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Command and Control of Northern Maritime Forces: The Concept and Rationale in Support of a JFMCC-Arctic

Troy J. Bouffard and Cameron D. Carlson

Introduction

On December 18th, 2019, Senators Sullivan (AK), Murkowski (AK), and King (MA) introduced the “Strategic Arctic Naval Focus Act of 2019.”¹ The bill (S.3080) refers to numerous adversarial aspects associated with national security and the Arctic. Moreover, the proposed legislation indicates what is possibly the biggest gap in defense-related strategies and operational capacity for the north - a severe lack of U.S. Navy surface capability and presence in the Arctic.² In his new role as the U.S. Navy Secretary (nominee), Braithwaite stated as a priority that, “as it [the Arctic] becomes more navigable on the surface, we also need to make sure our presence is noted...that requires an adequate-size to be there.”³ S.3080 exemplifies years of recent efforts⁴ to increase awareness of these issues, sometimes in close association with the need for U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers, now known as *polar security cutters*. It is common knowledge that the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) helps define maritime boundaries for littoral states as well as

¹ *Strategic Arctic Naval Focus Act of 2019*, 116th, 3080.

² Troy J. Bouffard and Cameron D. Carlson, "A Surface Presence for the U.S. Navy in the Arctic?," *Canadian Naval Review* 15, no. 2 (October 2019).

³ "SECNAV Nominee Commits to Advancing Navy's Arctic Presence," *Seapower*, 2020, accessed 07 May, 2020, <https://seapowermagazine.org/secnav-nominee-commits-to-advancing-navys-arctic-presence/>.

⁴ David W. Titley and Courtney St. John, "Arctic Security Considerations and the US Navy's Roadmap for the Arctic," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 2 (2010); Peggy Stolyarova, "Engage in the Arctic Now or Risk Being Left out in the Cold: Establishing a JIATF-High North," (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College, 2010); "US Make Strides Increasing Presence, Activity in Alaska, Arctic," *KTVA*, updated 16 August, 2018, accessed 30 January, 2020, <https://www.ktva.com/story/38902927/us-making-strides-to-increase-presence-and-activity-in-alaska-and-arctic-region>.

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layered aspects involving international law within these complex political spaces. Less known, are the operational mechanisms behind administration and enforcement, where the U.S. Coast Guard represents the lead agency responsible for upholding the sovereign rights, international law and national policies in open waters.⁵ Even fewer studies offer a vision toward a future maritime command and control solution, especially in light of the Russian Arctic military buildup and increasing Chinese interests and behavior regarding the region. To that end, the research goal for this article is to explore options and rationale regarding the establishment of a joint command to provide command and control over Arctic maritime surface forces. A joint command requires that two or more components of the U.S. armed forces combine to establish and conduct a formal defense arrangement. In the context of this article, it is logically assumed that the primary services leading the joint command would be the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard in what would be known as a joint maritime forces command. In particular, the authors focus examination of an operationally-sized, mid-level joint echelon known as a Joint Forces Maritime Component Command with a presumed Arctic designation (JFMCC-A). The first section will provide a comprehensive discussion of the national authorities and philosophical justification involved with establishing a joint command. The next section will provide major considerations involving the potential structure and purpose of the joint maritime forces command, including the roles of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, opportunities for personnel exchange. The final section will provide initial suggestions toward potential development of a joint maritime forces command. Prior to the thematic sections, the following background section will offer operationally-relevant context and requirements behind the changing Arctic as well as operational circumstances associated with security development.

⁵ Andreas Østhagen, *Coast Guards and Ocean Politics in the Arctic* (Springer, 2020), 85.

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Background – Regional Changes and Polar Pivot

Environmental

The Arctic is a region of the world undergoing unprecedented change. The scale of change may best be framed in the findings provided in the 2019 Arctic Report Card, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) annual summary of research findings for the region.⁶ Specific to the maritime environment, the report underscores that the observed changes provide for a continued warming for the surface air temperature. This continued rise of temperature has also had other associated impacts on the environment to include both the extent of sea ice as well as thickness and volume. In 1985, approximately 33 percent of the ice cover within the arctic (at the end-of-winter maximum), comprised of older, thicker ice. In comparison, by 2019, only 1.2 percent of the ice cover was older ice providing for a transition where newer weaker ice has replaced older, stronger ice.

With the backdrop of a changing environment facilitating growing access, China and Russia have taken increasingly more ardent steps towards influencing the Arctic and Antarctic regions.⁷ According to Burke and Matisek, the United States must move to realign focus on the Arctic – named a ‘Polar Pivot’ by them – given the evolving nature of great power competition in within the region.⁸ Additionally, as an Arctic nation because of Alaska, the changing environment effects the ability to both develop and sustain infrastructure which will be key in the future ability to monitor and influence activities in the North.

⁶ "Arctic Report Card: Update for 2019," Arctic Program, updated 06 December, 2019, accessed 01 April, 2020, <https://arctic.noaa.gov/Report-Card/Report-Card-2019>.

⁷ Ryan Burke and Jahara Matisek, "The American Polar Pivot - Gaining a Comparative Advantage in Great Power Competition," *Marine Corps University Journal* 10, no. 2 (2019).

⁸ "The American Polar Pivot - Gaining a Comparative Advantage in Great Power Competition," 72.

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The DOD 2019 Arctic Strategy demonstrates a greater awareness as to the changes taking place within the physical environment and the subsequent trends which will effect DOD regionally.⁹ Two strategic maritime corridors exist in both the Pacific and Atlantic side, including 1) Arctic/Pacific access through the Bering Strait astride the United States and Russia and 2) Arctic/Atlantic access through the GIUK-N gap (Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom - Norway). With an ever-decreasing amount of sea ice in the region, analysis projects an expected growth of shipping traffic through both corridors. Other changes to the physical environment including permafrost thaw and coastal erosion will further serve to impact DOD and its current/future plans for infrastructure development and sustainment.

