

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

May 4, 2021

1:02 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative George Rauscher  
Representative Laddie Shaw  
Representative David Nelson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Matt Claman

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: REGAINING ARCTIC DOMINANCE BY MAJOR GENERAL PETER ANDRYSIAK

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MAJOR GENERAL PETER ANDRYSIAK, Commanding General, United States Army Alaska and Deputy Commander, United States Alaskan Command Fort Wainwright, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a PowerPoint on Regaining Arctic Dominance.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR CHRIS TUCK** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives Rauscher, Nelson, Story, Shaw, and Tuck were present at the call to order. Representative Tarr arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**PRESENTATION: Regaining Arctic Dominance by Major General Peter Andrysiak**

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CHAIR TUCK announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by Major General Peter Andrysiak.

CHAIR TUCK introduced Major General Andrysiak and stated that he assumed command of the U.S. Army in 2019, is a graduate of [the United States Military Academy] West Point, and has a Master of Science degree in National Security Strategy from the National War College. He said that over his 29-year military career Major General Andrysiak has served in Rwanda, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Italy, and Alaska.

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MAJOR GENERAL PETER ANDRYSIK, Commanding General, United States Army Alaska and Deputy Commander, United States Alaskan Command, began his presentation with a PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], titled "America's Arctic Warriors," and he said that the Army is working in Alaska with the newly-signed Arctic Strategy. He said that some operational changes are expected in Alaska, including who will be involved and where the work will take place, in order to expand the capacity of developing cold-weather capabilities and to regain dominance in the Arctic. He said this is being done in cooperation with the U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) and the Department of the Army. He directed attention to information on slide 2, "Organization and Mission," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

USARAK provides trained and ready forces in support of  
worldwide unified land operations.

Supports USINDOPACOM Theater Security Cooperation  
Program in order to contribute to a stable and secure  
operational environment.

O/O, executes joint force land component command  
functions ISO of homeland defense and defense support  
of civil authorities in Alaska.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIK explained that slide 2 describes the layers of command. The U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK) is represented by the "Binky Bear" logo and I CORPS, USARAK's primary headquarters at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, is

identified by its "bulls-eye" patch. He said that USARPAC oversees USARAK and I CORPS, with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) in command of them all. He stressed that USARAK's first requirement is to generate "trained and ready forces" for use by the INDOPACOM commander in the INDOPACOM Area of Responsibility (AOR). He explained that the challenge is that Alaska is in the NORTHCOM [United States Northern Command] "footprint" and that while he is the senior commander in Alaska for the U.S. Army, he is also the deputy commander for Lieutenant General [William] Krumm in Alaskan Command, which includes personnel from the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Coast Guard. He noted the number of different units within USARAK.

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MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIK presented slide 3, "Location," which displayed a map of Alaska with stars representing the locations of Fort Wainwright, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), and Black Rapids Training Site with the Northern Warfare Training Center. He noted that Fort Wainwright has 2,500 more soldiers than JBER and remains the home of the 1-25th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, which returned from Iraq and Syria in 2020. He said that Fort Wainwright is also home to the two aviation battalions, 1-52nd General Support Aviation Battalion and 1-25th Attack and Recon Battalion, as well as supporting partners such as the U.S. Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM). He explained that JBER is the headquarters of the 4-25th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) as well as the headquarters of USARAK, the USARAK Support Battalion ("17th CSSB"), and related mission partners. He said that the Northern Warfare Training Center at the Black Rapids Training Site is where leaders are prepared to train the soldiers in cold weather operations.

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MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIK presented slide 4, "USARAK: Ready to Fight and Win Anywhere," which displayed a world map showing the areas designated as "cold climate" locations, which he described as 31 percent of the earth's surface, 27 percent of which is mountainous. He explained that in the 20 years of military focus on Afghanistan and Iraq, cold weather training has atrophied. He then presented slide 5, "The Arctic and the Geopolitical Landscape," which displayed a world map from the point of view of the Arctic and showing Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Russia, China, and the Scandinavian countries. Slide 5 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Regaining dominance in the Arctic provides new opportunities to engage and train with the many allies and partners around the world who also operate in extreme cold weather, mountainous, and high altitude environments. - U.S. Army Arctic Strategy

