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SUPPLEMENTAL TO DEFENSE ANALYSIS CAPSTONE REPORT

(4 OF 12: APPENDIX D)

USSF CAPABILITY GAP IN THE ARCTIC

by

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INFORMATION PAPER

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SUBJECT: Nuance in Defining Arctic Capability

1. Purpose: This paper aims to help inform Army decision-makers on critical aspects of the implementation of the Army Arctic Strategy: *Regaining Arctic Dominance (2021)*. This paper is specifically about defining 'Arctic-Capable,' 'Arctic-Ready,' and the term 'Arctic' itself meaning Arctic, sub-arctic, high-altitude, mountainous, and extreme cold weather (ECW) as outlined in *Regaining Arctic Dominance.*

2. Background:

a. One of the outputs of the Arctic Dominance 2028 Wargame was to develop a recommendation on the size and scope of Arctic-capable forces. Throughout the wargame, multiple friction points were identified, two of which were particularly applicable to the above-stated output; both related to a shared understanding of terminology. The first was the confusion between 'Arctic-capable' and 'Arctic-ready' forces. The second was the appropriateness of the concept of Arctic capabilities and skills as outlined by *Regaining Arctic Dominance*.

3. Discussion:

a. In the Arctic Dominance 2028 Wargame, two classifications of readiness were discussed in Arctic operations: Arctic-capable and Arctic-ready. While similar in name, these terms represent significant differences in operational capability. Arctic-capable referred to units of action that are fully equipped with Arctic-specific equipment, are fully trained, and capable of sustained combat operations in an Arctic environment. Arctic-ready referred to units of action equipped for operating in the Arctic environment for short-duration missions; however, due to limited or episodic training, they cannot conduct sustained operations. Even with these definitions, there was some confusion, primarily stemming from the widely held understanding that 'ready' seemed to be the higher level of capability as it implied the ability for immediate employment. In comparison, 'capable' appeared to suggest the ability to conduct operations without the connotation of immediate readiness.

b. The second issue stemmed from the broad definition of Arctic skills outlined in *Regaining Arctic Dominance*. Throughout the document, the "Arctic" in Arctic-capable / ready was defined as five different environments: Arctic (all season), sub-arctic, extreme cold weather (ECW), high altitude, and mountainous. While some similarities exist between these harsh environments, they are not analogous. It is vital to understand the differences between these five environments and the requirements of

each. Combining these environments under one term and expecting to achieve or maintain a state of readiness at each echelon is not feasible for any single unit.

c. When most military leaders hear the term 'Arctic,' they usually think of the words: cold, frozen, and winter. However, the term 'Arctic' is an all-season environment where both summer and winter present equally complex but distinct operational challenges. Additionally, the Arctic region includes different types of terrain depending on the area of operations (Alaska, European High North, etc.). Being Arctic-capable in one region does not necessarily mean a unit is prepared for others. For example, units that train in the High North of Scandinavia will not be able to use the same Arctic TTPs in northern Alaska due to vast differences in the environment and conditions, even during the same season.

d. It is too much to ask of one unit to maintain a validation pathway that includes mountaineering, ECW, high altitude, sub-arctic, and Arctic. Some units may retain the capability to conduct operations in two of the five environments but requiring more than that is not feasible. For example, in Army Special Forces, each SF Company has a team designated as a "mountain team" and is required to maintain a 'level 1 qualification' for military mountaineering. However, even the most qualified mountain team in the Special Forces Regiment would not be considered 'Arctic-ready.' Becoming Arctic-capable requires immersion in the actual conditions throughout the entire training and validation pathway. This requirement has severe implications for the length of time that a unit can maintain a required state of readiness, especially if that unit is not stationed in the environment to allow for constant immersion. Our Nordic partners are more proficient than the U.S. because they are constantly immersed in the environment and incorporate it into every phase of training. During the wargame, there was discussion of investing in indoor range facilities; this concept is entirely foreign to our Nordic partners as they ski to their training sites in the winter (a TTP used by 10th Group Soldiers prior to GWOT as well).

e. When examining the training opportunities for units in an Arctic environment, nearly all training venues are below the Arctic Circle and, therefore, are considered sub-Arctic. In other words, most Arctic training does not occur in an Arctic environment. This includes the Northern Warfare Training Center (NWTC) in Alaska and the Swedish Sub-arctic Warfare Training Center (SWTC) in Arvidsjuar, SWE. If a unit trains and validates in one environment, they will not necessarily be well prepared for operations in the other. Major Barrett Martin experienced this firsthand after validating in the SWTC in Sweden and participating in exercise COLD RESPONSE in Norway in the winter of 2020 as a Detachment Commander. Later that same year, he participated in exercise VIGILANT SHIELD in Deadhorse, Alaska. Despite having three months of Arctic training in the High North, MAJ Martin found his Detachment unprepared for the harsher environment of the Northern slope in Alaska. The terrain and environmental conditions on the Northern slope were drastically different and presented different operational challenges and limitations than the European High North, such as mobility and survival on ice instead of snow, lack of terrain and vegetation, high winds, etc.

f. Senior leaders must consider the difficulties inherent in requiring a unit to maintain proficiency in multiple related yet distinctly different capabilities. Furthermore, there must be very clear, distinct, Arctic-capable / Arctic-ready definitions understood across the Army and Joint Force. The training and resources required to be 'Arctic-capable' as currently defined across the five environments described above are not feasible. The Army should have a standardized validation pathway for units expected to be Arctic-capable. This standard should include Arctic-specific METL tasks at individual and unit (collective) levels and eventually be institutionalized in the Army and recognized by our partner nations to qualify U.S. units for participation in joint exercises in other Arctic nations. Currently, most U.S. units must attend a Norwegian or Swedish Arctic / Winter Warfare course as a prerequisite to any Arctic joint exercises in the High North. As the greatest Army in the world, we should not depend on other nations to validate us in military training. Furthermore, we should not be seen as a liability in combined training in an Arctic environment. If the Arctic is truly a priority, the Army must adapt to properly man, train, and equip our Soldiers and units. Currently, no U.S. unit has proper summer and winter OCIE for each Soldier. Our Nordic partners are successful in the High North partly because each Soldier is issued both summer and winter OCIE and can train with their equipment on a regular basis and during all training events and seasons.

4. Recommendations:

a. Redefine the readiness levels outlined at the Arctic Dominance 2028 Wargame to ensure that there is a clear delineation and easily understood difference between the two terms. Use doctrinal terms for Arctic readiness levels, such as 'Trained' and 'Proficient' rather than 'Ready' and 'Capable,' to help build shared understanding and avoid confusion. Therefore, troops and units could be referred to as 'Arctic-Trained' or 'Arctic-Proficient.' These terms will then nest with collective METL assessments.

b. Re-scope the requirement of Arctic readiness from the five environments outlined in *Regaining Arctic Dominance* (Arctic-all season, sub-arctic, ECW, high altitude, and mountainous). This recommendation is based on the understanding that no unit can reasonably maintain proficiency to conduct sustained combat operations across all five environments effectively. If all five skills need to be maintained, then assign them to different units. For example, one unit can maintain readiness in high altitude and mountainous environments while a separate unit can maintain readiness in Arctic and ECW.

c. Clearly define Arctic-specific METL tasks and develop standardized training and validation guidance to achieve readiness status concerning Arctic capabilities. This might also be further refined into area orientation (European High North vs. Alaska) and should provide some focus based off the projected mission requirements (defense of infrastructure, combined-arms maneuver, reconnaissance, etc.).