

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Address

at the

4th Symposium on the Impacts of an Ice-Diminishing Arctic on Naval and Maritime Operations

Monday June 20, 2011

Good morning!

It is an honor to be here with you, and I look forward to discussing the U.S. Coast Guard's Arctic Operations.

For the Coast Guard, the Arctic in many ways is Déjà vu!

In 1867, following the purchase of Alaska, the Cutter Lincoln carried our Flag into what was the territory of Alaska, along with the official U.S. delegation, to participate in the transfer ceremony from Russia. America had just become an Arctic nation. The problem was, we just didn't know it yet! Today, most Americans still don't realize it – which presents a real challenge for us! – but more on that later.

Following the transfer ceremony, Cutter Lincoln immediately turned to the business of conducting scientific exploration, charting the waters, providing humanitarian assistance to native tribes, and maintaining a sovereign presence in this vast new territory!

Our déjà vu is that we are doing precisely the same thing today – except our vast new territory is not a landmass – but the increasingly wet Arctic Ocean.

Then, as now, our job is to protect U.S. sovereign interests, protect mariners in distress, and enforce U.S. law and treaties.

As I speak to you this morning, our newest high-endurance ship, the National Security Cutter Bertholf, is underway in the Gulf of Alaska on its first Alaska patrol – or ALPAT. Bertholf's design and sea keeping abilities have allowed her to launch and recover her helicopters and small boats in 14-foot seas – while her advanced tracking systems simultaneously monitor other fishing vessels working miles away.

Bertholf and the other 7 planned National Security Cutters are replacing our 40-plus-year old fleet of 378-ft high endurance cutters – so far 2 are operational, the 3rd is nearly complete, we just ordered the 4th and we are in the process of negotiating for the 5th – our plan is to have 8 NSCs replace 12 378s – so we need every one of these ships to protect our fisheries stocks and carry out our other important missions!

Later this summer, we will continue to conduct Arctic seasonal small boat and helicopter operations – Operation Arctic Crossroads -- as we have done for the past 3 years — along with bi-weekly arctic domain awareness flights (March- November).

Now, people always want to talk about Ice Breakers when I discuss the Arctic – and ice breakers are certainly one important piece of our Arctic capabilities. But it is also important to focus on continuing to test our other ships and aircraft – we need to determine how they function – or how they need to be modified and engineered to operate in ice and extreme cold.

This year, one of our 225- buoy tenders – Cutter SPAR – along with Cutter MIDGETT – one of our legacy high endurance cutters will be testing out a new cold weather emergency 50,000 DWT towing system (ETS) North of the Arctic Circle ... ETS was developed by the Aleutian Islands Workgroup – it is designed to be delivered by helicopter – and it could potentially be used to rescue a vessel grounded on an uncharted shoal, or stranded in ice – which is occurring with increasing frequency as vessel traffic and human activity increases.

But our most important need is not a ship or a plane – but infrastructure – we need at least a seasonal air station – and an operations base with capacity to base our crews. I travelled up to the Arctic last year to observe seasonal operations – and I am heading up again this August – let me tell you for those of you who have not been ashore, in the places that have small airports, there are often no hangars for our aircraft – and no more than a dozen or so beds to sleep in.

If we had to mount a large-scale response in the Arctic this logistical challenge would pose a significant obstacle ... there is no way we could deploy several thousand people like we recently did in the BP Deepwater Horizon Response.

And since we are talking challenges, it is a good time to talk about ice breakers. I am happy to report that Cutter HEALY is underway for “Arctic West Summer 2011” – she’ll load her science party in Dutch Harbor and then start her 6-month science patrol to support a variety of experiments throughout the Arctic.

And, I am proud to say, that this summer will mark the fourth year Cutter HEALY and the Canadian Coast Guard Ship Louis S. St.-Laurent will work together to collect seismic and bathymetric data to continue our understanding of our respective continental shelves.

This has been a great partnership, and it continues to grow stronger with each mission.

In my opinion, partnerships will be critical to Arctic success ... the Arctic is such a vast region, that our Service, our Nation – and really every Nation will have to partner our way through its emerging challenges –

So it is great to see so many of you -- our partners represented here today -- including those in the federal family and DoD -- as well as non-governmental organizations, industry -- and probably most importantly other Arctic Nations like Canada and Russia ... to name a few.

We need to continue to cooperate and learn from one another.

One example of this cooperation is the Arctic Search and Rescue agreement...signed last month by Secretary Clinton, who joined leaders from seven other Arctic Nations—Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden to sign this important and historic agreement...hopefully, this spirit of cooperation will continue as we collectively confront emerging Arctic challenges.

As I hinted earlier, one of our biggest challenges is icebreakers.

While HEALY is underway -- she is our only ice breaker that will get underway this year. Our two other ice breakers, POLAR SEA and POLAR STAR are not operational.

To offer some perspective at the end of WWII Windclass Icebreakers were the most capable in the world...in 1966 the U.S. Navy had 5 and U.S. Coast Guard had 3.