Arctic is Simultaneously

- Arena of competition
- Line of attack in conflict
- Area rich in natural resources
- Platform for global power projection

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK said that senior leaders in the Army have realized that readiness for competition, crisis, or conflict requires change in how the region is considered. This would involve considering the geopolitical and geographic aspects while recognizing that Russia and China are invested both militarily and economically in the region. He stressed that the military understands that climate change will impact how future operations are conducted. Realizing that the "flat-map" perspective is no longer sufficient, he said, viewing the area instead from the top down will allow better understanding of the interconnectedness of the Arctic. He said stated that due to the changing environment, the Army views the Arctic as an area of competition and a line of attack in conflict. A critical component of that is the perspective of homeland defense, he said, and the military views the Arctic "global power projection platform." He noted that competitors look at the Arctic as an opportunity to exploit the northern shipping routes like the Northwest Passage through the northern Canadian islands and the Transpolar Sea Route; the same resources and shipping routes important to Russia and China are also important to the U.S.

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MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK presented slide 6, "Regaining Arctic Dominance," and directed attention to the left half of the slide, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Timeline

11 July 2020

- Chief of Staff of the Army visits USARAK
- Arctic strategy fast-tracked

26 August 2020

- Army Senior Leaders Readiness Forum

4 December 2020

- Army Arctic Symposium

19 January 2021

- Secretary of the Army and CSA sign the classified Arctic strategy

The strategy lays out a plan of broad objectives the Army will achieve through the execution of Title X actions and analysis to achieve operational results

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK explained that the Army Arctic Symposium was the last piece of preparation informing the release of the strategy. He paraphrased the remainder of slide 6, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Construct

The Arctic Now and in the Future

- Geopolitical environment
- Army capabilities
- Future environment
- Resources & transportation

The Arctic as a Region of Strategic Competition

- Russia - Asserting dominance
- China - Normalizing presence

The Army in the Arctic - Strategy

- Project power from, within, and through
- Employ calibrated force posture
- Engage and strengthen allies and partners to maintain stability
- Generate Arctic capable forces

The Arctic Path

- Actions to achieve our objectives
- Strong Alaska focus

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MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK presented slide 7, "The Arctic Path," which displayed the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) objectives of defending the homeland, competing to maintain favorable regional balances of power, and ensuring common domains remain

free and open. He said that the strategy includes an operational approach for land forces in the region; the commanders of NORTHCOM, United States European Command (EUCOM), and INDOPACOM all have equities in the Arctic, and the question for all units is how to generate trained and ready forces. He described the methods used to achieve DoD objectives, and he said that the first line of effort is to improve Arctic capability; equipment will be adjusted to operate throughout the Arctic environment, and the Army will be looking for soldiers who would be more likely to thrive in cold weather. The second line of effort, he said, is to compete in the Arctic as well as globally. He described the challenge of redefining the relationships with INDOPACOM countries such as India and Mongolia that have cold and mountainous environments. The third line of effort, he said, is to defend the far north in crisis and conflict; he noted that the Arctic Scout program is being reinvigorated, and the military is developing opportunities to engage the Alaska Native community. The fourth line of effort is to build Arctic multi-domain operations, which he described as a complicated effort to integrate cyber and intelligence communities. The fifth line of effort is to project power across the Arctic in the form of exercises and bringing other units into Alaska to train. He said that the plan is to convert USARAK to an operational headquarters, which would add much-needed capabilities for Arctic operations.

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MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK presented slide 8, "Arctic Capacity - Operational Approach," which showed the hierarchical approach to training in a cold weather environment. He explained that the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid is having the right equipment such as snowshoes, skis, Arctic tents, stoves, winterization kits, and tire chains. The next level is provided by the Northern Warfare Training Center, which will train the leaders, followed by the commander and unit level training. The fourth level in the hierarchy is the collective training focusing on the Arctic, in which soldiers will learn to operate on a larger scale and for a longer duration; he explained that this level includes experiential-based training in the weather and terrain, so training which was primarily done from March to October will now be October to March. At the top of the hierarchy, he said, is the focus on building and retaining the soldiers with the type of expertise informed by the Arctic approach. He clarified that units will stay in Alaska, and other units and leaders will be brought into Alaska to train, so the Army at large is exposed to Arctic training.