Operational Security

Aside from legacy enterprise defense systems originating in the Cold War involving subsurface and air/aerospace capabilities, the Arctic maritime surface represents a newer challenge concerning forward presence and/or force projection. In the Arctic, U.S. naval forward presence and deployments involving surface combatants has yet to materialize. With slowly increasing access into northern waters,¹⁰ U.S. maritime forces need to develop strategies for unilateral and shared security responsibilities in the Arctic. With regard to the Arctic, and in the context of Russia as the dominant adversary, forward presence is significantly lacking in the regionally traditional sense given the absence of forward-positioned U.S. or alliance land forces. Forward presence of forces, as a critical capability, would provide a means by which to instill

⁹ Department of Defense, "Report to Congress - Department of Defense Arctic Strategy," (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2019).

¹⁰ James A. Screen and Ian Simmonds, "The Central Role of Diminishing Sea Ice in Recent Arctic Temperature Amplification," *Nature* 464, no. 7293 (2010).

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and support regional stability as well as impose deterrence via punishment or denial.¹¹

Traditionally, land forces often represent the persistent version of forward presence as a more dedicated posture in support of strategies involving geopolitical management. Additionally, sea basing usually represents the regional static point of conventional naval forward presence.

However, during transition toward a sustainable presence, the United States will likely have to rely on a naval forward deployed version to demonstrate presence and capability.

Authority and Philosophy behind the Concept

Establishing a joint command is a complex endeavor and not one relegated only to the Department of Defense. According to Joint Publication 1-02, the term ‘joint’ is defined as something that “connotes activities, operations, organization, etc., in which elements of two or more Military Departments participate.”¹² When considering the development of a joint maritime command for the Arctic, presumably the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard would be the logical choices as the lead, if not only, military departments. It is the reason that this article focuses on maritime forces, as opposed to naval forces alone. From this premise, the Department of Defense would likely not have a unilateral role in such a command or its development. As a refresher, remember that the U.S. Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security, and since 1915, was established as a military service and branch – one of (now) six - of the armed forces of the United States.¹³ Several other entities will likely participate in consideration and decision

¹¹ Dave Shunk, Charles Hornick, and Dan Burkhart, "The Role of Forward Presence in US Military Strategy," *Military Review* 97, no. 4 (2017).

¹² Department of Defense, "Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," ed. Joint Staff (Washington, DC2016), 121.

¹³ United States Congress, "14 USC §101: Establishment of Coast Guard," (Washington, DC 1915).

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making for the potential command. The U.S. Congress and President would have to enact laws through the (National Defense Authorization Act - NDAA). Other participants would include DOD and DHS, the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, and several combatant commands just to name a few.

The process involving establishment of a joint command starts with the legal authorities that permit and guide such activity. Represented in the top law of the land, Title 10 (Armed Forces) and Title 14 (Coast Guard) of the United States Code, where enacted laws are codified, provide the baseline legal source from which national defense is defined. In essence, Titles 10 and 14 provide the foundational responsibilities to organize, train, equip, prepare, and maintain forces from the federal level to the components of the U.S. Armed Forces. Title 50, (War and National Defense), defines and outlines the security aspects for the nation. Although numerous other U.S. Code Titles might be associated with national defense, Titles 10, 14 and 50 provide the preponderance for what for legally drives the direction for the next level of publications associated with joint military commands: national strategies.

The primary guidance defining the mission and purpose of the Department of Defense relies on interpretation and implementation of the latest edition (with working updates) of the National Defense Strategy, which is directly derived from the National Security Strategy. Not surprisingly, DOD provides a leading critical contribution to the formulation of the nation's top security doctrine.¹⁴ Of note, DHS currently lacks a comprehensive strategy directly aligned to National Security Strategy, especially with regard to the Arctic region and maritime domain. However, the U.S. Coast Guard seems to have retained that particular role and continues to do so

¹⁴ Nathan J. Lucas and Kathleen J. McInnis, "The 2015 National Security Strategy: Authorities, Changes, Issues for Congress," (Washington, DC United States Congress, 2016), 4-5.

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through its current strategic publication.¹⁵ Additionally, the above strategies and U.S. Code, as well as the U.S. Constitution and policies regarding established international law, represent what is known as ‘national strategic direction’, which remains central with regard to any use of military national powers. The above core national-level strategies provide the main authorities for continued implementation of the next level of intra-agency publications from DOD.

The library of DOD joint pubs articulates the doctrine and philosophies of the U.S. military toward a cross-Service combination involved with joint and multinational operations. Joint warfare, as the focused purpose of ‘jointness’, “relies upon the effective coordination of Service capabilities,” as well as integrated partnerships toward unified action through successful interoperability and merging of “capabilities and skill sets of assigned components.”¹⁶ Military jointness might be thought of as analogous to the economic theory/law of comparative advantage, whereas the principle gains relative opportunity costs by efficiently combining existing resources and capabilities rather than creating new ones. In the context of this article, the Department of Defense can pursue its own comparative advantage by combining resources and capabilities in a joint organization in order to meet nationally directed objectives. Moreover, *economies of scope* adds further analogy toward the effectiveness of joint military solutions as cost savings (economies) are realized via broadened services through diversity (scope), especially when a combination of distinct services are cheaper than separate approaches.

Joint Publication 1 (JP-1) is the “capstone of US joint doctrine hierarchy...[which] describes the authorized command relationships and authority that military commanders can use

¹⁵ United States Coast Guard, "Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018-2022," ed. Department of Homeland Security (Washington, DC 2018).

¹⁶ Department of Defense, "Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States," ed. Joint Staff, Joint Publication (Washington, DC 2017).

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and other operational matters derived from Title 10 USC.”¹⁷ Among the chapters in JP-1, chapter VI outlines the major aspects of how joint force development occurs. The opening references the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 as the legislation enabling the flexibility and approach to current use of joint solutions in support of national security.¹⁸ In 2016, the Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee at the time, Senator John McCain stated that the “focus of Goldwater-Nichols was operational effectiveness, improving our military's ability to fight as a joint force.”¹⁹ While debate over the philosophical merits of the Act continues – often the driving impetus behind military reform – JP-1 doctrinal implementation involves use of the joint force development life cycle (improve, sustain, discover, and create) through a myriad of formal subordinate processes.²⁰ One of the key steps worth emphasizing is *joint concepts and assessment*. With regard to this article, the following summary clearly articulates this foundational guidance from JP-1 that contributes to exploring joint military solutions:

“Joint concepts examine military problems and propose solutions describing how the joint force, using military art and science, may operate to achieve strategic goals within the context of the *anticipated future security environment*. Joint concepts lead to military capabilities, both non-materiel and materiel, that

¹⁷ "Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States," ix.

