



ARCTIC DEVELOPMENT



US Coast Guard VADM Peter W. Gautier, deputy commandant for operations, visited TSC last October to discuss a whole-of-government approach to Arctic security, as outlined in the National Strategy for the Arctic Region.

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The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies

Soft power in the northern frontier

By Terri Marshall



Before he was a US senator, before he moved to Alaska, and even before he earned his undergraduate degree from UCLA, a 21-year-old Ted Stevens flew transport aircraft over the Himalayan mountains in support of the Flying Tigers, volunteer fighter pilots assisting China's resistance against Imperial Japan. Global security was his first career and remained an area of interest for the next half century. By 1989, Stevens was a contender for Secretary of Defense.

Now, fifteen years after his passing, Stevens' legacy continues with a namesake institution at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) educates and collaborates with civilian and military practitioners from the United States and from Allied and partnered nations to build understanding and advance security solutions for the Arctic region. The center is the sixth and newest for the US Department of Defense (DOD).

The DOD Regional Centers for Security Studies are international platforms for research, communication, idea sharing, and training. They bring together US and foreign military, civilian, and nongovernmental participants. These centers create valuable academic spaces that help build strong and lasting international networks of security leaders. Currently there are six regional centers:

- George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch, Germany, established in 1993.
- Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, Hawai'i, established in 1995.
- William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies in Washington, DC, established in 1997.
- Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, DC, established in 1999.
- Near East-South Asia Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, DC, established in 2000.
- Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies in Anchorage, established in 2021.

"Our mission is to advance US national security efforts in the Arctic region and with our Allies and partners as one of six regional centers across the Security Cooperation enterprise," says Matthew Hickey, associate director for strategic engagement for the TSC. "All the regional centers are

aligned with a regional combatant command; the US Department of Defense splits up the world into regions to synchronize the coordination of activities in command. We are aligned with US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) but we also work closely with the European Command and other commands when applicable.”

Inspiration for the TSC

A congressional delegation visit to the Hawai'i center named for Stevens' good friend Senator Daniel K. Inouye served as the inspiration for TSC. The delegation walked away impressed by the work the center was doing to support security cooperation initiatives in the Pacific region.

“Security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region is done primarily to confront the competing interests of China,” explains Hickey. “The US National Security Strategy defines China is the ‘pacing threat.’ During the congressional delegation’s visit they observed how the Asia-Pacific Center was doing good work in a critical region with important partners and allies, such as the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, Japan.”

TSC teamed up with DOD’s Arctic and Global Resilience Office to host a visit to the Port of Nome last August. Officials gained insights into how DOD can work with Alaska-based stakeholders on Arctic security and opportunities.

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Interest in the Arctic began to garner more attention in Washington, DC, in about 2019, around the same time the congressional delegation visited the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies. “There was a kind of inflection or culminating point of an interest in Arctic issues within the national security apparatus... [there was] the establishment (or reestablishment) of a number of Arctic initiatives” referring to an updated National Strategy for the Arctic Region, a new DOD Arctic strategy, and the incorporation of the Arctic.

It was at about the same time when Congress included The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies into legislation and on June 9, 2021, the Secretary of Defense announced the establishment of the TSC and provided the following guidance:

- Advance a network of civilian and military practitioners promoting understanding and providing collaborative security solutions for the Arctic region.

Build strong, sustainable, domestic, and international networks of security leaders and promote and conduct focused research on Arctic security to advance DOD security priorities in the Arctic region.

- Prepare civilian and military security practitioners, propose useful solutions, and enhance people networks to ensure a stable, rules-based order in the Arctic that will benefit the United States and nations across the Arctic.

Arctic Support

While the TSC was being created, another initiative was in the works. The office of the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Arctic and Global Resilience position was being created within the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy to advance Arctic initiatives and priorities within the Pentagon and across the Defense Department. “Personnel is policy and the creation of this office was yet another example of the Arctic’s growing importance.” The new office was created to advise on how to protect the US homeland and Allied interests in the Arctic; address strategic resilience risks, such as critical minerals and energy security; and ensure the DOD maintains innovation advantages in strategic competition. That innovation alludes to investments in satellites, radars, missile defense, icebreakers, and other security assets.

