



Statement before the
House Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Subcommittee

***“Coast Guard Arctic Implementation
Capabilities”***

A Testimony by:

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U.S. National Security in the Arctic

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Garamendi, Members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege to testify before you today regarding “Coast Guard Arctic Implementation Capabilities.” While my fellow panelists will offer their considerable insights on specific U.S. capability requirements in the Arctic, I would like to provide the Subcommittee with some thoughts on broader Arctic national security challenges and their relation to U.S. readiness and capabilities.

The United States has always prioritized its national security interests in the Arctic. In every National Security Presidential Directive over the past thirty years, the U.S. has affirmed our “unique and critical interests in the Arctic region related directly to national defense,” (1983)¹ our need to ensure “basic national security and defense interests in the Arctic region ... in maintaining peace and stability ... maintain[ing] the ability to protect against attack across the Arctic, to move ships and aircraft freely,” (1994)² a requirement to “meet national and homeland security needs,” (2009)³ and “U.S. security in the Arctic encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from those supporting safe commercial and scientific operation to national defense” (Arctic Strategy 2013).⁴ The most pressing U.S. security interests in the region include “hard security” threats such as: “missile defense and early-warning systems; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight; and preventing terrorist attacks and mitigating criminal or hostile acts that could increase U.S. vulnerability to terrorism in the Arctic region.” (2009)⁵

Yet, rarely is Arctic security defined in Washington by such “hard security” threats or discussed in such stark terms. There is a lack of consensus about what exactly constitutes national security in the Arctic because so many different groups define security in the Arctic differently. For some, it is hard security concepts such as America’s missile defense architecture at Fort Greely Air Base in Alaska and Thule Air Force Base in Greenland, the increased presence of Russian special forces and placement of surface-to-air missiles on remote Russian Arctic islands, as well as the increased activity of Russian submarines in the North Atlantic. Yet for others, security in the Arctic means search and rescue operations, oil spill response, infrastructure development, greater maritime domain awareness, and U.S. energy security. Still others view water, food and

¹ Ronald Reagan, “United States Arctic Policy,” National Security Decision Directive Number 90, *Washington DC*, April 14, 1983. <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDD90.pdf>.

² Bill Clinton, “United States Policy on the Arctic and Antarctic Regions,” Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-26, *Washington DC*, June 9, 1994. <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-26.pdf>.

³ George W. Bush, “Arctic Region Policy,” National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-66, Homeland Security Presidential Directive/HSPD – 25, *Washington DC*, January 9, 2009. <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.htm>.

⁴ The White House, “National Security Strategy for the Arctic Region,” *Washington DC*, May 2013. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf.

⁵ George W. Bush, “Arctic Region Policy,” National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-66, Homeland Security Presidential Directive/HSPD – 25, *Washington DC*, January 9, 2009. <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.htm>.

human security of indigenous populations as well as coastal village relocation – of which the U.S. Government Accountability Office estimates that coastal relocation for the village of Kivalina could cost up to \$1 million per person – as paramount security concerns.⁶ Ambassador Mark Brzezinski, Executive Director of the Arctic Executive Steering Committee best captured this view recently when he stated that, “... It involves food security – food security as it pertains to subsistence communities in the Arctic. Water and sanitation is one of the central organizing challenges in rural Alaska, access to clean water. So I define national security as it pertains to the Arctic broadly.”⁷

There is so much definitional confusion about Arctic security because it encompasses all of these forms of security – from missile defense and search and rescue to water and sanitation. Because the Obama Administration has primarily focused on the human and environmental dimension of this Arctic security challenge, which is certainly considerable, senior officials have tended to discount or deny significant changes to Russia’s military posture in the Arctic. Interestingly other Arctic nations, such as Denmark, Finland and Norway, have recently recognized the growing hard security threats in the Arctic and have begun to make necessary adjustments to their defense budgets and force posture. This past May, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs reviewed its foreign and security policy toward the Arctic noting, “in light of the increased military presence and activity level in the Arctic, it should be explored whether there is support for a discussion forum on security policy related to the Arctic.”⁸ In response, the Danish government anticipates, “The Armed Forces should continue to develop a single set of robust military capabilities which are flexible and, in cooperation with our allies, can be used for the entire spectrum of tasks, including as a genuine deterrent for high intensity operations against a capable opponent.”⁹

The Government of Finland updated its security policy highlighting an increasingly militarized Arctic, notably due to a Russian military installation in the town of Alakurtti, 31 miles from the Finnish border. As of January 2016, the base holds approximately 800 servicemen from Russia’s Northern Fleet. The rest of Russia’s Northern Fleet – which includes 3,000 ground troops

⁶ “Alaska Native Villages: Most Are Affected by Flooding and Erosion, but Few Qualify for Federal Assistance,” *United States General Accounting Office*, December 2003. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04142.pdf>.

