



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

**ON "ARCTIC OPERATIONS"**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,  
SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION**

**JULY 27, 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 native tribes, conduct search and rescue, and law enforcement. 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 while acknowledging the effects of climate change and increased human activity. Importantly for Coast Guard, NSPD 66 specifically directs relevant agencies, including 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. 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. 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, we have been conducting limited Arctic operations during open water periods. However, we face many challenges. Some Arctic operations demand specialized vessels, aircraft, and crews trained to operate in extreme climate.

Operationally, in order to meet the NSPD 66's and EO 13547's requirements, we need to determine our nation's vessel requirements for transiting in 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, we encourage 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 U.S. ratified to Law of the Sea.

## **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 USCG 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 such as Shell 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.
- *Fish Stock Migration:* As the ice edge recedes and water temperatures change, there have been anecdotal reports that fish stocks are moving northwest. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is currently conducting a study to gather more reliable data on fish stock migrations. The Bering Sea remains one of the world's richest biomasses, and if fish stocks are in fact migrating north, fisherman will follow, which could lead to increased foreign incursions into the U.S. EEZ.
- *Extended Continental Shelf:* This summer marks the fourth year the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) HEALY and the Canadian icebreaker LOUIS S. 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 according to the criteria set forth in the Law of the Sea Convention.]

## **SUPPORTING EXECUTION OF THE NATIONAL ARCTIC POLICY OBJECTIVES**

The vast Arctic is primarily a maritime environment and the U.S. Coast Guard has the same responsibilities in the Arctic Ocean as it does in all other waters it patrols. The Arctic, more so than any other ocean, is environmentally fragile, lacks infrastructure, and remains a very harsh operating

environment. At the same time, within the risk reduction framework that drives our allocation of assets and resources, we recognize that the Arctic poses greater long-term planning challenges that overshadow the immediate tactical challenges we face today.

Given the scope of these challenges, we have adopted a “whole of government” approach and are leveraging international partnerships to pursue our interests. The Coast Guard’s strategic approach is to ensure we pursue the capability to perform our statutory missions so we can ensure the Arctic is safe, secure, and environmentally sustainable. This strategy is consistent with our Service’s approach to performing its *Maritime Safety, Security and Stewardship* functions. In accordance with our risk reduction framework, we will do our part to build legal regimes, domain awareness, and a force structure that can operate in extreme cold and ice.

Our approach also accounts for seasonal changes and conditions in the environment. While the Arctic is increasingly open in warmer months, its waters remain mostly ice-covered.

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

As part of a multi-agency effort to implement the Arctic Region Policy, we continue to push forward and assess our Arctic operational limits. In 2008, 2009 and 2010 we 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 activity. 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, 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 to facilitate awareness, contingency planning, and communications.

While prevention is critical, USCG must be able to respond to pollution incidents where responsible parties are not known or fail to adequately respond. 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.

Fisheries are also a major concern. The National Marine Fisheries Service, based on a recommendation from the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, has 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 this region.

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

We continue to update our Waterways Analysis and Management System to determine navigational requirements, vessel traffic density and appropriate ship routing measures. We are 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 Strait, we require coordination with the Russian Federation before we can forward it to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for consideration.

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

The Coast Guard continues to support international and multilateral organizations, studies, projects and initiatives. We are actively working with the Arctic Council, IMO and their respective working groups. We are also conducting joint contingency response exercises with Canada and we maintain communications and working relationships with Canadian and Russian agencies responsible for regional operations including Search and Rescue (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. We will continue to engage Arctic nations, international organizations, industry and Alaskan state, local and tribal governments to strengthen our partnerships and inter-operability.

In particular, our engagement with Alaska Native Tribes continues to be highly beneficial. Our efforts to learn from their centuries of traditional knowledge—and their willingness to share it with us—have made our operations safer and more successful. This year, we are again conducting small-scale visits to tribes in remote villages on the North Slope and along northwestern Alaska to conduct boating safety exchanges and provide medical, dental, and veterinary care. We are working hard to ensure tribal equities are recognized, considered and indigenous peoples and their way of life are protected to the greatest extent possible. We look forward to continuing to strengthen 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 their satellite data in 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 U.S. made an extended continental shelf claim, we 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, undiscovered deposits of oil and natural gas in the Arctic. However, until the U.S. 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 us with standing to work within the Law of the Sea Convention framework with other Arctic Nations on issues such as environmental stewardship. As such, I join with a number of other senior Administration, military, industry, and academic leaders in supporting favorable action on the part of the U.S. Senate to accede 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 our summer operations continue to provide valuable lessons and help us gain insights regarding the Arctic, we must acknowledge the seasonal limitation of these efforts and the fact that we still have much to learn about Arctic operations.

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 PC3, specifically adapted for scientific research. Our two heavy polar ice breakers 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 US waters is currently low, our nation must plan for ice capable assets in the future that can effectively carry out search and rescue 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 underway on the North Slope of Alaska, but the existing infrastructure is extremely limited. We need a seasonal facility to base our crews, hangar our aircraft and protect our vessels in order to mount a response.

## **CONCLUSION**

With an emerging Arctic Ocean come increased national operational responsibilities. National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 25 and Executive Order 13547 direct Coast Guard developing mission objectives. We also must meet our persistent statutory responsibilities. To meet these objectives and responsibilities, we have much work to do.

We must build toward a level of mission performance and preparedness commensurate with the relative risks posed by Arctic activity; we 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. We must 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 wet 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. We look forward to working with the Congress on how we can support our national objectives and responsibilities in the emerging Arctic Ocean.

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