

Rear Admiral Thomas Atkin

It is a great opportunity to be here, and it is certainly great to sit on the panel with Ms. Amanda Dory and Rear Admiral David Woods. I have had the opportunity to work for and with Ms. Dory a couple of times now, and it is intimidating to say the least. She

Rear Admiral Thomas Atkin recently assumed the position of Assistant Commandant in support of the Deputy Commandant for Operations. Prior to this assignment, Rear Admiral Atkin served as the Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Transborder Security; first Commander of the U.S. Coast Guard Deployable Operations Group (DOG); and the Deputy Principal Federal Official to the Gulf Coast in 2006 and Chief of Staff in New Orleans, Louisiana, for the Principal Federal Official for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Before working the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Rear Admiral Atkin served as Chief, Maritime Homeland Security and Defense Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense. In 2003, he served as the Chief of the Counterterrorism Division in the Chief of Naval Operations Office, Deep Blue. Rear Admiral Atkin's operational assignments included Commanding Officer, Tactical Law Enforcement Team (TACLET) North in Chesapeake, Virginia; Commanding Officer, TACLET Gulf in New Orleans, Louisiana; Operations Officer, TACLET Seven in Miami, Florida; Navigator, Coast Guard Cutter ALERT in Cape May, New Jersey; Deputy Group Commander in New Orleans, Louisiana; and Coast Guard Liaison to Joint Task Force One Six Zero at the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. His staff assignments included Chief, Office of Law Enforcement and Intelligence for the Eighth Coast Guard District, New Orleans, Louisiana; Fisheries Enforcement Officer for the Eighth Coast Guard District, New Orleans, Louisiana; and Mathematics Instructor, Assistant Football Coach, and Head Lacrosse Coach at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. Rear Admiral Atkin graduated from the United States Coast Guard Academy with a B.S. degree in mathematical sciences. He also holds an M.S. degree in management science from the University of Miami.

is obviously brilliant. I am also intimidated because when I first found out I was coming here to speak I thought that I would be the only Coastie here, and that if I did poorly, I could always go back to work and say that I was awesome. I now see that I am not alone and there are people who will be inclined to tell the truth when I go back to work. So it is a little bit scary from that perspective.

I have just a few slides, and I am not trying to repeat too much of what Ms. Dory talked about already. I am going to try to cover my material quickly so that we have a lot of time for questions and answers.

To start, I am going to talk a little about climate change in general and how we look at it from the Coast Guard perspective. Then, I will turn briefly to strategic engagement. Finally, I am going to talk about the Arctic, which is really where, from a Coast Guard perspective, climate change will require that we focus first.

Climate change, as I think everyone here already knows, is not so much about the Earth just getting warmer. Climate change is really about severe weather extremes; it is about how the weather is changing, becoming more severe—events such as the snow-storm we had here in Washington, D.C., not too long ago in which people were stuck on the roads for 13 or 14 hours. It is those types of things that are really starting to affect us. Several days ago, on one of our piers up in Alaska, we were getting steady-state winds of 80 knots, with gusts up to 120 knots—very unusual, indeed, but another sign that the times are changing.

So, many types of severe weather—to include hurricanes and floods—are going to become more severe. On top of those direct effects, you have all the indirect effects that are associated with severe weather—the degradation of the environment, for example (Figure 1). When we look at the coastline of Louisiana, we can see how it is eroding and the speed at which it is eroding. Such effects are certain to affect our pipelines, our offshore oil rigs, and the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port that brings oil into the refineries along the Gulf Coast. The implications will eventually extend all the way to the global supply chain and our overall economy.

- **Direct Effects**
 - **Extreme Weather**
 - **Sea-Level Rise**

- **Indirect Effects**
 - **Environmental Degradation**
 - **Economic Growth**
 - **Migration**
 - **Critical Infrastructure**



Figure 1. Climate Change Effects

As more and more countries are impacted by significant environmental change, population migration is likely to increase. There will invariably be more migration from countries that are impacted to countries that have greater opportunities; migration to the United States may well increase. Another concern is critical infrastructure; we have a lot of critical infrastructure around our coastline that will be impacted. Obviously, a lot of our Coast Guard infrastructure is located at the water's edge. Any significant rise in sea level will have an adverse effect on that infrastructure. These are all things that we have to take a look at, and all are starting to impact what the Coast Guard and the nation will have to do.

So how do we look at it? How do we do that strategic engagement part (Figure 2) and who do we need to work with?

