



**TESTIMONY OF
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ON

“ARCTIC OPERATIONS”

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE – WESTERN HEMISPHERE & EUROPE,
EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS SUBCOMMITTEES**

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Good afternoon Chairman Duncan, Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Sires, Ranking Member Meeks, and distinguished members of the Subcommittees. I am honored to appear before you today to discuss Coast Guard operations to ensure Maritime Safety, Security and Stewardship in the Arctic Region.

THE COAST GUARD IN ALASKA AND THE ARCTIC REGION

The Coast Guard has been operating in the Arctic Ocean since 1867, when Alaska was purchased from Russia. Then, as now, our mission is to enforce U.S. laws and regulations, conduct search and rescue, assist scientific exploration, and foster navigation safety and environmental stewardship. The Coast Guard uses mobile command and control platforms including large cutters and ocean-going ice-strengthened buoy tenders, as well as seasonal air and communications capabilities to execute these missions within more than 950,000 square miles of ocean off the Alaskan coast.

Since 2008, the Coast Guard has conducted operations in the Arctic Region to assess our capabilities and mission requirements as maritime activity and environmental conditions warrant. These operations have included establishing small, temporary Forward Operating Locations along the North Slope to test our capabilities with boats, helicopters, and personnel. Each year from April to November we also fly aerial sorties to evaluate activities in the region. We will continue to deploy a suite of Coast Guard cutters to test our equipment, train our crews, and increase our awareness of Arctic activity.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE ARCTIC REGION

U.S. Arctic policy is set forth in the National Strategy for the Arctic Region and its Implementation Plan. The Coast Guard’s efforts to foster safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic directly support national objectives of advancing U.S. security interests, pursuing responsible regional stewardship, and strengthening international cooperation.

In addition to the National Strategy for the Arctic Region, Executive Order (EO) 13689 – which was signed in January 2015 – established the Arctic Executive Steering Committee (AESC), set priorities for the 2015-2017 chairmanship of the Arctic Council, and outlined commitments which were re-affirmed by the President of the United States during his visit to Alaska in August 2015. I would like to further describe how we support the AESC, the Arctic Council, and the President’s commitments to the Arctic.

ARCTIC EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

Per EO 13689, the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) represents the Department on the Arctic Executive Steering Committee (AESC). In general, the Deputy Secretary has asked the Coast Guard to represent the Department at AESC meetings. The AESC was established to help coordinate Arctic-related activities across the Federal Government and to enhance collaborations with state, local, and tribal governments, academic institutions, and the nonprofit and private sectors. The AESC manages coordination of national policies, consultation with stakeholders, and advancement of Arctic initiatives.

The Coast Guard is the lead agency responsible for coordinating seven activities associated with the National Strategy for the Arctic Region and its Implementation Plan:

- Enhance Arctic Domain Awareness
- Sustain Federal Capability to Conduct Maritime Operations in Ice-Covered Waters
- Improve Hazardous Material Spill Prevention, Containment, and Response
- Promote Arctic Oil Pollution Preparedness, Prevention, and Response Internationally
- Enhance Arctic Search and Rescue
- Expedite International Maritime Organization Polar Code Development and Adoption
- Promote Arctic Waterways Management

SUPPORT FOR THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The Coast Guard is actively engaged with international organizations and industry through two noteworthy Arctic Council activities. First, the Coast Guard, under the auspices of the Interagency Coordinating Council on Oil Pollution Research, is working with stakeholders to address critical research and development needs and capabilities for pollution response and oil spill prevention in the Arctic environment. As part of this initiative, the Coast Guard led the U.S. delegation to the Arctic Council that developed the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response, which was signed into force in May 2013. Additionally, the Coast Guard is a key participant in the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) workgroup, and helps develop, implement, and sustain Arctic-wide prevention and response strategies. This past September the EPPR workgroup coordinated and hosted an Arctic Council oil spill workshop to test the oil pollution agreement, and will help lead a live exercise in 2016.

Second, the Coast Guard is a key sponsor of various contingency response agreements and exercises. Most notably, the Coast Guard was a prime mover in coordinating the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic.

The U.S. Government recently conducted an International Arctic Search and Rescue Exercise, ARCTIC ZEPHYR from October 19-22, 2015 in Anchorage Alaska to test the agreement in practice. Its focus was on the coordination of response capabilities of the Arctic Nations, local governments, private sector, and indigenous communities to a mass search and rescue operation in the Arctic Region.