⁷ Ambassador Mark Brzezinski, “A Discussion on National Security Risks in the Changing Arctic,” Panel Discussion, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington DC, June 9, 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/arctic/discussion-national-security-risks-changing-arctic/p37929>.

⁸ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Danish Defence and Diplomacy in Times of Change – A review of Denmark’s Foreign and Security Policy,” May 2016. <http://um.dk/en/foreign-policy/danish-defence-and-diplomacy-in-times-of-change/>.

⁹ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Danish Defence and Diplomacy in Times of Change – A review of Denmark’s Foreign and Security Policy,” May 2016. <http://um.dk/en/foreign-policy/danish-defence-and-diplomacy-in-times-of-change/>.

trained for combat in Arctic conditions – will be stationed there soon.¹⁰ The strategy openly names Russia as a primary culprit of this new trend, stating, “in recent years Russia has also increased its military footprint and activity in the Arctic, where the situation, so far, has remained relatively stable.”¹¹ Perhaps the strongest recognition of this trend and the security implications came from the Norwegians. In June, the Norwegian Ministry of Defense published a “Capable and Sustainable Long Term Defense Plan” that warned, “...we cannot rule out the possibility that Russia in a given situation will consider the use of military force to be a relevant tool, also in the High North.”¹² The plan also proposed an increase in defense spending that would allow for a new maritime patrol aircraft to replace the current P-3 Orion aircraft.¹³ Norway also agreed to host NATO’s 2018 Trident Juncture exercise, which is expected to include around 36,000 soldiers and personnel from over 30 nations.¹⁴

It is clear that the projection of power in the Arctic today and in the future will be increasingly defined by both traditional hard power (as evidenced by Russia’s build-up of military presence in the Russian Arctic) as well as the softer power of superior logistics and infrastructure capabilities, science, technology, the combined intuition of traditional and 21st century knowledge, accurate predictive meteorological and ice modelling, and enhanced satellite communications. The projection of power in the Arctic will be multi-faceted and require a new U.S. approach to the region. The U.S. has yet to formally embrace this dual hard and soft power approach because to do so would require difficult budget decisions and prioritization. In lieu of this, Washington reverts to a near-constant assessment process of U.S. infrastructure and security needs in the Arctic, which justifies postponed decision-making. We have effectively ended up with a largely inadequate paper policy, which constitutes impressive strategies but lacks clarity, leadership, and budget prioritization.

Against this broader security backdrop, the U.S. has decided to accelerate the acquisition of one heavy icebreaker. Will a single icebreaker meet America’s comprehensive security needs in the Arctic?

No, but it will certainly enhance the U.S.’ operational capacity, state of readiness, and ability to respond and be resilient in the face of rapid change in the Arctic which we currently lack. But it

¹⁰ Jeremy Bender, “Russia is Constructing An Arctic Stronghold 30 Miles From The Finnish Border,” *Business Insider*, January 14, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-arctic-base-miles-from-finnish-border-2015-1>.

¹¹ Prime Minister’s Office of Finland, “Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy,” June 17, 2016. <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10616/1986338/VNKJ092016+en.pdf/b33c3703-29f4-4cce-a910-b05e32b676b9>.

¹² Norwegian Ministry of Defence, “Capable and Sustainable Long Term Defence Plan,” June 17, 2016. <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/rapporter-og-regelverk/capable-and-sustainable-ltp-english-brochure.pdf>.

¹³ Beth Stevenson, “Norway reveals P-3 replacement plans,” *Flight Global*, June 21, 2016. <https://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/norway-reveals-p-3-replacement-plans-426544/>.

¹⁴ Norwegian Armed Forces, “Trident Juncture 2018,” June 28, 2016. <https://forsvaret.no/en/exercise-and-operations/exercises/nato-exercise-2018>.

is also important to note that this heavy icebreaker is not solely intended for use in the Arctic. It will also be utilized in Antarctica as the U.S. currently lacks additional and redundant heavy icebreaking capabilities should the recently refurbished 1970s-constructed Polar Star become inoperable when resupplying the McMurdo Research Station in Antarctica. It was very fortuitous that in December 2012 the USCG Cutter Healy was in the Arctic when Nome, Alaska required icebreaking capabilities to escort a Russian fuel tanker bringing emergency fuel to Nome. Due to limited assets above the Arctic Circle, the Coast Guard has at times been forced to rely on third-party responders as it did in July 2007, when a Shell Oil Company helicopter and Canadian Coast Guard cutter assisted a 20-foot skiff near Barrow, Alaska. The U.S. has asked other countries to loan us their spare icebreaking capacity only to be told that it may not be available when needed should the country urgently need its own icebreaking capabilities closer to home. Moreover, even as the U.S. embarks on what could be a ten-year acquisition process, it is unclear what the interim U.S. icebreaker capability strategy is for the next decade. Change in the Arctic is only accelerating, and it will not wait for our procurement schedule. As the world's leading maritime power, the United States has been living on good luck and borrowed time for far too long. I fear the future incident when our luck runs out.

