keep our country safe.

While we face significant challenges, there should be no doubt we have the finest military on the planet and that the commands will defend our nations with tenacity and resolve. In what is likely my final appearance before this subcommittee, I remain deeply humbled and immensely proud to lead the noblest mission of any Combatant Command--defending the homeland. I am grateful to the subcommittee for your longstanding support of our missions and of the men and women who stand watch over our nation every day. I thank you for the honor of representing our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Guardians, Marines, and civilians.

Read this original document at: https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/download/vanherck-statement-050923?download=1

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