¹⁸ United States Congress, "H.R.3622 - Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986," (Washington, DC 1986).

¹⁹ Kathleen J. McInnis, "Goldwater Nichols at 30: Defense Reform and Issues for Congress," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016).

²⁰ Department of Defense, "Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States," VI-2.

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significantly improve the ability of the joint force to overcome future challenges.”²¹ (emphasis added).

The ‘anticipated future security environment’ aspect of the Arctic region emphasized above speaks volumes about the emerging circumpolar issues. The entire premise of this article is based on the need for the U.S. Navy to develop a surface presence capability in the Arctic, largely in response to what is increasingly considered a growing region of maritime importance, activity and expected tensions and emergencies.²² When putting concepts into actions, Joint Publication 3-0, ‘Joint Operations’, provides the central doctrinal processes to do so. Chapter V explains the purpose through a “framework comprised of fundamental constructs, such as operational art, the range of military operations, and the interconnected operational environment” in order to meet the challenges for “use of military capabilities in various circumstances across the conflict continuum.”²³ To clarify, the term ‘conflict continuum’ is not easily definable on a two-dimensional scale as a result of the highly dynamic nature of multi-domain battle complexities²⁴ (figure 1). However, application toward the developing competitive spectrum in the Circumpolar North has enduring meaning as significant activity as well as security concerns continue to point toward seemingly inevitable forms of conflict, albeit likely minor,

²¹ "Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States," VI-9.

²² Alyson Azzara, J., Haifeng Wang, and Daniel Rutherford, "A 10-Year Projection of Maritime Activity in the U.S. Arctic Region," ed. International Council on Clean Transportation (Washington D.C.: United States Committee on the Marine Transportation System, 2015); Odd Jarl Borch et al., "Maritime Activity in the High North—Current and Estimated Level up to 2025," (MARPART - Maritime International Partnership in the High North, 2016); Yu Koizumi, "Russia's Military Build-up in the Arctic: Russia's Threat Perception and Its Military Strategy in the Arctic Region," in *The Influence of Sub-State Actors on National Security*, ed. Minori Takahashi (Switzerland: Springer, 2019).

²³ Department of Defense, "Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations," ed. Joint Staff (Washington, DC 2018), V-1.

²⁴ "Competition, Conflict, and Mental Models of War: What You Need to Know About Multi-Domain Battle," Modern War Institute, updated 26 January, 2018, accessed 21 April, 2020, <https://mwi.usma.edu/competition-conflict-mental-models-war-need-know-multi-domain-battle/>.

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miscalculated and external in origin. The ability to conceptualize and operationalize, through JP 3-0, a joint force will provide solid ground from which to build an efficient and sustainable joint solution for the Arctic. Moreover, such solutions add a core national capability in efforts to deter actions contrary or threatening to national interests and defense in efforts to keep tensions within the competitive, or even better, the cooperative realms.

Figure 1 – Notional Operations Across the Conflict Continuum



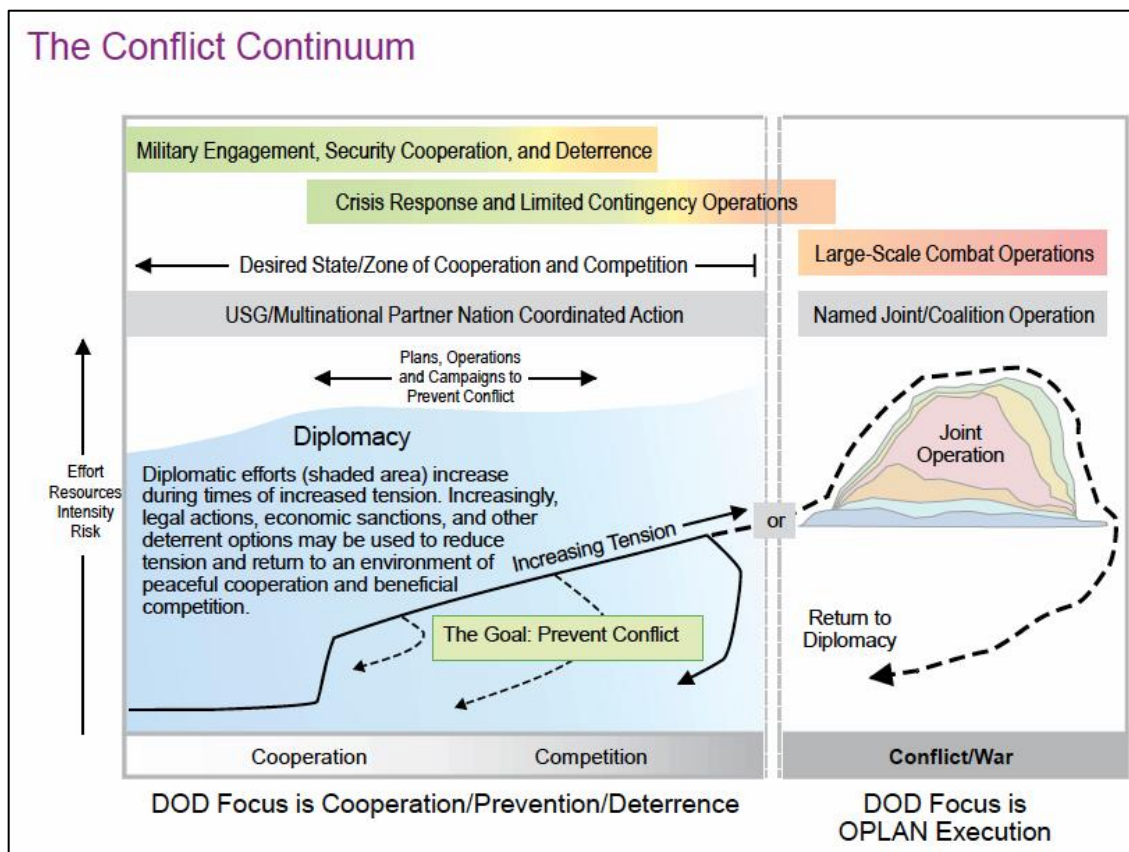
Source: Department of Defense. *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*. Washington, DC 2018, V-4.