Obviously, the Arctic Council is a huge player from the perspectives of both the Arctic and climate change. As climate change advances and the Arctic opens up, we will have no choice but to interact with the eight other Arctic nations. This coming May 11, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is going to sign a search-and-rescue agreement with eight other Arctic nations on how we respond from a search-and-rescue perspective in the Arctic.

- **Arctic Council**
- **National Security Staff**
– NSPD 66/HSPD 25
- **National Ocean Council**
- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**

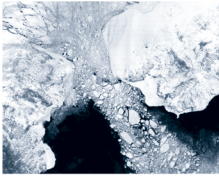
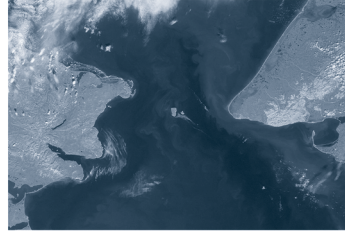


Figure 2. Strategic Engagement

On the national security side, we have the strategies and policies laid out in the National Security Presidential Directive/ Homeland Security Presidential Directive (NSPD/HSPD) on Arctic region policy. [1] This document includes specific implementation tasks. While originally signed by President George W. Bush, it has recently been reaffirmed by President Barack Obama. Unfortunately, only two interagency policy committee meetings on the Arctic have been held since it was signed. Having hosted one of those, I understand that we need to have greater involvement from the National Security staff on the Arctic and the associated implementation of a national policy. We need to ensure that it is being implemented uniformly across the whole of government.

The National Ocean Council is an Obama Administration initiative to develop a National Ocean Policy and a governance structure for how we move forward. While the National Ocean Policy does not really have a security component, it does include a coastal marine spatial planning effort. That effort describes how planning should be divided up regionally around the United States and how it is going to be a joint effort between federal, state, and local governments and private industry.

I do not think you can go into any climate change discussion without talking about the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and how critical it is that we have UNCLOS ratified by Congress. We have to move forward on that. UNCLOS is going to be our lifeline into the international community and how we protect our own national security interests. We have talked a lot about what the impacts are from an environmental perspective, from an energy perspective, and from a natural resource perspective, but I think we really need to re-look at this issue. We must bring UNCLOS into our national security discussion because it is imperative to make that part of our way ahead.

The International Maritime Organization, which establishes the standards and regulations for the shipping industry, is also going to be critical. Consider, for example, something as simple as the Bering Strait. There are two islands in the middle—one is Russian, one is American. As the Arctic sea ice melts and we get more and more open water, the shipping industry will want to use the Northwest Passage. We will need some type of vessel traffic separation scheme up there. We have to work that through the international community and the IMO. Simply stated, we are going to have to utilize and partner with our international organizations.

• **United States is an Arctic Nation**

- **More Water**
- **More Human Activity**
- **More Maritime Traffic**



Prudhoe Bay Oil Drilling
Prudhoe Bay, Alaska

Figure 3. Importance of the Arctic Region

We in the Coast Guard like to remind people that the United States is an Arctic nation, even though we usually do not think about our country that way (Figure 3). While everyone in this room probably understands that, if you asked someone in Ottumwa, Iowa, about the Arctic, they probably would not have a whole lot to say about it. So you have got to think about how do we communicate to the American public the importance of climate change in general, then the importance of the Arctic in particular, and then how that is going to impact not only our national security but also things like the global supply chain and global economics.

It is a fact that climate change is going to have some impacts. Although the most significant effects in the Arctic will occur well after my time in the Coast Guard comes to an end, and perhaps even after I am alive, given the rate I am going right now, we have to make dealing with these effects a priority. The question becomes: how do you get people interested in something that is not going to even happen in their lifetime? For me, I always think about my children. I make them recycle.

But those are the little things that we can do as we teach and talk about the impacts of climate change and the impacts of where we are going as a country. There is already more open water in the Arctic, there is more human activity, and there is more maritime traffic. While I do not understand the science part or how we got to where we are, it does not really matter to me. I do not care what people's cultural, political, or scientific beliefs are or why we are where we are with climate change, but there is more water and there is more traffic, so we have to start accounting for it, and we have to develop the right strategies, plans, and policies as we move forward.

From a Coast Guard perspective, we have the same responsibilities in the Arctic Ocean as we do in the Gulf of Mexico. We have the same law enforcement responsibilities, we have the same search and rescue responsibilities, and we have the same fisheries enforcement responsibilities. While it used to be ice covered, that no longer matters since now all of a sudden, there is plenty of open water. So now we have to start looking at how we are going

to fulfill our responsibilities by law in the Arctic and how that will impact us.