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REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked whether DoD or USARAK has a plan to combat the suicide rate as soldiers from the Lower 48 are stationed in Alaska.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK explained that suicide is tied to unique problems in individuals rather than being tied to the environment. He noted that the Army has spent \$1.3 billion in the past few years to improve quality of life and ensure that soldiers have access to resources, and he remarked that integration into the community is a key strategy in suicide prevention. He referred to his earlier description about the recruiting strategy that targets more soldiers from the north, and that those soldiers would be "more apt to thrive."

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON said that some soldiers have expressed that it's difficult to get Arctic training and asked whether increasing class size at the Northern Warfare Training Center is part of the strategy.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK replied that the school is designed for leaders to train soldiers; as the Army retains talent and soldiers work their way to squad leader or platoon sergeant positions, they will get the opportunity to go through the course. He said that the course will expand to meet the demand to train leaders rather than training each soldier.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked whether there is a timeline for increasing the capacity of the training center.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK explained that the instructors will be augmented to move more leaders through the program; he said that a problem is that with training in the mountainous environment and extreme cold, and for longer durations, the training period will be longer overall. He said that the Army is doing a program assessment now, evaluating the needed instructor size to meet demand for the course. He said that the course is currently focused on preventing issues that have occurred in more recent history, with instruction focused on things like preventing frostbite at the beginning of training in March, and needs to be revamped for full cold-weather training.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON noted that a few years ago there was talk of transferring Arctic paratroopers out of Alaska, and he expressed his appreciation for the strategy.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER referred to slide 4, which stated that 31 percent of the earth's surface experiences cold climates, and asked at what temperature the climate is deemed to be "cold."

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK replied that the focus of the strategy is to be able to use the troops in Korea or Europe and said that he would find out the temperature.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether the Black Rapids Training Site would be operational year-round.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK explained that classes in the winter focus on cold weather operations, with mountaineering the focus in the summer. He indicated that "a mountain component to the winter piece" needs to be added. He mentioned the 10th Mountain Division, which started in World War II as a skiing division, and he remarked that the division's operational success in the Italian Alps could be attributed more to its mountaineering skills than to its skiing skills.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked whether there would be any overlap with the U.S. Coast Guard in the Arctic dominance strategy.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK replied that all branches of the military are looking at Arctic strategy from different perspectives. He said, "I think the biggest piece that needs to come next is, 'How do we stitch this all together, and how does that all play a role in competition?'"

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY noted his remarks about using the traditional knowledge of Alaska Natives and asked whether he believes the legislature should be doing anything to assist in providing a better quality of life for the soldiers.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK responded that the Army has been in full support of the needed resources to build out the infrastructure challenges in Alaska. He said that U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski asked him, "How do we, as a community, need to come together from a quality-of-life perspective?" He expressed the belief that as COVID-19 restrictions ease, community connections will

strengthen. He opined that a challenge in the Interior is to get the market to absorb the new requirements; for instance, he said, hospital capacity that relies on the local market. He also noted that a lot of soldiers come to Alaska without their families because the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) doesn't provide the services the soldier's family might need.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said that there is proposed legislation for interstate licensure for military spouses.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK responded that the proposed legislation for licensure is a huge initiative for spouse employment.

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CHAIR TUCK added that in 2019 the Alaska Defense Initiative included a discussion with ideas to support lifestyles that support military families by helping them connect with the communities and make a living. He noted the effect on families with deployed troops and young children.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER said that 60 Russian airplanes were intercepted in 2020, and he expressed that the increased activity is "straining our units." He asked whether Russia or any other country is breaching Alaska's northern borders.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK replied that he is not aware of that happening.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked Major General Andrysiak whether he had comments about supporting the soldiers with education.

MAJOR GENERAL ANDRYSIAK expressed that educational experiences at Fort Wainwright have been "extremely positive," and he knows of no shortfalls in that area.

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The committee took an at-ease from 1:44 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.

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## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:45 p.m.