



**TESTIMONY OF  
ADMIRAL ROBERT PAPP  
COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD**

**ON "COAST GUARD NEEDS IN ALASKA"**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES, AND COAST GUARD**

**AUGUST 12, 2011**

Good morning, Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison and distinguished Members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Coast Guard's operational presence in the Arctic. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

**AN EVOLVING ARCTIC**

The United States is an Arctic Nation, and the Coast Guard has been operating in the Arctic Ocean since Alaska was a territory to assist scientific exploration, chart the waters, provide humanitarian assistance to Alaskan Native tribes, conduct Search and Rescue (SAR), and enforce the law. Today our mission remains remarkably similar to what it was in 1867; however, as open water continues to replace ice, human activity is increasing. With increasingly navigable waters, comes increased Coast Guard responsibility.

Along with our statutory responsibilities, U.S. Arctic policy is set forth in the 2009 National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 25. The Arctic Region Policy directive identifies objectives for the Arctic including directing the Department of Homeland Security to work with other nations and through the IMO to provide for safe and secure Maritime Transportation in the Arctic. NSPD-66 also directs the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Homeland Security, in coordination with heads of other relevant executive departments and agencies to carry out the policy as it relates to national security and homeland security interests in the Arctic. Executive Order 13547 (National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts, and the Great Lakes) adopts and directs federal agencies to implement the recommendations of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force. These recommendations include, as one priority objective, identifying and implementing actions to address changing conditions in the Arctic through better stewardship. The Coast Guard is moving forward to execute its responsibilities under these directives.

The Coast Guard is the Nation's principal maritime safety, security, environmental protection and law enforcement entity. We have the lead role in ensuring Arctic maritime safety, security and stewardship.

From an operational perspective, in order to meet the requirements set forth in NSPD 66 and EO 13547, we must determine our nation's vessel requirements for transiting ice-laden waters, consider establishing seasonal bases for air and boat operations, and develop a force structure that can operate

in extreme cold and ice. As a matter of policy and stewardship, the Administration encourages the Senate to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty. Law of the Sea has become the framework for governance in the Arctic. Every Arctic Nation except the United States is a party. As our responsibilities continue to increase in direct proportion to the Arctic's emerging waters, it is more vital than ever that the United States accedes to the Law of the Sea Treaty.

## ARCTIC TRENDS

The Arctic domain has been gaining national attention. Gradually increasing accessibility to waters previously covered by ice has increased the significance of maritime issues including freedom of navigation, offshore resource exploration and exploitation, and environmental preservation. Observations and trends relevant to Coast Guard operations include:

- *Dynamic changes in ice conditions:* The recession of the ice edge continues to open new water in the summer months. While there is less ice and more water, the unpredictable movement of existing ice flows and uncharted waters beneath a previously frozen sea could present risks to ships that venture into these waters.
- *Offshore Resource Development:* Oil companies are in the process of taking advantage of drilling and exploratory opportunities in the Arctic. In May 2011, Shell submitted a plan of exploration to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) that details company plans to drill exploratory wells in the Chukchi Sea beginning in 2012. Other companies, including ConocoPhillips and Statoil, own leases on the Arctic outer continental shelf and may submit exploration plans as well. Shell is currently in the process of retrofitting a mobile offshore drilling unit (MODU), the *Kulluk*, designed for drilling in the offshore Arctic environment and plans to have the drilling platform operational in the spring of 2012. Shell modified their exploration plan and updated their worst case discharge estimates from 5,500 barrels per day to 24,000 barrels per day to comply with new BOEMRE requirements. The Coast Guard received Shell's revised oil spill response plan from BOEMRE in May 2011 to review worst case discharge estimates against the current Area Contingency Plans and is now updating the North Slope and Northwest Arctic Subarea Contingency Plans to reflect this new activity.
- *Extended Continental Shelf:* This summer marks the fourth year the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) HEALY and the Canadian icebreaker *LOUIS ST. LAURENT* will work together to collect seismic and bathymetric data in the Arctic Ocean. This data is necessary to delineate the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

## **Meeting Homeland Security Needs in the Arctic**

As part of a multi-agency effort to implement the Arctic Region Policy, the Coast Guard continues to push forward and assess our Arctic operational limits. In 2008, 2009 and 2010 the Coast Guard set up small, temporary Forward Operating Locations on the North Slope in Prudhoe Bay, Nome, Barrow and Kotzebue, AK to conduct pulse operations with Coast Guard boats, helicopters, and Maritime Safety and Security Teams. We also deployed our light-ice capable 225-foot ocean-going buoy tenders to test our equipment, train our crews and increase our awareness of maritime activity in the region. Additionally, from April to November we fly two aircraft sorties a month to evaluate private, commercial, and governmental activities. These initial missions have provided valuable

information that we are applying to future operations, gaining insight on infrastructure requirements and force structure development.

