



COMDTINST 16003.1
26 APR 2011

COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 16003.1

Subj: U.S. COAST GUARD ARCTIC STRATEGIC APPROACH

- Ref: (a) Arctic Region Policy, National Security Presidential Directive-66 / Homeland Security Presidential Directive-25 (NSPD-66/HSPD-25) dtd 09 Jan 2009
 (b) U.S. Coast Guard Strategy for Maritime Safety, Security, and Stewardship
 (c) National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures and Policy for Considering Environmental Impacts, COMDTINST M16475.1(series)

1. PURPOSE. To promulgate the U.S. Coast Guard’s strategic approach for mission execution in the Arctic¹ region.
2. ACTION. All U.S. Coast Guard unit commanders, commanding officers, officers-in-charge, deputy/assistant commandants, and chiefs of headquarters staff elements shall comply with the provisions of this Instruction. Internet release is authorized.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. None.
4. ARCTIC STRATEGIC VISION. As the Nation’s lead agency for ensuring maritime safety, security, and stewardship, the U.S. Coast Guard will lead our nation’s maritime engagement in the Arctic, and be a leader in advancement of U.S. national interests in the Arctic maritime domain. The U.S. Coast Guard must have the capability to perform the Service’s statutory missions in the demanding Arctic maritime environment to ensure the Arctic remains a safe, secure, and environmentally sustainable region. The U.S. Coast Guard’s Arctic strategy is founded on its

¹ A definition of the Arctic is contained in 15 USC § 4111. However, for the purposes of this Instruction, the Arctic region is defined as: “All United States and foreign territory north of the Arctic Circle and all United States territory north and west of the boundary formed by the Porcupine, Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers; all contiguous seas and straits north of and adjacent to the Arctic Circle, including the Arctic Ocean, the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, Greenland, Norwegian, Barents, Kara, Laptev, Lincoln, Wandel, and East Siberian seas, the Bering, Davis, Fram, and Denmark straits, the Canadian archipelago and Baffin Bay, and the Aleutian islands chain.” This definition was agreed upon by U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy in 2009 and is more inclusive of regions in which we may be called to operate.

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overarching strategy for maritime safety, security, and stewardship; and its intent to strengthen operational capability and field an adaptive, responsive force.

5. DISCUSSION.

a. U.S. Coast Guard Strategic Approach to the Arctic.

- (1) As outlined in reference (a), the Arctic region is primarily a maritime domain. Human activity in the region is increasing and is projected to increase further in coming years. The National Arctic Policy directs the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Defense to develop greater capabilities and capacity, as necessary, to protect U.S. borders; increase Arctic maritime domain awareness (MDA); preserve global mobility; project a sovereign United States maritime presence; encourage peaceful resolution of disputes; cooperate with other Arctic nations to address likely issues from increased shipping; establish a risk-based capability to address hazards in the region including cooperative search and rescue (SAR), basing and logistical support; and evaluate the feasibility for using the Arctic for strategic sealift. This tasking requires the United States to assert a more active and influential national presence to protect its Arctic interests throughout the region. Reference (b) is the overarching strategy for accomplishing the U.S. Coast Guard's missions in the maritime domain, and it will guide our efforts in meeting our national objectives in the Arctic region.
- (2) Driven by changes in the physical environment, the Arctic operational and tactical environment has changed dramatically in recent years. Greater accessibility and human activity in Arctic waters, previously covered by ice, have increased the significance and national urgency associated with ensuring the United States has the ability to preserve freedom of navigation, provide safety of life at sea, protect our natural resources, and preserve the natural environment.
- (3) The U.S. Coast Guard will be a leader in supporting the Nation's policy objectives and interests as outlined above and in reference (a). We will assert an active, layered, adaptive, fiscally responsible and scalable approach in meeting maritime safety, security, and stewardship requirements in the dynamic and challenging Arctic maritime domain.
- (4) Although the U.S. Coast Guard will face complex and different operational challenges than experienced just a few years ago, we will aggressively work to overcome these challenges and operational gaps in a fiscally responsible manner. In doing so, the U.S. Coast Guard will build on the interlocking system of governance comprised of legal regimes, awareness, and operational capabilities outlined in reference (b). Similarly, we must meet the broad and fundamental national interests and tasks outlined in reference (a).

b. Arctic Strategic Focus.

- (1) Maritime Safety, Security, and Stewardship: The core elements of our strategic approach to maritime safety, security and stewardship remain valid in the Arctic. However, the vast and harsh environment, lack of infrastructure, and current low levels of commercial maritime activity represent unique challenges in this regard. To overcome these challenges, we must work to build upon existing legal regimes, enhance our partnerships with key stakeholders,

such as tribal governments, enhance maritime domain awareness, and field an operational capability that is adaptive to the seasonal operational mission demands.

