



**TESTIMONY OF  
VICE ADMIRAL PETER V. NEFFENGER  
VICE COMMANDANT**

**ON**

**“IMPLEMENTING U.S. POLICY IN THE ARCTIC”**

**BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE**

**JULY 23, 2014**

Good morning Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Garamendi, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to appear before you today to discuss Coast Guard operations in the Arctic Region, the Coast Guard’s Arctic Strategy, and how to ensure Maritime Safety, Security and Stewardship today—and into the future—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 on the North Slope and in the Bering Strait 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.

The Coast Guard operates and maintains two U.S. polar icebreakers, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) HEALY and USCGC POLAR STAR. These cutters are sufficient to address the Coast Guard’s current polar icebreaking activities and to continue support to the scientific community; however, the USCGC POLAR STAR operates with aging equipment and the recent reactivation effort is expected to extend its lifespan for only another six to nine years. The Coast Guard is completing preliminary requirements evaluation and documentation as part of the acquisition process to acquire a new polar icebreaker to address future needs. A polar icebreaker is 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. We are working with the Administration and other federal agencies to ensure full consideration of capabilities that will cost-effectively optimize benefits to the Nation.

To protect the Arctic environment, the Coast Guard is engaged with industry and the private sector to ensure oversight of pollution prevention, preparedness, and response requirements. Pollution response is significantly more difficult in the Arctic region. In 2010, we tested an emergency vessel towing system north of the Arctic Circle and in the last two years we exercised the Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System and the Spilled Oil Recovery System in Arctic waters. Both of these systems enable vessels to collect oil in the event of a discharge.

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.

Potential increased vessel traffic in the U.S. waters of the Arctic region will require adequate waterways management systems. 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. We are currently conducting a Bering Strait PARS, which is a preliminary analysis to evaluate vessel traffic management and appropriate ship routing measures. Information from this study, in coordination with other Arctic Nations, will also inform recommendations to the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Coordination with federal, state, tribal, and international organizations such as the Arctic Council and IMO, as well as industry stakeholders, is critical to ensuring the safety, security, and stewardship of the Arctic region. The Coast Guard is engaging with international organizations and industry, through the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response workgroup of the Arctic Council to develop, implement, and sustain Arctic-wide prevention and response strategies. In addition, the Coast Guard, under the auspices of the Interagency Coordinating Council on Oil Pollution Research, is engaging stakeholders to address critical research and development needs and capabilities for pollution response, and with the Department of Energy for oil spill prevention, in the Arctic environment. 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 on May 15, 2013. We are also conducting joint contingency response exercises with Canada, and we maintain communications and working relationships with agencies responsible for regional operations including Search and Rescue, law enforcement, and oil spill response.

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, will be a unique maritime governance group where the 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" meeting of the ACGF occurred last in March 2014 in Canada, and garnered enthusiastic approval of the concept. An executive level meeting will occur in September to approve the Terms of Reference and issue a joint statement.

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 in coordination with Alaska Native subsistence activities to ensure de-confliction of these activities during operations. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our relationships with the Alaskan Native tribes.

Working with the Department of Defense, the Coast Guard is advancing maritime domain awareness by testing numerous types of technologies and capabilities for use in the Arctic, including communication systems and unmanned vehicles. 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.

### **OPERATION ARCTIC SHIELD**

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

Arctic Shield 2013 focused on Western Alaska and the Bering Strait with a three-pronged interagency operation consisting of outreach, operations, and assessment of capabilities from May through October 2013. Outreach consisted of delivering education and awareness services to Arctic communities and outlying native villages. Operations involved the establishment of a temporary forward-operating location in Kotzebue, as well as the deployment of major cutter forces, air assets, communication equipment, and logistics support to conduct the Coast Guard's missions. Assessment of capabilities involved an analysis of our front-line operations and mission support assets in Arctic conditions. Additionally, the Coast Guard led a spill of national significance seminar and several mass rescue workshops that were conducted in Anchorage, Kotzebue, Unalaska, Nome, Barrow and St. Paul; these workshops identified potential opportunities for improvement in preparedness and response actions to a maritime emergency. Arctic Shield 2013 was 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 also continued regular deployment of the icebreakers POLAR STAR and HEALY; the national security cutter WAESCHE; and the seagoing buoy tender SPAR. The crews aboard the various vessels conducted the Coast Guard's statutory missions while providing an operational presence and command and control capability in the region.

Arctic Shield capability assessments included the deployment of a vessel of opportunity skimming system aboard the cutter SPAR and a Canada Coast Guard vessel. The training exercise reinforced crew familiarization with the equipment and built upon the Coast Guard's international partnership with Canada. In September 2013, a multi-agency team of engineers and scientists led by the U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center performed testing and evaluation of oil spill detection and recovery technologies in sea ice aboard the USCGC HEALY in the Arctic Ocean.

Arctic Shield 2014 operations are currently underway, where the Coast Guard is focusing on the North Slope and Barrow. Following the three-pronged approach of stakeholder outreach, capability assessment, and operations, the following unclassified schematic outlines our planned locations of activity during Arctic Shield 2014.



We have already conducted ice rescue training exercises and collected scientific data that will be used to further the understanding of the Arctic ecosystem. We will be testing numerous technologies, including communications equipment, cutter-based, unmanned aerial systems and ice radars.

## **THE 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 and the Coast Guard’s Arctic Strategy aligns with this policy. 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 our statutory missions as the environment changes. The Coast Guard’s efforts to foster safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic also advance the Nation’s strategic objectives of advancing U.S. security interests, pursuing responsible regional stewardship, and strengthening international cooperation.

## **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.