### **Protecting the Maritime Environment**

To protect the Arctic environment, we engage industry and the private sector to address their significant responsibilities for pollution prevention, preparedness, and response capability. Recognizing that pollution response is significantly more difficult in cold, ice and darkness, enhancing preventative measures is critical. Those engaging in offshore commercial activity in the Arctic must also plan and prepare for emergency response in the face of a harsh environment, long transit distances for air and surface assets and limited response resources. We continue to work on raising awareness of these challenges, and foster continued development of contingency plans, and communications.

While prevention is critical, the Coast Guard must be able to respond to pollution incidents where responsible parties are not known or fail to adequately respond. The Federal On-Scene Coordinators and their staffs at Sector Juneau, Sector Anchorage, and Marine Safety Unit Valdez provide incident management expertise and limited pre-positioned response equipment. Additionally, the Coast Guard Pacific Strike Team based in Novato, CA maintains response equipment and specialized personnel which can deploy to the Arctic on short notice. Furthermore, Air Station Kodiak C-130 crews are trained to deploy the Aerial Dispersant Delivery System (ADDS) out of Anchorage.

We have exercised the Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System (VOSS) and the Spilled Oil Recovery System (SORS) in Alaskan waters, but we have yet to conduct exercises north of the Arctic Circle. Both of these systems enable vessels to collect oil in the event of a discharge. The VOSS is deployable and capable of being used on a variety of ships and the SORS is permanently stored and deployed from the Coast Guard's 225-foot ocean-going buoy tenders. However, these systems have limited capacity and are only effective in ice-free conditions.

The Coast Guard needs to test and evaluate these systems in icy waters. Notably, the President's Fiscal Year 2012 Budget supports research and development work, including research on oil detection and recovery in icy water conditions.

There are five Oil Spill Removal Organizations (OSROs) classified in the State of Alaska that support vessel and facility response plan holders. Two large OSROs service Prince William Sound and Prudhoe Bay; one OSRO provides response capabilities in Cook Inlet; and two service the Aleutian chain and Southeast Alaska with response capability for refined products only. None of the OSROs in Alaska are classified for open ocean responses.

Fisheries are also a major concern. The National Marine Fisheries Service, based on a recommendation from the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, imposed a moratorium on fishing within the U.S. EEZ north of the Bering Strait until an assessment of the practicality of sustained commercial fishing is completed. Regardless of the outcome of this assessment, the Coast Guard will continue to carry out its mission to enforce and protect living marine resources in the region.

## **Facilitating Safe, Secure, and Reliable Navigation**

The Coast Guard continues to update the Waterways Analysis and Management System to determine navigational requirements, vessel traffic density and appropriate ship routing measures. The Coast Guard is also moving forward with a Bering Strait Port Access Routing Study, which is a preliminary analysis to determine navigational and vessel traffic and other safety requirements. This study is in the initial phase and, because the Bering Strait is an international body of water, this requires coordination with the Russian Federation before it can be acted upon by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

## **Supporting Multi-Agency Arctic Region Policy Implementation**

The Coast Guard continues to support international and multilateral organizations, studies, projects and initiatives, including work with the Arctic Council, IMO and their respective working groups. The Coast Guard also conducts joint contingency response exercises with Canada and maintains communications and working relationships with Canadian and Russian agencies responsible for regional operations, including SAR and law enforcement. Additionally, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently signed an Arctic SAR agreement, which memorialized the intent of all Arctic nations to cooperate in SAR operations. The Coast Guard will continue to engage Arctic nations, international organizations, industry and Alaskan state, local and tribal governments to strengthen our partnerships and inter-operability. To meet this end, the Coast Guard is cooperating with the Department of State, BOEMRE, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and others in leading U.S. participation in the Arctic Council and EPPR to develop an Arctic wide instrument focused on improving availability and access to Arctic capable equipment and personnel for catastrophic incident response.

In particular, engagement with Alaskan Native Tribes continues to be highly beneficial. Efforts to learn from their centuries of knowledge—and their willingness to share it—have made operations safer and more successful. This year, the Coast Guard is again working with tribes in remote villages on the North Slope and along northwestern Alaska to conduct boating safety exchanges. The Coast Guard is working hard to ensure tribal equities are recognized and considered. The Coast Guard continues to value our partnerships with our Native Alaskan friends.