Figure 2 adds more context to the conflict continuum with regard to joint perspectives and roles. As mentioned above, deterrence plays a key part for DOD in managing approaches to avoiding conflict. Within the concept of a JFMCC-Arctic, the joint force would likely represent a significant military capability toward not only deterrence, but also military engagement, security cooperation, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and crisis response. Militarily, one definition of deterrence is, “to reduce the probability of enemy military attack by posing a sufficient prospect of suffering a net loss as a result, or at least a higher net loss / lower net gain

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resulting from no attack.”²⁵ However, while not all accept any particular definition, most experts agree on similar aspects of the well-grounded logic involving a distinction between deterrence by denial (defense) and deterrence by punishment (retaliation).

Figure 2 – Realms in the Conflict Continuum



Source: Department of Defense. *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*. Washington, DC 2018, VI-2.

²⁵ Glenn Herald Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, vol. 2168 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

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Regardless of the variety of definitions, the common goal of deterrence is to stop an adverse action before it occurs. Buzan offers a version involving the logic of deterrence and its merits:²⁶

“The effectiveness of deterrence, and the ease or difficulty of implementing it, thus depend on two sets of factors: first, the strength of basic motivation in the deterree towards the action, and the probability that he would undertake it in the absence of specific deterrence measures; and secondly, the logic of costs and gains which results from taking the action in the presence of deterrence measures against it. In practice, there is a mixed area at the boundary between these two sets. Any military action will risk some costs, and therefore a measure of deterrence, perhaps considerable, exists between states whether it is made specific or not.”

Furthermore, another important variable requires consideration of the deterree’s tolerance for costs – otherwise known as net losses resulting from action or inaction as well as the extent (and probability) of loss or damage to national assets, suppressed ideological values, heightened threats and diminished power, status and independence.²⁷

Joint Publication 3-32 (Joint Maritime Operations) provides the ‘maritime’ focus of joint force development and employment. Up front, one of the distinctions emphasized involves the “five (sea power) functions in a combined-arms approach [which] provides a unique comparative

²⁶ Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to Strategic Studies: Military Technology and International Relations* (London, UK: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1987).

²⁷ *An Introduction to Strategic Studies: Military Technology and International Relations*, 165-66.

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advantage for the joint force,” adding supplementary context to the previously mentioned ‘comparative advantage’ analogy.²⁸ The pub also outlines organizational options and command relationships as well as a description of the maritime domain.

Operationalizing the Concept

The DOD Arctic maritime boundaries have shifted on numerous occasions since the development of the first Unified Command Plan (UCP) in 1946. According to the “History of the Unified Command Plan 1946-2012, the Arctic region was originally divided between what was then Alaskan Command (as a Unified Command) and Northeast Command, (a Unified Command with assigned forces from Newfoundland, Labrador and Greenland), with both tasked to provide for the security of both the maritime as well as the airways within their respective regions.”²⁹

As detailed in historical literature, the command and control structures supporting the Arctic as a region would continue to transform as subsequent changes were made to the UCP. Notable changes would include ALCOM’s (Alaskan Command) loss of its naval component to Pacific Command (now USINDOPACOM) in 1971 and subsequently its inactivation and replacement by Joint Task Force Alaska (JTF-AK) and Joint Task Force Aleutian (JTF-AL) in 1975.³⁰ The responsibility for Arctic within the Atlantic region would likewise shift between

²⁸ Department of Defense, "Joint Publication 3-32: Joint Maritime Operations," ed. Joint Staff (Washington, DC 2018), x.

²⁹ Edward J. Drea et al., *History of the Unified Command Plan: 1946-2012*, ed. Joint History Office (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013).

³⁰ Alaskan Command, "Factsheet," (Anchorage, Alaska 2015).

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Atlantic Command (CINCLANT), European Command (CINCEUR) and later European Command (EUCOM).³¹

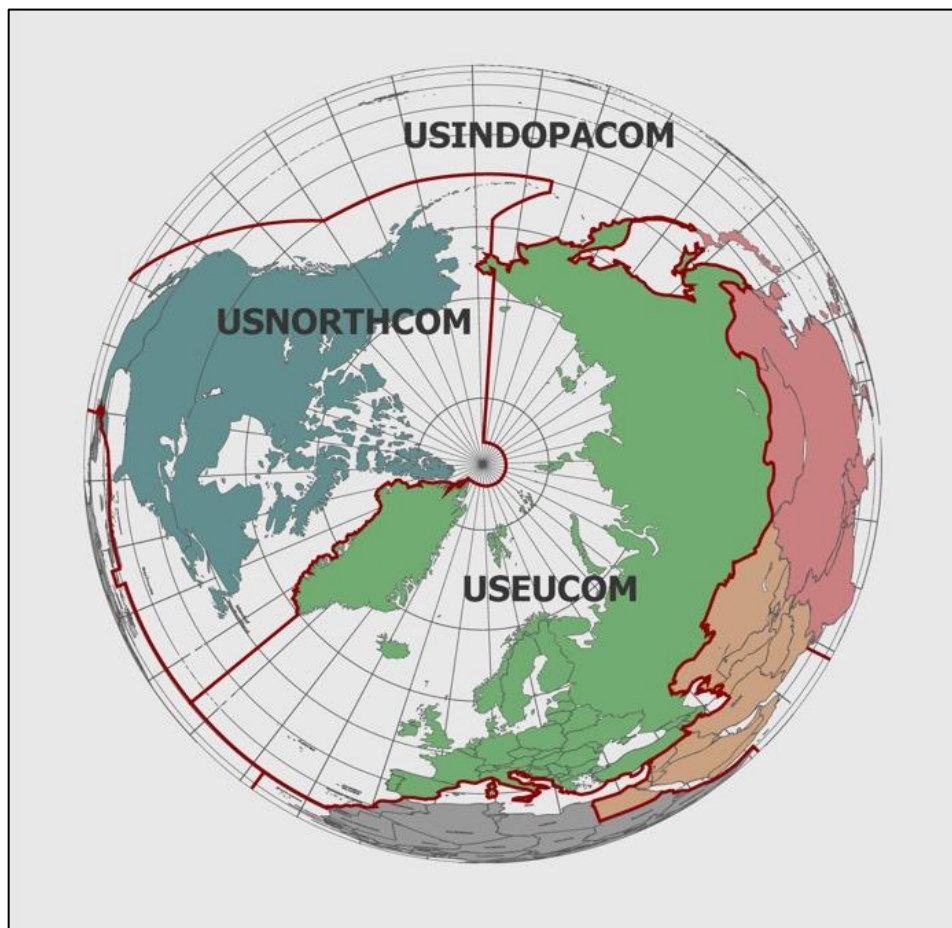
Today, the geographic Area of Responsibility for the Arctic region is a shared endeavor, divided between three Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs).³² The commands include, United States European Command (USEUCOM), United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) (see Figure 3). The operational divisions in the Arctic include USEUCCOM and the area in and through the Northern Atlantic and into the Arctic Ocean, USNORTHCOM and the area from the Gulf of Alaska, through the Bering, Chukchi and Beaufort Sea's extending into the Arctic Ocean and, USINDOPACOM, extending from the North Pacific up to Kamchatka.