- (a) **Legal Regimes and Partnerships:** Statutes, regulations, international agreements, conventions, and standards all establish the maritime rule set. As the Arctic maritime community continues to evolve, legal regimes required to ensure sound safety, security and stewardship will likely evolve as well. The U.S. Coast Guard will take a leadership role in ensuring proper maritime legal regimes are in place for the Arctic domain. In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard's extensive history of Arctic service that began in 1865 provides both experience and an expansive network of governmental, non-governmental, and private partnerships which we will leverage to meet the demands of the Arctic. The U.S. Coast Guard will make enhancing federal, state, local, tribal, and industry partnerships a priority. Strong partnerships and broad authorities are key to our leadership in a comprehensive approach to meet national policy objectives in the Arctic.
 - (b) **MDA:** It results from the full integration of situational awareness and intelligence. Greater awareness and effective understanding of maritime activity in the Arctic is required to promote safety, protect the environment, and respond to maritime incidents and threats. The U.S. Coast Guard will assert its leadership in developing an integrated MDA program that will fuse the expertise and input from our tribal, local, state, federal and industry partners and the myriad of informative sources available in the region.
- (2) **Mission Performance and Preparedness:** The U.S. Coast Guard must build toward a level of mission performance and preparedness in the Arctic comparable to that of other maritime regions. This will require enhancement of our partnerships with other Arctic nations, industry, and state, local, tribal, and federal agencies. This phased approach will use available resources balanced against other national priorities. In doing so, we will be prepared for and conduct operations across a broad range of mission sets, including environmental response in the Arctic region.
- (3) **Capability:** The U.S. Coast Guard must be prepared to respond to all threats, all hazards, and fully perform its mission responsibilities in the Arctic. We will work to develop the appropriate capabilities with sufficient capacity to execute our missions at an acceptable level of risk, and in a manner that is adaptive to the drastic changes in environmental conditions. It is important that we adopt an approach in the Arctic that leverages the capability of our federal, state, local, tribal and industry partners.
- (a) **Capability Partnerships:** As public and private infrastructure is developed in the Arctic, it should be leveraged to build MDA, and where appropriate, operational capability. In concert with our international and interagency partners, state, local and tribal governments, and the private sector, the U.S. Coast Guard will be a leader in safeguarding the Arctic against all maritime threats and hazards, while meeting our national objectives, today and in the future.
 - (b) **Technology:** Recent advances in surveillance, navigation, and communications systems present the potential to eliminate the need for traditional, industrial-age marine transportation infrastructure, and at a fraction of the life-cycle cost. Not only can our Arctic partners benefit from technological advances to reduce costs and increase

effectiveness, but the U.S. Coast Guard can benefit as well. We will be a leader in leveraging technology to meet our mission demands.

- (c) Right-sized Assets: There are few U.S. Coast Guard (or other federal) assets capable of operating in the harsh maritime environment of the Arctic. As new capabilities are developed, the U.S. Coast Guard will work to ensure its force structure is appropriately sized, trained, equipped, and postured to meet national Arctic mission and regulatory requirements as seasonal environmental conditions demand. As stated previously, this phased approach will be consistent with available resources and balanced with other national priorities.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS.

- a. Environmental considerations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 were examined in the development of this Instruction. This Instruction includes preparation of guidance documents that implement, without substantive change, the applicable Commandant Instruction or other Federal agency regulations, procedures, manuals, and other guidance documents. The policies contained in this Instruction provide a broad general plan for a U.S. Coast Guard strategy in the Arctic, which includes the guidance and direction for appropriate environmental planning and compliance with all applicable environmental laws. Because this Instruction contains specific guidance and direction, as appropriate, on completion of necessary environmental planning analysis under NEPA (which would ensure compliance with other environmental mandates), it is appropriate to categorically exclude the policy from further NEPA analysis. Specifically, Categorical Exclusion (CE) (33) as published in National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures and Policy for Considering Environmental Impacts, COMDTINST M16475.1(series), and Figure 2-1 (reference (c)) is applicable. An Environmental Checklist and Categorical Exclusion Determination (CD) are not required for this CE.
- b. However, additional NEPA analysis and documentation should be completed as appropriate for specific actions resulting from, or connected to, implementation of this policy. Any such actions should be assessed for potential environmental impacts under NEPA and the applicability of other environmental mandates and appropriate compliance completed, as necessary.

7. FORMS/REPORTS. None.

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