CGC HEALY is presently supporting Arctic research efforts throughout the summer and into early fall. These operations are supporting research by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Naval Research Lab, National Science Foundation, Office of Naval Research, and the Department of State. Presently, NASA scientists are aboard CGC HEALY conducting their ICESCAPE mission –“Impacts of Climate on Ecosystems and Chemistry of the Arctic Pacific Environment” to study the impacts of climate change in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. NASA does part of this mission from space – but also needs “boots on the ice” to better understand satellite data from this complex and emerging region.

## **LAW OF THE SEA TREATY**

All other Arctic nations and most other nations worldwide have acceded to the Law of the Sea Treaty. Arctic nations are using the treaty’s provisions in Article 76 to file extended continental shelf claims with the U.N. Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) in order to expand the territory over which they have exclusive rights to resources on and beneath the Arctic

seabed. If the United States made an extended continental shelf claim, the nation could potentially assert sovereignty over 240 miles of additional seabed territory out to 440 miles from our land base line, far beyond the existing 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone. This area reportedly contains some of the richest deposits of oil and natural gas in the Arctic. However, until the United States accedes to the Law of the Sea Treaty, it is unlikely CLCS will entertain any U.S. submission of an extended continental shelf claim. Acceding to the Law of the Sea Treaty also provides the United States with standing to work within the Law of the Sea Convention framework with other Arctic Nations on issues such as environmental stewardship. As such, the Administration, along with other industry and academic leaders, supports favorable action on the part of the U.S. Senate with regard to the Law of the Sea Treaty.

## **CURRENT ARCTIC CAPACITIES AND LIMITATIONS**

The U.S. Coast Guard's extensive history of Arctic service provides both experience and an expansive network of governmental, non-governmental, and private partnerships to draw upon. However, while summer operations continue to provide valuable lessons and help us gain insights regarding the Arctic, we must acknowledge the seasonal limitation of these efforts.

There are few national assets capable of operating in the harsh Arctic maritime environment. As new capabilities are developed, the Coast Guard will work to ensure its force structure is appropriately sized, trained, equipped, and postured to meet its Arctic mission requirements. Currently, the Coast Guard has one operational ice breaker, the 11 year old HEALY, a medium icebreaker or Polar Class 3, specifically adapted for scientific research. Our two heavy polar ice breakers, or Polar Class 1s, are not operational. The 34-year old POLAR SEA has been out of commission due to a major engineering casualty, and is now in the process of being decommissioned. The 35-year old POLAR STAR, which has been in a caretaker status since 2006, is currently undergoing a major reactivation project, funded by 2009 and 2010 appropriations, and is expected to be ready for operations in 2013. Surface capability is vital to meet our responsibilities in the region. Although the risk of an incident in ice-covered U.S. waters is currently low, our nation must plan for ice capable assets in the future that can effectively carry out SAR and environmental response in ice-laden waters. In the near term, the Coast Guard can utilize the HEALY to manage the response or rely on our foreign arctic partners that have icebreakers operating in the area.

The Coast Guard's most immediate operational requirement, however, is infrastructure. Energy exploration is emerging on the North Slope of Alaska, but the existing infrastructure is extremely limited. The Coast Guard needs facilities to base crews, hangar aircraft, and protect vessels in order to perform prevention and response missions.

## **CONCLUSION**

With an emerging Arctic Ocean comes increased national operational responsibilities. National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 25 and Executive Order 13547 guide the Arctic region mission objectives for all agencies including the Coast Guard. To meet NSPD 66's and EO 13547's direction, the Coast Guard is working closely with its many inter-agency partners, and Alaska State, local and tribal governments. For the past four years, the Coast Guard has been conducting limited Arctic operations during open water periods. However, as operational tempo increases in the Arctic, the Coast Guard will require specialized vessels, aircraft, and crews trained to operate in extreme climates.

The nation must build toward a level of mission performance and preparedness commensurate with the relative risks posed by Arctic activity. The Coast Guard must continue working amongst the interagency to refine future mission requirements, identify the precise mix of national assets, capabilities and infrastructure needed to meet these requirements, and look for collocation opportunities. Coast Guard will continue to seek out opportunities with our Arctic neighbors and the global community to address the critical issues of governance, sovereignty, environmental protection, and international security.

While there are many challenges, the increasingly open Arctic Ocean also presents unique opportunities. The relatively undeveloped infrastructure, current low commercial maritime activity levels, and developing governance structure provide an opening to engage in proactive, integrated, coordinated, and sustainable U.S. and international initiatives. The Coast Guard looks forward to working with the Congress on how we can support our emerging national objectives and responsibilities in the Arctic Ocean.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.