Figure 3. Geographic Combatant Command Boundaries of the North

³¹ Drea et al., *History of the Unified Command Plan: 1946-2012*, 11-12.

³² Department of the Navy, "Strategic Outlook for the Arctic," ed. Chief of Naval Operations (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2019). U.S. Strategic Command also plays a significant role as a functional combatant command,

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The U.S. Coast Guard has long history of more than 150 years in the Arctic dating back to Revenue Cutters sailing to Alaska in the 1860's.³³ Today, the Coast Guard provides a wide range of support to the Arctic region including SAR, fisheries/law enforcement, environmental response, vessel inspections and marine safety.³⁴ The Coast Guard, as the maritime capability of DHS, supports its Alaskan/Arctic based maritime mission out of the 17th district headquarters (D-17), located in Southeast of Alaska. Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, located on the island of Kodiak, Alaska provides aircraft support which extends from the Gulf of Alaska, the Aleutian

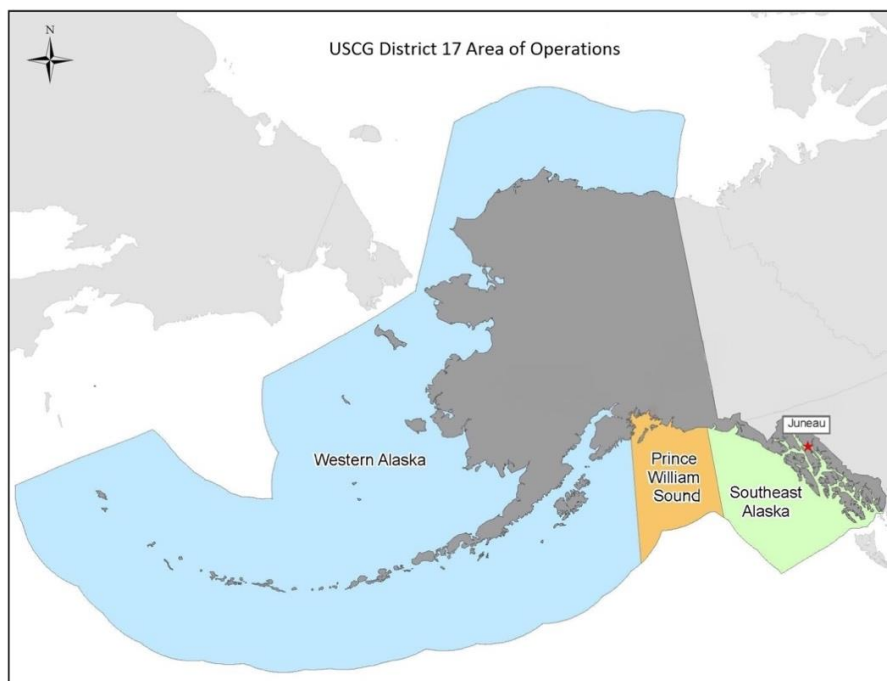
³³ United States Coast Guard, "Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018-2022."

³⁴ "Missions," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, accessed 13 May, 2020, <https://www.work.uscg.mil/Missions/>.

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Islands, through the Bering Strait, and north to Barrow. Coupled with the remoteness of this region, extreme weather and an acute lack of infrastructure are noted factors influencing the capability and complexity in responding to an incident.³⁵

Figure 4. US Coast Guard D-17 Operational Area



Source: "Area of Responsibility." Department of Homeland Security, <https://www.pacificarea.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/District-17/>.

Still, as noted in the U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook, numerous gaps exist in regard to the capabilities required to operate effectively within this transforming region. RAND provides a summary of three all-encompassing gaps regarding Arctic capabilities with supporting sub-gaps to further define the three macro-level areas as primary gaps.³⁶ These high-latitude gaps

³⁵ G. M. Sulmasy and A.P. Wood, "US Coast Guard Activity in the Arctic Region," (Berkeley, CA: Institute for Legal Research, 2014).

³⁶ Abbie Tingstad et al., *Identifying Potential Gaps in U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Capabilities*, ed. Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

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include, limitations in voice and data communications, lack of consistent awareness about threats and hazards, and challenges in the ability to respond to incidents. Additionally, General O'Shaughnessy recently stated with regard to communications infrastructure above 65 degrees north latitude, that "traditional means of communication really start to break down," and above 70 degrees, all but the "most exquisite" communications means are degraded.³⁷

From a strategic and operational perspective, Whitehead provides that while U.S. policy may treat the Arctic as one "distinct area," on one hand, the whole of government approach to the Arctic is fragmented on the other.³⁸ Interagency activities he provides, are distributed to numerous organizations including, but not limited to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of the Interior (DOI), the Department of Homeland Security, (DHS) and to that extent, DOD. "An effective command organization is essential for ensuring all military and interagency efforts are coordinated to project U.S. presence and protect national security interests in the Arctic" remains key in meeting emerging threats and challenges.³⁹ Considering the changing dynamic of the Arctic that is now growing in both global awareness and strategic significance, a determined effort must be made to provide for a focused Command and Control of this maritime domain.