PRESIDENT’S ARCTIC COMMITMENTS

The DHS is working with the Administration to support the President’s announced intention to accelerate the acquisition of a replacement heavy polar icebreaker and begin planning for construction of additional icebreakers. The Coast Guard currently operates and maintains two U.S. polar icebreakers, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) HEALY and USCGC POLAR STAR, only one of which (the USCGC POLAR STAR) is a “heavy” icebreaker. The USCGC POLAR STAR operates with aging equipment and the recent reactivation effort is expected to extend its lifespan for only another five to eight years. The Coast Guard is finalizing operational requirements documentation as part of the acquisition process to acquire new heavy polar icebreakers to address future needs. Polar icebreakers are critical to supporting key national priorities laid out in the National Security Presidential Directive on Arctic Region policy and the National Strategy for the Arctic Region.

COAST GUARD ARCTIC STRATEGY

The Coast Guard’s Arctic Strategy aligns with the National Strategy. The Coast Guard’s strategic objectives in the Arctic are to improve awareness, modernize governance, and broaden relationships. In pursuing these objectives, the Coast Guard has initiated efforts that will enhance capabilities to continue performance of all of our statutory missions as the environment changes.

The Coast Guard’s plan for implementing its strategy includes a number of initiatives that are planned to be in place by the year 2025. I would like to highlight five of our initiatives that are already in progress.

1. BROADEN ARCTIC SHIELD OPERATIONS

Arctic Shield is the Coast Guard’s annual operation in the Arctic region. Using a seasonal and mobile approach, the Coast Guard executes its statutory missions in the region.

Arctic Shield 2015 is currently focused on Western Alaska and the Bering Strait with a three-pronged interagency operation consisting of outreach, operations, and assessment of capabilities. Since May, outreach has consisted of delivering education and awareness services to Arctic communities and outlying native villages. Coast Guard District Seventeen, which oversees Arctic operations in Alaska, employs a North Slope Liaison who engages local emergency management agencies regularly and recently participated in the Arctic Economic Partnership Mini Summit at Barrow. District Seventeen also supports a variety of community oriented projects sponsored by the University of Alaska in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Our engagement with Alaska Native tribes continues to be mutually beneficial. Our continued partnership has made Coast Guard operations safer and more successful. We are working hard to ensure tribal equities are recognized, and that indigenous peoples and their way of life are protected, including managing our operations and the activities of other waterways users with the establishment of The Arctic Waterways Safety Committee.

This body works in close coordination with Alaska Native subsistence activities to ensure de-confliction of activities during open water operations. We will continue to engage other Federal agencies, Arctic nations, international organizations, industry, academia, and Alaskan state, local, and tribal governments to strengthen our relationships and inter-operability.

Arctic Shield Operations in 2015 involved the establishment of a temporary forward-operating location in Deadhorse, as well as the deployment of major cutter forces, air assets, communication equipment, and logistics support to conduct Coast Guard's missions. In 2015, the Coast Guard utilized the icebreaker USCGC HEALY for a perimeter circuit of the U.S. Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) and an historic expedition to the North Pole, supporting scientific research projects and operational evaluations of communications systems. Meanwhile, the national security cutter WAESCHE and high endurance cutter MUNRO operated in the Chuckchi and Bering Seas, conducting maritime patrols and stationing response capabilities during drilling operations. The seagoing buoy tender SYCAMORE conducted several waterway management surveys associated with Aids to Navigation missions. Additionally, the Coast Guard has partnered with NOAA and other agencies to conduct mapping operations, and to coordinate mass casualty prevention and response plans at all levels of government. Arctic Shield 2015 has been carefully tailored to deliver the appropriate set of capabilities to this remote area, and directly supported the priorities in the Coast Guard's Arctic Strategy.

The Coast Guard is also working with the Department of Defense, to advance maritime domain awareness by testing numerous types of technologies and capabilities for use in the Arctic, including communication systems, and unmanned vehicles. Recently, the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate established the Arctic Domain Awareness Center (ADAC), as a Center of Excellence at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. ADAC's focus is to develop and transition technology solutions, which will improve situational awareness and crisis response capabilities related to emerging maritime challenges posed by the dynamic Arctic environment. The Coast Guard will work closely with ADAC and other agencies on projects such as sea ice forecasting and the development of remote sensors and power systems.