Let us be clear: one icebreaker is not a silver bullet, nor is it a substitute for enhanced satellite communications, aviation assets, deep-water ports, navigational aids, and internationally approved hydrographic mapping.¹⁵ It does not solve the funding challenges of the Long Range Radar sites in Alaska, which track aircraft through Alaskan airspace and along its borders, can serve as emergency airfields or halfway points for refuelling, and support Air Force Space Command and Missile Defence Agency operations.¹⁶ It does not enhance our military's cold weather fighting capabilities. It does not build new U.S. Coast Guard operating bases or stations above the Arctic Circle, which would improve search and rescue or maritime deployment in the Arctic, which now constitutes a minimum of eight hours by air and days by sea. It is only one piece of the larger Arctic security puzzle.

These extremely limited capabilities I have just highlighted call into question the ability of the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Government to be able to perform basic national security tasks in the Arctic let alone prevent future oil spills, assist in mass casualty events, respond to shipping accidents, acts of terrorism, and ensure strong maritime law enforcement in the Arctic. And my fear is that our near-exclusive focus on acquiring one heavy icebreaker will be deemed sufficient for future U.S. Arctic readiness. It is a vital start to a much longer and more expensive proposition.

¹⁵ Heather A. Conley, "To Build or Not to Build an Icebreaker? That is the \$1 Billion Funding Question," CSIS, September 1, 2015. <http://csis.org/publication/build-or-not-build-icebreaker-1-billion-funding-question>.

¹⁶ Kyle Johnson, "Securing Alaska's airspace: Radar sites work around the clock," U.S. Air Force, August 3, 2015. <http://www.af.mil/News/ArticleDisplay/tabid/223/Article/611931/securing-alaskas-airspace-radar-sites-work-around-the-clock.aspx>.

The Obama Administration has taken a leadership role in identifying readiness and preparedness as a major task for the American Arctic. The U.S. has co-led efforts to negotiate international search and rescue and oil spill response agreements as well as providing the impetus for the creation of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum. But the U.S. has been slow to develop the necessary infrastructure to implement these search and rescue and oil spill response capabilities. Offshore Arctic energy exploration in the U.S Arctic has been indefinitely postponed as the Royal Dutch Shell Company decided to end its drilling campaign and not pursue its leases any further. As a result, numerous infrastructure and research projects have come to an abrupt end. In October, the Army Corps of Engineers announced another year's postponement to a study to determine the feasibility of its first deep-water port, which has been designed to support vessels in the Arctic. The Corps began studying the feasibility of a port in 2011, and it is now questioning the economic benefit of moving forward with the project.¹⁷

The U.S. Coast Guard recognizes the growing concern of potential future maritime accidents in the narrow Bering Straits and the heightened risk factor posed by increased traffic through the Straits. It recommended a vessel traffic management scheme (e.g. speed limits, shipping lanes, and designated hazard areas) and the construction of ocean "highways" that would be hydrographically mapped to international standards and have state-of-the-art navigational aids. Steps are currently being taken to plot these shipping routes but the Russian Federation has not yet agreed to participate in this scheme which will be vital to its success.

Arctic security will be challenged this August by the *Chrystal Serenity*, a 1,700-passenger and crew cruise ship which will traverse the ice-clogged North West Passage, which has limited infrastructure. In cooperation with U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), the U.S. Coast Guard will simultaneously host a search and rescue exercise – Operation Chinook – with participating nations to identify challenges and gaps in search and rescue capabilities. We will learn a great deal from the voyage of the *Chrystal Serenity*, which we hope will be incident free.

Simply put, U.S. national security needs and challenges in the American Arctic far surpass existing Coast Guard implementation capabilities and the value added of acquiring one heavy icebreaker. It is however an important step forward and I hope that its acquisition fuels greater investment and a comprehensive approach to addressing national security challenges in the Arctic.

¹⁷ Alex DeMarban, "Work toward deep-water port in Alaska Arctic on hold, Army Corps says," *Arctic Newswire*, October 26, 2015. <http://www.adn.com/article/20151026/work-toward-deep-water-port-alaska-arctic-hold-army-corps-says>.

In closing, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, the chair of Russia's Arctic Commission, said this to Russian President Putin last week¹⁸: *"I would like to say that all efforts taken to create the icebreaker fleet, to restore it, are closely connected with our plans for enhanced national security in the Arctic region [...]"*. The United States, in contrast, cannot say this today.

¹⁸ Atle Staalesen, "Future of icebreaker fleet on President's table," *The Barents Observer*, July 4, 2016. <http://thebarentsobserver.com/arctic/2016/07/future-icebreaker-fleet-governments-table>.