

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE - DEFENSE

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE - DEFENSE

ARCTIC STRATEGY

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SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE - DEFENSE

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairman Cochran, distinguished members of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

The Arctic region is changing. This year, the Navy concluded in its *Arctic Roadmap* that ice conditions in the Arctic Ocean are changing at a more rapid pace than first anticipated in the first *Arctic Roadmap* in 2009. The emergence of new challenges and opportunities in the Arctic is demanding greater attention from governments and stakeholders.

While significant uncertainty remains about the rate and extent of changes in the region and the pace at which human activity will increase, human activity in the Arctic is increasing and will likely continue to increase. With increased activity comes the potential for increased security challenges, but also new opportunities. In planning the Armed Forces' future role in the Arctic, we see the opening of the region as an opportunity to work collaboratively with allies and partners to keep the Arctic as a secure and stable region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is protected, and nations work cooperatively to address challenges.

The Armed Forces existing infrastructure and capabilities are sufficient to perform required missions in the Arctic in the near to mid-term. This point

must be emphasized because some recent reporting has overemphasized the changes in the security landscape.

For example, some media reporting highlights exponential growth in the use of Arctic shipping lanes for global commerce. The present reality, however, is that an extremely small percentage, between one to two percent (1-2%), of total global shipping activity occurs in the Arctic, and much of that activity is local fishing and destination shipping, meaning shipping from one area of the Arctic to another area of the Arctic. The small numbers of transits through the region are not necessarily preferred by the shipping industry due to added expense for icebreaking and other services and increased risk from less predictable weather. As uncertain as the rate of activity may be, decades from now more activity is likely to lead to greater security and safety challenges. These uncertainties result in a difficult situation where we must balance the risk of having inadequate capabilities or insufficient capacity with the opportunity cost of making premature and/or unnecessary investments.

Various sources indicate there are there are significant undiscovered mineral and hydrocarbon resources in the region, and media reporting would indicate that a “Wild-West, gold rush” mentality exists with Arctic and non-Artic nations racing to stake claims to these resources. Additionally, it is widely reported that regional boundary and territorial disputes, the resolution of which

inevitably impact jurisdiction over potentially valuable resources, may be a source of tension and conflict in the region.

The view that competition for resources and boundary disputes will lead to regional conflict overlooks the fact that the Arctic is a region bounded by nation states that have not only publicly committed to approaching Arctic issues within a common framework of international law, but have demonstrated the ability and commitment to doing so over the last fifty years. This low level of threat in the region is reflected in DoD's strategy.

Our strategic approach to the Arctic seeks to link goals with resources and activities in a manner that is consistent with the low threat environment and uncertainties regarding the rate of increase in human activity while taking practical fiscal realities into consideration.

Activities to accomplish our goals run the range from national interests of global application to issues unique to the Arctic region.

For example, we seek to preserve freedom of the seas in the Arctic as a necessary component and strategically consistent with our global interest in preserving all of the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace recognized under international law. Promoting navigational and overflight freedoms, whether in an increasingly accessible Arctic or other maritime

spaces, such as the South China Sea, is vital to preserving global mobility of our Armed Forces and communicates - to liked-minded partners and allies as well as states seeking to restrict freedom of the seas - that the United States is committed to upholding international norms and the rule of law. We continue to support accession to the Law of the Sea Convention because it codifies the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace DoD, State, Coast Guard, and other Federal departments and agencies seek to preserve.

Our Armed Forces are manned, trained, and equipped to be the “away team,” operating forward deployed for extended periods of time in some of the most austere environments in the world. Alaska’s vastness and harsh conditions throughout the entire Arctic region, present us with a unique opportunity to enhance human and environmental security and safety as both a “home team” and an “away team” by supporting and collaborating with both domestic civil authorities and allies and international partners to support search and rescue or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Establishing a foundation of cooperation – internal and external to the U.S. Government – is vital to success for both an emergent humanitarian crisis and long term stability in the Arctic.

While the most significant changes to the Arctic itself may be years away, we are currently well-postured with existing infrastructure and capabilities as well as a strategy to support our long-term planning efforts. Though we are presently well-postured, we are not idly waiting for the all the multi-year ice to

recede. We are currently focused on improving sea ice and weather forecasting, enhancing domain awareness, and evolving communications and satellite capabilities. Progress in these areas is vital as these are necessary key enablers should increased presence and operations be required in the future.

In sum, we are optimistic in our assessment that increased human activity and accessibility in the Arctic will provide opportunities to work collaboratively to promote a balanced approach to improving human and environmental security in the region. In such a security environment, we have currently assessed that existing defense infrastructure and capabilities in the region are adequate to meet near- to mid-term U.S. defense needs. As with any issue or activities, capabilities will need to be reevaluated as conditions and regional activity changes, and any gaps will need to be addressed and we will periodically reassess missions and supporting infrastructure needs in the Arctic.