Two (plus three) in the Arctic

³⁷ "NORTHCOM: More Training, Improved Comms Needed for Arctic Operations," Air Force Magazine, updated 04 May, 2020, accessed 06 May, 2020, <https://www.airforcemag.com/northcom-more-training-improved-comms-needed-for-arctic-operations/#.XrI8r8PyxR4.twitter>.

³⁸ James H. Whitehead III, "Taking Command in the Arctic: The Need for a Command Organization in the Arctic Theater," (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2008).

³⁹ "Taking Command in the Arctic: The Need for a Command Organization in the Arctic Theater," 8.

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The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) names Russia and China as the primary threat to the national security interests and priorities of the United States.⁴⁰ The literature is extensive concerning the type and extent of competitive threats⁴¹ that both represent to, through, and in the Arctic.⁴² From an elevated view, the security-related dynamics occurring in the Arctic continue to manifest in what is now part of “Great Power Competition.” Russia and China both continue to pursue global near-peer capabilities of which some aspects apply to the Arctic. In a sense, the Arctic becomes part of the bigger picture involving Great Power Competition. However, the region is currently not as strategically important as other parts of the world, so context remains vital in properly understanding the degree to which the Arctic plays host to such influences (see Figure 5). For the most part, the current natural state of the Arctic falls into the competitive category, as discussed previously, of which the extent of competition remains mostly ‘healthy’ and well within stable and/or productive norms and processes.

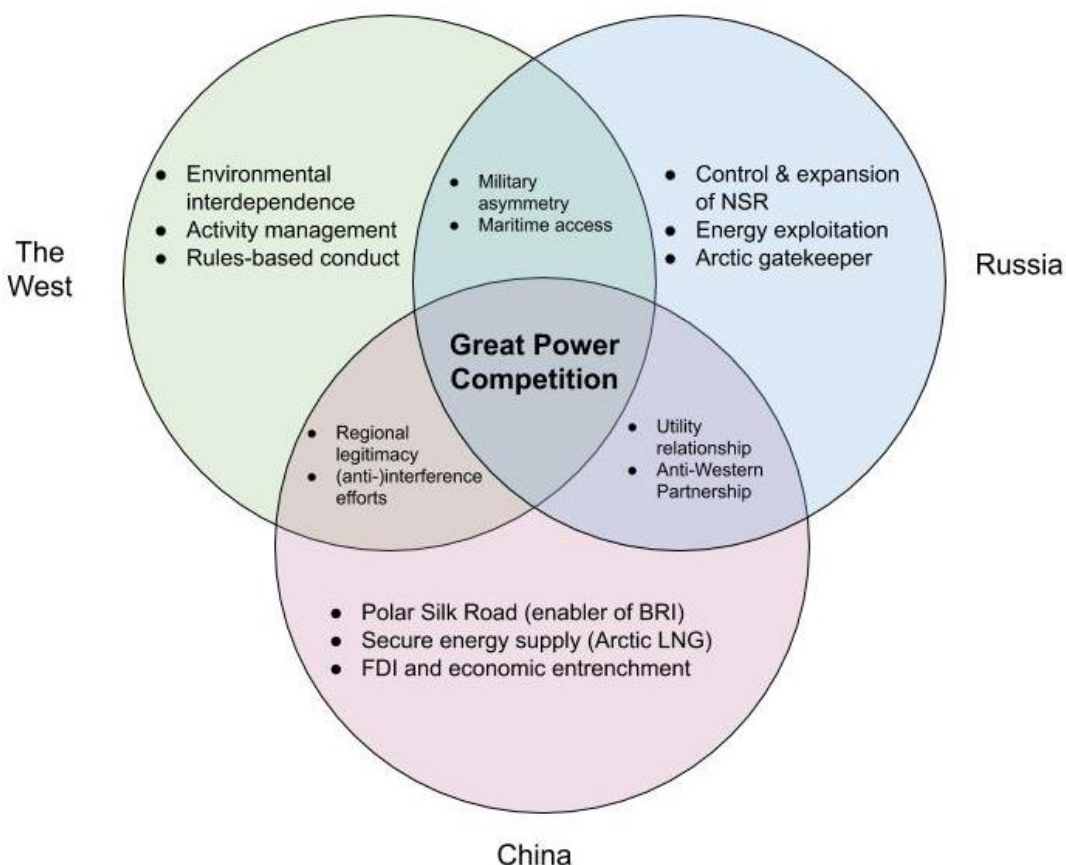
Figure 5: The Arctic Triad

⁴⁰ ‘2+3’ is common security lingo describing the top five threats to the United States, referring to Russian and China as the ‘2’ and distinctly separate as a higher level threat, while the ‘3’ represents, North Korea, Iran, and Violent Extremist Organizations, also known as VEOs. The White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” ed. Executive Office of The President (Washington, DC 2017).

⁴¹ “Is Russia Going Hard or Soft in the Arctic?,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, 2017, 2019, <https://wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/into-the-arctic/is-russia-going-hard-or-soft-in-the-arctic/>; Troy J. Bouffard and Andrea Charron, “A Tale of Two Russias?,” *Vanguard* 25, no. 4 (2018); “Российские Владения В Арктике. История И Проблемы Международно-Правового Статуса,” ТАСС, updated 09 April, 2019, accessed 06 May, 2020; Sanna Kopra, “China, Great Power Responsibility and Arctic Security,” in *Climate Change and Arctic Security*, ed. Lassi Heininen and Heather Exner-Pirot (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020); Mark E. Rosen and Cara B. Thuringer, “Unconstrained Foreign Direct Investment: An Emerging Challenge to Arctic Security,” (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2017).

⁴² “To, through, and in the Arctic” is a concept developed by Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer to describe an analysis and methodology for understanding proximal categories of threats involving the Arctic.