Although the US Navy has a minimal presence in Alaska, the branch plays a role in Arctic research, situational awareness, and technology. LCDR Barry McShane addressed a meeting last November at TSC of the International Cooperative Engagement Program for Polar Research.

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The new office would also work closely with the new Ted Stevens Center to educate people and conduct engagement to build a network of Arctic leaders, both domestically and internationally. To

compliment it all, the center also does research and analysis to support Arctic security initiatives.

“What we do is educate people on these issues everywhere from the tactical all the way up to the geopolitical level of engagement,” explains Hickey. “We’ve now existed for three years as a bit of a startup entity. It’s not easy to create something within the DOD, but we’ve embraced the opportunity to exist. And what we have found from day one of our existence, the demand for our center has been nearly unsustainable to keep up with. To me that reflects how important the Arctic is in today’s geostrategic conversation.”

“What we see now is the Ted Stevens Center as a soft power complement to hard power investments in the region.”

Matthew Hickey

Associate Director for Strategic Engagement

Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies

The Importance of the Arctic

“Alaska’s strategic location has far-reaching implications. It serves as the first line of homeland defense, an essential power projection platform for US military forces, and a critical flank for NATO’s defense against Russian aggression,” says Hickey.

The National Security Strategy identifies China as the pacing threat to the United States, while Russia is an “acute” threat. Both countries are highly active in the Arctic region. “Russia is roughly half of the Arctic. Regardless of what’s happening, you can’t change geography,” says Hickey. “Also, China has self declared aspirations of becoming a global power, which means it would need to be able to be everywhere, including the Arctic. This explains why China has sent icebreakers into the Arctic for what might be considered dual-use purposes,” referencing both civilian and military purposes.

The Arctic comes into play at all levels of strategic discourse: political, operational, and tactical. “Our center immediately came in demand to our European partners and allies, including Arctic countries

like Sweden and Finland, who changed hundreds of years of neutrality policy to join NATO,” explains Hickey. “China and Russia have been jointly campaigning off the coast of the Aleutian Islands. Our Pacific partners and allies are keeping a close eye on what the United States’ response is to some of these actions.”



TSC is equipped with a multimedia studio to amplify the center’s mission through virtual courses and podcasts. Here, IT specialist Rahsaan Ash poses for systems testing by multimedia specialist Jason Roe.

TSC's main purpose is to educate. "Whether you are a strategist, a commander, a platoon leader, business executive, analyst, consultant, et cetera, everything is predicated on what you know and who you know. Our number two objective is to build a network or to convene people," says Hickey. "I say this because we have found that our nation's Arctic literacy is not as good as it could be. So the number one thing we set out to do was to create an education platform—kind of an Arctic 101. We've had over 100 people in each iteration of the course." The insatiable demand for this course ultimately led to the center's launch of the inaugural Anchorage Security and Defense Conference.

The Inaugural Anchorage Security and Defense Conference

In November 2024, the TSC held the inaugural Anchorage Security and Defense Conference (ASDC) to bring diplomats, international affairs specialists, regional experts, and senior military officers together for discussions centered around the Arctic's growing importance in global security.



TSC sought public input at the Alaska Federation of Natives annual convention last October. The booth posted a different security question each day, encouraging participation and dialogue.

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In an op-ed, Hickey noted “The most important geostrategic place in the world now has an important geostrategic conference. A crucial aspect of the ASDC was the representation from both European and Asian nations. The Arctic is not just a regional concern for the United States or Canada or the Nordics; it is a global issue that impacts countries beyond the circumpolar north. For Europe, the security of the Arctic is intimately tied to its broader defense posture, particularly in the face of Russia’s aggression. Countries like Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark have long been on the front lines of Arctic security and have vital interests in maintaining stability and safeguarding international law in the region.”

More than 300 people attended the multi-day conference. Hickey notes that participants included people from industry, national laboratories, the Indigenous community, and local representation. The keynote addresses covered information on partnerships, allies, working together in the Arctic region, and incorporating industry.

TSC plans to continue the Anchorage-based conference to provide people with a better understanding of the importance of the Arctic.