The POLAR SEA suffered a catastrophic engineering casualty. And, POLAR STAR is currently in the shipyard undergoing a major overhaul. We are going to transfer the crew of POLAR SEA -- and much of its equipment -- over to POLAR STAR. POLAR SEA is scheduled to be decommissioned -- and POLAR STAR will return to operations sometime in 2013.

I am very concerned that our Nation currently has only one operational ice breaker -- and it is a medium vice heavy icebreaker that is mainly designed for science missions. The Navy's submarines can operate under the ice. And, we have aircraft that can fly over the ice—but only when the weather permits—zero visibility is more often the case.

Having ice-capable surface assets is vitally important -- both for science, sovereignty and our many other missions. Indeed, for most search and rescues, or even an environmental response, you need a surface ship to carry out the response.

You cannot clean up oil from a plane. You cannot carry heavy equipment on a plane. And, you certainly cannot break another ship out of the ice and tow it with a plane.

Last spring a Russian ice camp "North Pole 37" unexpectedly broke up 630 miles North of Point Barrow -- a Russian Ice Breaker was dispatched to rescue the scientists -- had it been needed, there was no ice breaker presence in the U.S. SAR coordination area.

Right now, we simply don't have these assets -- we are not capable of conducting a response.

We are engaged in the process of conducting a high-latitude study and concept of operations to determine the way ahead – but I need you to add your voice this week to what is a very serious conversation about what type of Arctic capability we wish to have, we need to have, and we can afford to have – particularly surface ship capability.

This will be a real challenge – because ice breakers – and other types of ice-hardened or capable ships are extremely expensive to build and operate. And, we are all operating within constrained budget environments.

I suspect we will probably need some mix of vessels – heavy ice breakers like POLAR STAR – medium ice breakers outfitted for science like Cutter HEALY – and other ice-hardened vessels that can operate in, but not break through ice to meet our responsibilities.

But, having the right capabilities is also vitally important to our national security. Other Arctic Nations are continuing to expand their ice breaking fleets and Arctic presence.

We need to more fully embrace the fact that we are an Arctic Nation. This starts with convincing Americans living outside Alaska of the Arctic's importance. We need to do a better job of educating, and making the case on why the Arctic matters to every American.

And, we also need to convince the international community that we are serious, by ratifying the law of the sea treaty. Every other Arctic Nation – and most other Nations throughout the world have ratified the law of the sea treaty.

Right now, several Arctic nations are in the process of using the treaty's provisions to apply for extended continental shelf claims. These continental shelves contain rich maritime habitats and other valuable resources such as natural gas and petroleum. These claims seek to set forth the geographical boundaries over which each nation has the right to enjoy exclusive rights.

We need to know with specificity and certainty what areas of our extended continental shelf constitutes our sovereign territory – doing so is just as important as knowing the delineation of any land border – and the stakes will only get higher as the riches within the continental shelf are increasingly revealed.

However, unless the United States ratifies the Law of the Sea convention, it cannot file an extended continental claim – because it simply does not have standing to do so.

All the work that cutter Healy and many of you in this room have done over the past several years to understand and map our continental and extended continental shelf will not be able to be brought to fruition if we fail to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty.

But it is even more than that. If the U.S. made an extended continental shelf claim – a simple proposition if we were a party to the law of the sea convention – we could

potentially assert sovereignty out to 440 miles from our land base line – vice the current 200 miles. That is an additional 240 miles of territory, which according to U.S. Geological surveys contains some of the richest undiscovered deposits of oil and natural gas in the Arctic – much larger than Alaska's Prudhoe Bay oil field.

Mind you, the Coast Guard is not in the oil business...but we are in the oil spill prevention business...and, as an armed service, we protect our Nation's sovereign interests – ratifying the law of the sea treaty will memorialize an important set of authorities to exercise environmental stewardship and protect our many other national interests along our extended continental shelf.

That's why the Coast Guard will continue to work with the Navy, DoD, the Dept. of State and others to carry the message to the Senate on the importance of ratification.

As I said at the beginning, this experience has been Déjà vu – in the 18th and 19th century, explorers travelled to the Arctic seeking its precious resources – seal skins and whales. But while there is a certain feeling of familiarity that comes with new discovery – there will also be things we have not seen.

The precious resources being sought at the moment are oil and natural gas – and shorter trade routes. These are valuable and much sought after resources that have created geopolitical tension in many other areas where they have been discovered.

Extraction of these resources – and increased use of these waters by commercial vessels also presents much higher environmental and other risks. Indeed, the Bering Strait is the only way in or out of the Arctic Ocean for half of the world.

Thus, for the Coast Guard – and many of you, it is imperative that we work to position ourselves to obtain the capabilities, competencies and authorities to set us on course to be capable of exercising the same stewardship in the Arctic that we have done in all the waters we have operated upon for the past two centuries.

There are no shortcuts. We know what it will take. Just like in the 18th and 19th century – we need strong ships – and highly trained crews – if we are to be true to our Coast Guard motto – *Semper Paratus* – Always Ready – But not just for the Coast Guard, rather the United States – in what is rapidly becoming one of the most important regions in the world.

Thank you.