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For Russia, the Arctic represents a vital national security region, where a significant portion of the future hydrocarbon potential, and thus national revenue, is located. Along with development and protection of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), Russia's strategies and behavior remains fairly consistent with regard to Arctic-related national security efforts. However, some conflicting perspectives and behaviors do exist such as disagreements about the Russia's stated status of the NSR waters, which directly conflicts with the U.S. leading maritime principle involving freedom of navigation.⁴³ However, current issues remain reasonably manageable,

⁴³ Troy J. Bouffard, "A Developing Maritime Operational Environment: Forward Presence and Freedom of Navigation in the Arctic," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* TBD, no. TBD (2020). (accepted and in print); Rebecca Pincus, "Rushing Navy Ships into the Arctic for a FONOP Is Dangerous," *Proceedings* 2019.

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which is somewhat remarkable given the suspended mil-to-mil contact with Russia since annexation of Crimea.

Concerning China, the Arctic represents a region of various interests, including much-needed energy sources, climate change research and rare earth mineral production, just to name a few. The extent to which the Arctic carries importance to China has yet to be fully understood though. Chinese intent under the context of its global investment strategies remains one of the most complex strategic dynamics in the world today. The Arctic definitely plays an important role though, if only based on the major ‘Polar Silk Road’ policy as part of the larger Belt & Road Initiative – a strategy estimated to represent a \$23 trillion dollar GDP economic program for China.⁴⁴ Compared to China’s entrenchment successes around the world, the Arctic region does not seem to be susceptible to such exploitation despite several years of trying. However, the Arctic region is relatively young and a newcomer to global affairs, and the extent to which Russia and China ultimately affect military security issues has just begun.

Recommendations

The premise of this article focused on the concept of a formal command and control organization based on a standing joint maritime forces command. The U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard would presumably represent the lead services given the security arrangement concerning the maritime domain. For the U.S. Navy, Title 10 provides the crux of baseline national defense requirements while Title 14 outlines the role of homeland security and maritime law enforcement

⁴⁴ "How Will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China’s Interests?," China Power, Center for Strategic and International Studies, updated 08 May, 2017, accessed 08 November, 2020, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

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for the U.S. Coast Guard. At the helm, the U.S. Navy would be the practical choice for command, especially given the sheer amount of resources involved in fleet management. An O-9, 3-star U.S. Navy Vice Admiral might seem the most appropriate flag-officer grade as the joint commander. Part of the rationale for a vice admiral involves the considerable extent of overlapping operational area as well as resources allocated separately by geography possibly needed in combination to meet mission requirements. Such circumstances would require an appropriate rank in order to not only have the requisite experience and training, but to also be able to command at nominally equal footing amongst peers and superiors involved with the proposed command. As is normal, the command billet could be satisfied through concurrent assignment (a.k.a. multi-hatted), or in a single line command. However, there is challenge involving the concurrent approach as a result of the command arrangement of both primary geographic combatant commands (GCC) for the Arctic (i.e. USNORTHCOM and USEUCOM). The naval commanders for both Naval Forces North (NAVNORTH) as well as Naval Forces Europe and Africa (NAVEUR) are both 4-star Admirals. Add in the potential for the USINDOPACOM to participate in command as a result of the naval forces assigned to the parts of the region that connect to the Arctic via the north Pacific, and the same difficulty exists since the Pacific Fleet (PACFLT) commander is also a 4-star admiral (the Atlantic Fleet is now Fleet Forces, overseen by the same person commanding NAVNORTH). Perhaps a non-concurrent command might present a better option, unless a 4-star Admiral would be an acceptable solution. Part of the reasoning behind careful consideration for the commander is what might ultimately define the leadership of the maritime forces jointly with a position dedicated to the U.S. Coast Guard as the deputy commander. Again, it would seem appropriate to establish the position as a flag officer level, possibly a U.S. Coast Guard O-7, rear admiral (lower level RDML), partly

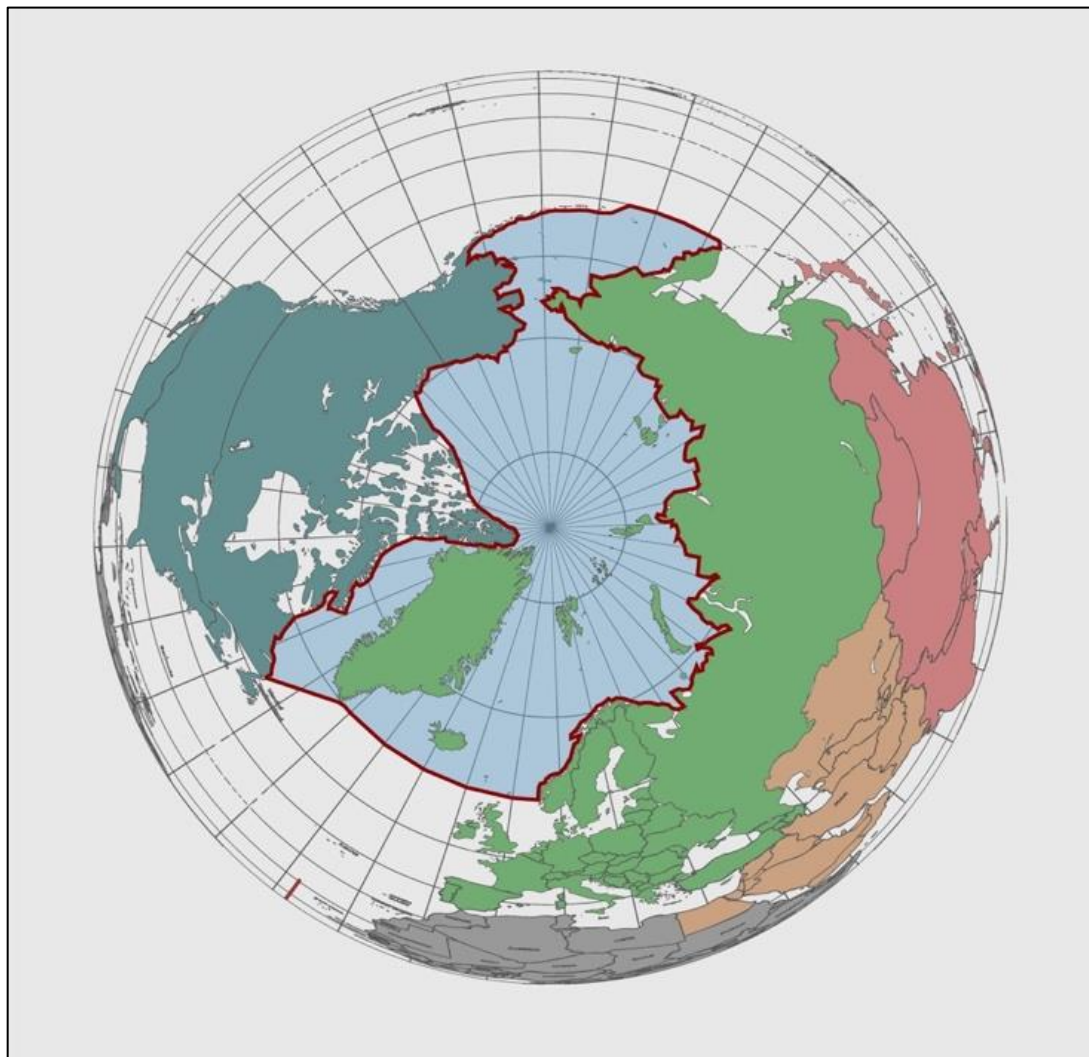
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because U.S. Coast Guard District commanders are O-8, 2-star officers as well as the norm of an O-7 as deputy to an O-9 commander.

