

**Statement of  
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**Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,  
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation  
U.S. House of Representatives**

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**Introduction**

Good morning Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Garamendi and other Members of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss how the Department of State is working to advance our security and economic interests in the Arctic region.

The United States has been an Arctic nation with important interests in the region since the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. Significant changes in the Arctic Region, unimagined then, have created new challenges and opportunities for the United States and the other Arctic nations.

**National Strategy for the Arctic Region**

As the Department of State and other agencies seek to address these challenges and opportunities, we are guided by the National Strategy for the Arctic Region that builds on the National Security Presidential Directive-66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive-25 (NSPD-66/HSPD-25) on Arctic Region Policy, among

other important policy directives. The National Strategy for the Arctic Region, released on May 10, 2013, articulates three “lines of effort” to be pursued:

- Advancing United States Security Interests
- Pursuing Responsible Arctic Region Stewardship
- Strengthening International Cooperation

In advancing these priorities, we have drawn from our long-standing policy and approach to the global maritime spaces in the 20th century, including freedom of navigation and overflight and other internationally lawful uses of the sea and airspace related to these freedoms; security on the oceans; maintaining strong relationships with allies and partners; and peaceful resolution of disputes.

### **The Arctic Council**

In promoting our economic, environmental and other interests in the Arctic region and strengthening international cooperation, we use the Arctic Council as the primary mechanism for multilateral engagement. The Arctic Council was created in 1996 as a “high-level intergovernmental forum of the eight Arctic States and the Arctic indigenous peoples to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues.” As the challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic have grown in volume and complexity, the Council has increased its workload and has created working groups to address emerging issues. Currently, the Council has six permanent working groups composed of Arctic State representatives that cover a broad range of issues such as emergency response, protection of the Arctic marine

environment, and the conservation of Arctic flora and fauna. In addition to the working groups, the Council has established task forces and expert groups, also composed of Arctic State representatives, for limited periods to address specific issues.

The United States has led or co-led many of the Council's important initiatives including the 2004 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, the 2008 Arctic Oil and Gas Assessment, and the 2009 Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment. In addition, work under the auspices of the Arctic Council has resulted in the following two binding multilateral agreements: (1) the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic, signed in 2011; and (2) the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic, signed in 2013.

The United States will assume the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in April 2015 for a two-year term. We are currently in the process of developing a robust program for our Chairmanship through regular meetings with federal interagency counterparts, the State of Alaska, including Alaska Native groups, NGOs and other interested stakeholders. While we have not yet finalized our program, it will be in line with the priorities laid out in the National Strategy for the Arctic Region and its subsequent Implementation Plan released in January 2014. Current areas we plan to highlight during the U.S. Chairmanship are climate change in the Arctic, improving economic and living conditions for Arctic residents, and responsible stewardship of the Arctic Ocean. Examples of projects in these areas might include improving access and availability of clean energy to remote Arctic communities, improving water sanitation, improving monitoring of black carbon

emissions, and pursuing an international framework to manage and protect the biological resources of the Arctic Ocean, to name a few.

We are still consulting with stakeholders on these ideas and others, which will include our fellow Arctic Council members after we have completed domestic consultations. The program will be finalized by the time we assume the Chairmanship from Canada in April 2015.

### **Special Representative for the Arctic Region**

Recognizing the importance of the Arctic Region, and in line with the President's commitment to elevate Arctic issues in our nation's foreign policy, particularly as we prepare to Chair the Arctic Council, Secretary Kerry announced in February of this year his intention to appoint a Special Representative for the Arctic Region. We set out to find the right American official for this assignment, a distinguished and senior, high-level public servant with broad foreign policy experience and a passion for the Arctic.

Secretary Kerry was pleased to announce just this past week that Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr. will lead our efforts to protect and advance U.S. interests in the Arctic Region as the State Department's Special Representative. We anticipate that he will soon travel to Alaska to consult with those on the front lines of our Arctic state.

### **Changing Arctic Environment**

Pursuing responsible Arctic Region stewardship requires, among other things, enhanced scientific research and traditional knowledge. While the Arctic region

has experienced warming and cooling cycles over millennia, the current warming trend is unlike anything previously recorded. The reduction in sea ice has been both dramatic and abrupt. As portions of the Arctic Ocean become more navigable, there is increasing interest in the viability of shipping through the Northern Sea Route and other potential routes, including the Northwest Passage, as well as in development of offshore Arctic resources.