2. ESTABLISH AN ARCTIC COAST GUARD FORUM

The Coast Guard is increasing engagement with our peer maritime services from Arctic countries. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), modeled after the successful North Pacific Coast Guard Forum, is a unique maritime governance group where Principals of all eight Arctic countries discuss coordination of exercises, strengthen relationships, and share best practices. Complimentary to the Arctic Council, the chairmanship of the ACGF will reside with the country holding the rotating chair of the Arctic Council. The first "experts-level" meetings of the ACGF in 2014 garnered enthusiastic approval of the concept. Representatives of the eight Arctic nations finalized and agreed on a Terms of Reference document, determined working groups (Secretariat and Combined Operations), and drafted a Joint Statement. The first ever "Heads of Arctic Coast Guards" meeting took place on October 28-30, 2015 at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, and the participating nations approved the Terms of Reference and released the Joint Statement.

3. ESTABLISH A CENTER FOR ARCTIC STUDY AND POLICY

The Coast Guard has established a Center for Arctic Study and Policy (CASAP) at the United States Coast Guard Academy. The CASAP is currently developing its credentials as a premier center, and building subject-matter expertise, by both presenting and participating in Arctic academic forums. Current projects include development of a workshop on shipping in confined waterways in conjunction with the DHS Center of Excellence at the University of Alaska - Anchorage.

4. PROMOTE WATERWAYS MANAGEMENT

With respect to waterways management in the Arctic, the Coast Guard is employing our Waterways Analysis and Management System and Port Access Route Study (PARS) methodologies to assess vessel traffic density and determine if a need exists for improved aids to navigation and other safety requirements. A thorough Bering Strait PARS, with input from other Arctic Nations, will provide valuable recommendations for the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The Coast Guard is also engaged with industry to ensure adequate oversight of pollution prevention, preparedness, and response requirements to protect the Arctic environment. Pollution response is significantly more difficult in the Arctic region. This year, the Coast Guard partnered with the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement in coordinating and monitoring drilling operations in the Chuckchi Sea, and continued to enforce safety and security as drilling and mission support assets demobilized.

In addition to pollution response, 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 improve awareness, contingency planning, and communications. The Coast Guard is also participating in the Department of Interior-led interagency working group on Coordination of Domestic Energy Development and Permitting in Alaska (established by Executive Order 13580) to synchronize the efforts of Federal agencies responsible for overseeing the safe and responsible development of Alaska's onshore and offshore energy development projects in Alaska. Moreover, the Coast Guard is engaged with cruise ship and adventure explorers planning future voyages through the Northwest Passage.

5. ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIA

Engagement with the Russian Federation is a key feature of effective environmental response in the Arctic. The Russian Federation is an important partner with responsibility for vast regions of the Arctic and shares a maritime border with the United States. It is in the interests of U.S. national security for the U.S. Coast Guard to maintain open lines of communication with its Russian counterparts to ensure effective cross-border search and rescue operations, maritime law enforcement, and pollution response.

The United States Coast Guard, in coordination with the Department of State, has strengthened its engagements with the Russian Border Guard to coordinate fisheries law enforcement operations and search and response in the Bering Sea and North Pacific between the United States and Russia.

In support of the Arctic Executive Steering Committee's "Recommendations for a Plan to Strengthen Oil Spill Prevention and Response in the Arctic," the U.S. Coast Guard is engaging with the Russian State Marine Pollution Control, Salvage, and Rescue Administration to advance the bilateral Joint Contingency Plan for environmental response.

In addition, the United States Coast Guard engages with the Russian Federation in multiple multilateral forums, including the newly formulated Arctic Coast Guard Forum, the North Pacific and North Atlantic Coast Guard Forums, and the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group of the Arctic Council.

CONCLUSION

The Coast Guard has been conducting mobile and seasonal operations and targeted capability assessments in the Arctic. The challenges posed by this unique operating environment demand specialized capabilities and personnel trained and equipped to operate in extreme climates. As human activity gradually increases, the Coast Guard's regional mission profile will continue to evolve.

Operating in ice-impacted waters is challenging, requiring specialized infrastructure and equipment, plus well-trained personnel, to achieve successful outcomes. The Coast Guard will continue to tailor operations and prioritize future collaborative efforts to match risk trends, maximize stewardship of resources, and assess out-year needs to ensure it can serve the nation's interest in the Arctic. This strategy is consistent with our Service's approach to performing its maritime safety, security, and stewardship missions.

While there are many challenges, the changing ice conditions in the Arctic Ocean also present unique opportunities. We look forward to working with the Congress to address how the Coast Guard can continue to support our national Arctic objectives, protect its fragile environment, and remain *Semper Paratus*—Always Ready—in this emerging frontier.

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