

Introduction

Chairman Carbajal, Ranking Member Gibbs, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for convening this hearing on the United States Coast Guard's (USCG) leadership on Arctic safety, security, and environmental responsibility. I am Dr. Rebecca Pincus and I am honored to appear before you today as the Director of the Wilson Center's Polar Institute to discuss these issues.

Prior to directing the Polar Institute, I served on the faculty of the U.S. Naval War College, in the Center for Naval Warfare Studies. From 2020-2022, I was detailed from the Naval War College to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy, first to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development office and later the newly established Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Arctic and Global Resilience. Before joining the Naval War

In keeping with the global, policy-focused work of the Wilson Center, I offer the following comments on the U.S. Coast Guard’s Arctic missions. By framing the USCG missions in the context of U.S. national interests and objectives in the Arctic and beyond, I will underscore the valuable contributions made by the Coast Guard and its value as a tool of national power.

In brief, my core argument is threefold: first, that in the global context of long-term, strategic competition, the Coast Guard is an effective means for strengthening relationships with Allies and partners and for competing with adversaries via the integrated deterrence framework established in the National Defense Strategy (NDS); second, that the U.S. has clearly identified the Indo-Pacific as the priority theater, and Europe as the secondary theater of strategic importance, and therefore the Arctic must be understood in that strategic hierarchy; and third, for a number of practical reasons, the Coast Guard is a cost-effective means to pursue multiple national interests in the Arctic.

1.! Global context: long-term, strategic competition

The Coast Guard’s missions in the Arctic take place in the global context of geopolitical competition, with China as the pacing threat. For several years, there has been bipartisan consensus in the United States on the importance and scale of the challenge posed by China, while Russia is broadly and accurately viewed as an “acute” threat. The 2018 and 2022 National Defense Strategies share similar language on the threats posed by China and Russia:

- ! (2018) “Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department...”
- ! (2022) “The 2022 NDS advances a strategy focused on the PRC [People’s Republic of China]...as our pacing challenge...also accounts for the acute threat posed by Russia...”

The 2022 NDS establishes the concept of integrated deterrence as the chief means of engaging in holistic competition with both the PRC and Russia: in the words of Secretary of Defense Austin, “to develop, combine, and coordinate our strengths to maximum effect...in close collaboration with our counterparts across the U.S. Government and with Allies and partners.”¹

The Coast Guard can play a unique role in integrated deterrence. It can serve as a fulcrum between the DoD and DHS, able to leverage the authorities and missions of both federal departments. It partners with State, local, and Tribal entities; with the private sector in the global maritime industry; and with its foreign counterparts. In this regard, the Coast Guard is a unique national tool for working across jurisdictions and functions.

The Coast Guard is useful in forging strong relationships with Allies and partners, in the Arctic and around the world. As a law-enforcement agency, it is also key to upholding the rules-based

¹ Department of Defense, “2022 National Defense Strategy,” pp. iv.

order that all countries rely upon. It is an important component of strategic competition with Russia and China.

In the Arctic and beyond, the Coast Guard is a welcome partner on a host of issues of shared concern. From search and rescue to fisheries enforcement to drug interdiction, the Coast Guard is a partner welcomed by countries around the world. The top maritime concerns of many partner nations are bread-and-butter USCG missions: enforcing fisheries regulations, interdicting crime and terrorism at sea, and maritime safety and response. The Coast Guard's Mobile Training Teams train over 1000 international military students each year, in over 40 countries, in both bi- and multilateral formats.² International training covers the range of Coast Guard missions, and is tailored to specific national or regional needs. Coast Guard international partnerships enhance partner capacity, pave the way for U.S. access, and embody the vision of integrated deterrence enshrined in the NDS.

Consider U.S. interests in forging closer ties with Greenland. As part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and host of the U.S. Air Base Thule, Greenland also holds important strategic mineral resources. In 2020, the U.S. reopened a consulate in Nuuk, Greenland, and work is ongoing to broaden and deepen the relationship between the U.S. and Greenland.³ The U.S. Coast Guard should be a more significant part of these efforts. According to the Greenlandic government, the fishing industry is responsible for more than 85% of exports and over 20% of employment. USCG is ideally poised to partner with Greenland and Denmark on maritime domain awareness, enforcement, and safety: issues of top concern to Greenland's leaders.