As noted before, the overlap of the Arctic region by three GCCs presents problems. Previously - regardless of the currently established boundary lines - sea ice acted as a default boundary, keeping activity so low that a maritime surface defense presence and capability remained minimally required. However, circumstances have changed and continue to reveal a growing need for strategic attention and solutions. In order to nominally set the utility of a new command, the existing boundaries must be redrawn. To that end, the authors propose an example (figure 4) of what could be the maritime forces boundary for an organization like the JFMCC-A. Such an operationally designated area would facilitate centralized efforts over a common environment as well as circumstances versus the currently fragmented delineations. In order to manage other defense-related aspects of the region, the joint maritime forces command could host GCC, ALCOM, D-17, Canadian, Danish, and Norwegian as well as interagency (State Department, NOAA, etc.) liaisons for deconfliction and consultation purposes. Moreover, the new command could participate in an officer exchange program with JTF-N (Joint Task Force – North) in Canada.

Figure 6: Proposed Joint Arctic Maritime Forces Boundary

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The supervisory echelon above the JFMCC-A would seem most effective as a subordinate entity to US Fleet Forces Command (USFF) as part of USNORTHCOM. USFF is located in Norfolk, VA, which is home to the USN 2nd Fleet as well as the NATO Joint Forces Command. The mission of JFCC is as follows:⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Andrew Feickert, "The Unified Command Plan and Combatant Commands: Background and Issues for Congress," in *CRS Report for Congress* (Washington, DC United States Congress, 2013).

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“USFF has responsibilities to generate ready Navy forces for assignment to global Regional Combatant Commanders, execute the Fleet Response Plan (FRP) using the Fleet Training Continuum, articulate to the Chief of Naval Operations the integrated Fleet warfighting requirements as coordinated with all Navy Component Commanders, and provide operational planning support to USTRATCOM.”

At least for the initial establishment and years, JFMCC-A would not need to be independent, nor would it seem to provide any benefit as strategic understanding and operational needs continue to emerge in the region. The Arctic requires an maritime operational focal point. The benefits of a JFMCC-A include numerous justifications. A single, permanent command facilitates centralized institutional knowledge rather than fragmented and duplicated efforts. A JFMCC-A would also be a single touch point for strategic, policy and operational recommendations. A new operating environment is ripe for complications and the old adage of “less is more” certainly rings true for a region defined more by uncertainty than not. A lack of experience and knowledge of the region means that overcoming such gaps requires a concentrated unity of effort. A singular joint command for an emergent maritime domain can better deconflict international issues and manage strategic communications. Additionally, A JFMCC-A could also serve as the primary maritime conduit as a layer of the all-domain defense concept and strategies.

Establishment of a JFMCC-A provides for numerous future opportunities and further benefits through incremental advancements. For example, based on the success of the command as well as the circumstances of the region, the command’s purpose could be elevated to levels

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that include value-added interagency functions. Liaisons from other security organizations could help to provide collaborative synergies, such as the CIA, FBI, fusion centers, NORAD positions (especially with the global maritime warning missions), NATO positions, and many more. Additionally, coast guard and coast guard-like entities can provide significant maritime administrative and operational support to the command. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum might even be able to integrate in ways that allow for exercise and training value, yet still maintain the necessary distance from defense agencies that conflict with the forum's charter functions.

Conclusion

Slowly, but steadily, indications point toward political and military interest as well as commitment in support of increased U.S. maritime surface capabilities and presence in Arctic waters. Senior leaders largely acknowledge the inevitability. Among the challenges is a need to deconflict separate operational boundaries in a stand-alone region. Additionally, a singular oversight organization should be established in order to facilitate efficiency and effectiveness of management over the geographic area. Until a decision to that end becomes a reality, continued exploration of concepts involving why and how to achieve such a goal should be offered for variety of consideration. Topics could involve identifying the role of deterrence the capability could represent or how a joint maritime forces command magnify operationalization of SAR capabilities, force projection, emergency response, homeland defense, regional security and stabilization, and defense readiness in the region. Additionally, how might the command bolster existing programs in the region such as annual exercises, public safety and research endeavors. Should some form of a sub-unified joint command ever materialize, many other opportunities for

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scholarly contribution could be pursued. For example, how should the proposed joint command synchronize and integrate with the Alaskan Command - a sub-unified joint Arctic command, subordinate to USNORTHCOM, and with strategic and operational responsibilities largely minus the maritime domain. Or even, how and/or why both should one day be merged to form a unified, combatant command.

Before hindsight forces such eventualities following a disaster or exploited gap in security within the region, the defense and scholarly community have an opportunity to explore visionary concepts. This kind of prospect is unique given the many years dedicated to debunking myths (like new shipping routes and a rush for resources) and resolving current problems (such as environmental and indigenous issues as well as the numerous achievements of the Arctic Council), and simply growing awareness and understanding of the region. The chance to envision defense solutions and assist decision makers in circumstances other than urgent can be rare. All stakeholders and enthusiasts alike should work together in an effort to offer a wealth of creative and innovative possibilities in support of Arctic regional stability and national security.

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