

# Crumbling Arctic infrastructure takes center stage in Air Force's new strategy

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The Air Force's new Arctic strategy highlights a need for basic infrastructure in the High North. But it's not clear where funding for new technology and infrastructure will come from.

The [14-page strategy unveiled on Tuesday is scant on details](#) and highlights competitors Russia and China. The strategy, which includes the Space Force, maintains the Defense Department's view that the risk of "immediate conflict" is low, while stepped-up military drills and economic investment by adversaries, paired with access to the region due to sea ice melt, could "intensify" regional competition.

"More recently, we have recognized the aging infrastructure from the Cold War era ... aging technology tells us it's time for us to focus there again," Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett said in response to a question about "why now" at an Atlantic Council webinar ahead of the strategy's release.

Barrett also stressed that Russia's military buildup in the Arctic, as well as China's new space capabilities, has increased the urgency of the Air Force's strategy.

"China has really gone from zero to 60 in space very quickly, and ... they're developing a robust set of capabilities that threaten our access to space in the Arctic," Chief of Space Operations Gen. John Raymond said at the event.

The four key parts of the strategy are detecting and tracking threats to defend the region, maintaining freedom-of-navigation operations to stand up to adversaries, further cooperating with Arctic allies and boosting training and situational awareness of the environment.

**Warnings of attack:** The strategy says the service will invest in "missile warning and defense" and modernizing missile radars, but it's unclear how much the investment will be and from where the funds will come.

The service also says the Air and Space Forces will develop an "Arctic communications roadmap," and new space technology is also a priority. It's unclear what those technologies will be.

**More jets:** The strategy highlights that the [arrival of F-35 fighter jets](#) will "present a highly-effective power projection capability" at Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska.

The plan addresses aging infrastructure in strategic locations such as Thule Air Base in Greenland that has "deteriorated due to extreme environmental factors."

A focus on updating old infrastructure is sure to please some Arctic advocates in Congress, as well as experts in the field who have urged for more funding to address this concern, although it again does not provide a budget for new infrastructure.

**Cooperation with allies:** Officials stressed the importance of boosting existing partnerships with Canada, as well as with Norway. The report mentions the service will "enhance and explore additional training, exercises, wargames, and combined deployments with regional and joint partners."

**Preparation for Arctic operations:** In order to combat harsh weather in the Arctic, the service will evaluate who's qualified and trained to operate in those conditions, and work to improve training by using Alaska National Guardsmen. The Air and Space Forces will also work with the Coast Guard and Alaskan Command to develop personnel recovery techniques and prepare for future deployments.