For all of the opportunities emerging with the increasing accessibility and economic and strategic interests in the Arctic, the opening and rapid development of the Arctic region presents very real challenges. We must, therefore, also recognize the negative effects that rising temperatures have on the Arctic region. Melting sea ice threatens marine mammal populations and the indigenous and local communities that depend on them. The warming also erodes the natural barrier of ice that seasonally shields Alaska's western and northern coast from significant storm events, causing serious erosion, with buildings literally falling into the sea. The thawing of the permafrost causes significant problems for roads and other infrastructure and has also led to increased Arctic wildfires. These and other challenges require the United States and our partners in the Arctic Region to help Arctic communities adapt to the changing environment and also to seek to prevent even more severe warming in the Arctic.

The United States is committed to doing our part. We have initiated efforts within the Arctic Council to mitigate so-called "short-lived climate pollutants" such as black carbon, methane, and tropospheric ozone. Recent studies have suggested that black carbon is a significant contributor to the observed, amplified Arctic warming. Unlike long-lived greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, black carbon's warming effects are short-lived, which means that reductions in emissions

will help mitigate Arctic warming in the near term. At the climate change conference in 2009, the United States launched the Arctic Black Carbon Initiative (ABCI) to help quantify emissions and impacts of black carbon from fossil fuel and biomass burning and to reduce black carbon emissions and the associated warming effects in and around the Arctic. To minimize the prospect of irreparable long-term harm to the Arctic – and the broader global impacts that such harm will have – we need to take sustained, effective measures to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Law of the Sea Convention**

The United States could significantly advance our national security and economic interests in the Arctic by joining the Law of the Sea Convention. Notwithstanding the strong support of past Administrations (both Republican and Democratic), the consistent backing of the military, and the support of all relevant industries and environmental groups, the Convention remains a key piece of unfinished international business for the United States. Further delay serves no purpose and deprives the United States of the significant economic and national security benefits we will gain by becoming a Party to the Convention.

The Law of the Sea Convention provides the basic legal framework applicable to the oceans, including the rules applicable to navigation, the determination of the outer limits of the continental shelf, fishing, environmental protection (including in ice-covered areas), and marine scientific research.

The Convention's provisions are highly favorable to U.S. national security interests, because navigational rights and freedoms across the globe for our ships

and aircraft are vital to the projection of sea power. In addition, the Convention's provisions are highly favorable to U.S. economic interests, in the Arctic and elsewhere:

- The Convention gives coastal States an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extending 200 nautical miles offshore, encompassing diverse ecosystems and vast natural resources such as fisheries, energy, and other minerals. The U.S. EEZ is the largest in the world, spanning over 13,000 miles of coastline and containing 3.4 million square nautical miles of ocean—larger than the combined land area of all fifty states.
- The Convention also gives coastal States sovereign rights for the purpose of exploiting and managing resources of the continental shelf, which can extend beyond 200 nautical miles if certain criteria are met. The United States is likely to have one of the world's largest continental shelves, potentially extending beyond 600 nautical miles off Alaska. Only as a Party could we take advantage of the treaty procedure that provides legal certainty and international recognition of the U.S. continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.
- The Convention provides a mechanism for U.S. companies to obtain access to minerals of the deep seabed in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- The Convention guarantees the ability to lay and maintain submarine cables and pipelines in the EEZs and on the continental shelves of other States and on the high seas.
- The Convention secures the rights we need for commercial ships to export U.S. commodities and provides legal protection for the tanker routes through which half of the world's oil moves.
- The Convention is the foundation upon which rules for sustainable international fisheries are based.

More broadly, U.S. accession is a matter of geostrategic importance in the Arctic, in terms of both symbolism and substance. We are the only Arctic nation that is not a Party. We are the only State bordering the Arctic Ocean that is not in a position to take full advantage of the Convention in pursuit of our national interest. We need to be a Party to the Convention to have the level of influence in the interpretation, application, and development of law of the sea rules that reflects our maritime status. We need to be a Party to the Convention to fully claim our rightful place as an Arctic nation.

### **Conclusion**

The Arctic Region presents enormous and growing geostrategic, economic, environmental, and national security implications for the United States. The Department of State, in collaboration with other parts of the Federal Government, the State of Alaska, Alaska Natives, U.S. stakeholders and our international partners, is endeavoring to meet the challenges of the Arctic and to seize the opportunities within our grasp.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.