Operating in the Arctic will entail immense challenges. I am sure all of you have seen a map with the Arctic placed over top the United States and how big it is. I was actually going to bring that slide, but my staff told me that I could not have another slide, so I left it behind. But the distances that we will have to cover are dramatic. Other challenges include the lack of infrastructure and the lack of the knowledge of just what is going on up in the Arctic. Then, of course, there is severe weather, which will have impacts on infrastructure, vessels, and people.

Another challenge that we face is dealing with the indigenous peoples who live in the Arctic region, including Alaska. We have to make sure we are talking to them and make sure that we understand their concerns. As you probably know, the Coast Guard likes people to wear life jackets when they are out on the water. When we tried to push the idea of life jackets to the Native Alaskans, they were adamantly against them. They said that if you put on one of those big orange life jackets, you are just making yourself an easy target for polar bears to zero in on.

Their fear was genuine, so we had to go with white life jackets which are very hard for rescuers to see. But at the same time we had to understand their concerns and we had to adapt ourselves accordingly. The indigenous people are also going to provide us with a lot of knowledge of the area. They can help identify the impacts because they can remember what it was like 50 or 60 years ago. That knowledge will help us identify impacts as we go forward. A big concern is melting permafrost and its impact on our infrastructure, for example.

So how does the Coast Guard look at that from a strategic or an operational perspective? The answer for now is that we go right back to the strategy that was signed out by Admiral Thad Allen in 2007 and is still in effect today. It is our strategy for maritime security, safety, and stewardship. It is a legal regime along the lines of the other legal regimes, like UNCLOS, IMO, and the Arctic

Council. It is about the domain awareness—understanding what the domain is about, to include talking to the Native Alaskans.

For the last 3 or 4 years we have had forward operating locations at Barrow and Nome up on Alaska's North Slope. We have flown up there in our aircraft, which gets kind of scary. We did not realize when we first started flying our C-130s up there that aviation fuel freezes at about -43° . So when it is hitting -40° , we are trying to get those things turned on and come home pretty quickly, especially when an admiral is on board. Speaking from experience, they can get a little nervous.

What we have done is we have forward deployed people and assets during the right weather and right time of year to see if we can operate, if we have the right capabilities, and if we have the right understanding of the area. What we have found is that most of our small boats and our short-range helicopters are ineffective. We found that we currently do not really have good charts for the Arctic; we do not understand where all the shallow water is. We need ships that can operate with the right endurance. There is not always an opportunity to refuel so we have to be able to get where we want to go, and then we have to be able to stay there for a long time. We have to have ships that have platforms for embarked helicopters in order to provide the extended reach that we need.

We have also learned that there is not a lot of infrastructure that can provide logistics support. So if something breaks, we have to worry about how we get the part that we need. It is pretty easy if we are operating in the Caribbean or in the Gulf of Mexico; we have an established network, and we can get parts within a couple of days. It is not so simple in the Arctic. The existing communications network is not very effective. So that is something else we have to work on as we go forward.

We know for certain, however, that there is going to be a requirement for the Coast Guard and for the nation up there. We understand that. We understand that we will have responsibilities for law enforcement, fisheries regulation, search and rescue, and environmental response. But there are things we do not understand yet. For example, how do you clean up oil spilled on the ice?

I do not know anyone who knows how to do that at this time, but we have to start accounting for that, we have to start figuring it out, we have to carry out essential research and development, and we have to partner with industry.

One of the neat things about the Arctic, if you think about it, is that there is not a lot of infrastructure. However, as we get more and more open water, and as private industry wants to operate more up there—whether it be cruise ships, fisheries, or oil and energy companies—we have an opportunity to establish rules and regulations to fit the environment. We have an opportunity to build the infrastructure that fits the regimes instead of building the regimes to fit the infrastructure, like we do now.

It is an opportunity for us to look way ahead and say okay, if somebody wants to operate in the Arctic, let us establish the regulations by which they can operate. If you want to be there, you have to establish the appropriate logistic and communications systems that will enable the federal agencies to carry out their assigned responsibilities. There has to be a partnership between the federal government and private industry.

REFERENCE

1. The White House, National Security Presidential Directive 66/ Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25 (NSPD-66/HSPD-25), *Arctic Region Policy*, 9 Jan 2009, <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.htm>.