In the Arctic, the U.S. Coast Guard is also able to navigate sensitive relationships. The most obvious example is along the U.S.-Russia maritime boundary in the Bering Sea, where USCG has maintained a professional and functioning working relationship with the Russian Border Guard throughout the current crisis driven by Russia's further invasion of Ukraine. For example, even in 2022, we saw just one incident in which a Russian fishing vessels crossed the boundary line to fish illegally in U.S. waters; when the U.S. Coast Guard reernf GulTT1 1 4e

activities are evidence of the mission's contribution to strong relationships with allies and partners in the Arctic and beyond.⁴

In addition to building relationships with allies and partners, the U.S. Coast Guard contributes to integrated deterrence through fortifying the rules-based order and demonstrating U.S. sovereignty and resolve in the Arctic.

In September 2022, the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Kimball encountered a flotilla of PLA Navy and Russian Navy vessels in the Bering Sea, inside the U.S. exclusive economic zone.⁵ The combined naval exercise in the Bering followed another encounter in 2021, when USCG encountered four PLAN warships, also in the U.S. EEZ.⁶ In 2020, a Russian Navy flotilla conducted operations in an active fishing area inside U.S. waters.⁷ Chinese icebreakers Xue Long and Xue Long II regularly conduct research in the Arctic.⁸

Without U.S. Coast Guard patrols in these waters, the Russian and Chinese warships would have symbolic free rein. USCG presence to identify and monitor these activities ensures the safety of U.S. citizens and interests in the Arctic.

In November 2022, the Federation Council of Russia approved a law restricting vessel traffic in the Northern Sea Route. According to the new law, foreign military vessels traveling in the NSR must request permission from the Russian government 90 days before the date of passage. Further, no more than one foreign warship or other state vessel may be in the NSR at a time. Foreign submarines must surface while in the NSR. The law allows for the suspension of passage of foreign state vessels.⁹

The new Russian legislation is likely to increase calls for a freedom of navigation exercise by the U.S. While Russia designates the Northern Sea Route as internal waters, the U.S. holds that key parts of the passage are international straits, where restrictive measures are not permitted under the terms of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Given the maritime hazards present in the NSR, icebreaker support for a FONOP, particularly in the eastern stretches, is advisable. USCG vessels may be considered less inflammatory to the Russians.

⁴ Melody Schreiber, "US icebreaker departs on a voyage that will transit the Northwest Passage." Arctic Today, August 26, 2021. <https://www.arctictoday.com/us-coast-guard-science-joint-mission-northwest-passage/>.

⁵ Maggie Nelson, "Coast Guard spots Chinese and Russian military ships together in Bering Sea." Alaska Public Radio, September 27, 2022. <https://alaskapublic.org/2022/09/27/coast-guard-spots-chinese-and-russian-military-ships-together-in-bering-sea/>.

⁶ Dylan Simard, "Coast Guard encountered Chinese warships in the Aleutians in August." Alaska Public Radio,

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2019, Alaska received almost two-thirds of all cruise passenger visits at U.S. ports, producing \$1.2 billion in income in Alaska and 23,000 jobs.¹⁵ Cruise traffic is rebounding from the pandemic and trends prior to 2020 indicate strong growth across the industry.

U.S. Arctic waters may also be affected by activities in adjacent Russian waters. While Russia's war in Ukraine has dampened shipping activity through the Northern Sea Route, Russia continues to ship LNG from its Arctic developments in Yamal. These LNG shipments are increasingly heading east, to Asia, transiting the Bering Strait and increasing environmental and maritime risks in the region. Less dramatic, but more frequent, are environmental impacts from garbage and pollutants that regularly wash into U.S. Arctic waters from Russia, including petroleum products and industrial debris. In 2020, large amounts of garbage washed ashore in the Bering Strait region, covering miles of shoreline and including hazardous waste (insecticide, lubricants, butane) and large amounts of plastic debris, as well as dead seabirds. Russian text and logos were identified on the marine debris, much of which was related to commercial fisheries.¹⁶

Reductions in sea ice and warming conditions in the Arctic enable increased maritime activity.

So what can the Coast Guard do better?

In conclusion, there are both strategic and practical reasons to fully resource the Coast Guard's Arctic missions. The Coast Guard is a highly useful tool for conducting integrated deterrence, campaigning,