



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza,
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004-3027
T 202.691.4000 | www.wilsoncenter.org

Testimony of Dr. Mike Sfraga

Director, Polar Institute and Director, Global Risk and Resilience Program
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Before the Congress of the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on
Transportation and Maritime Security of the Committee on Homeland Security

“The Northern Northern Border: Homeland Security Priorities in the Arctic, Part I.”

Thursday, September 19, 2019, at 2:00 p.m. in 310 Cannon House Office Building.

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. My name is Mike Sfraga. I am the Director of the Polar Institute and the Director of the Global Risk and Resilience Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center. I also serve as Co-Lead Scholar for the Department of State’s Fulbright Arctic Initiative. I am honored to testify on the subject “The Northern Northern Border: Homeland Security Priorities in the Arctic, Part I.”

As we convene today, we are witnessing the opening of a new ocean: a fourth accessible, maritime border for the United States. The Arctic Ocean joins the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific Ocean as a critical geographic component of our country’s maritime ring of security and opportunity. Spanning nearly five and one half million square miles, the Arctic Ocean covers an area roughly 1.5 times the size of the United States and nearly half the size of the African Continent. It is a region we cannot ignore.

The Department of Homeland Security’s Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2020-2024 is a helpful filter through which my testimony should be considered. The DHS Strategic Plan calls for confronting a “complex threat landscape” by establishing “a clear strategic vision that achieves and advances our Department’s essential mission by placing American safety and security first.” One of the guiding principles includes championing “‘Relentless Resilience’ **for all threats and hazards.**” The Arctic, including Alaska, the state by which the United States is an Arctic nation, is experiencing rapidly evolving threats—and opportunities—that we must recognize and address.

My testimony provides an overview of key issues facing the US, and other Arctic and non-Arctic nations. To re-conceptualize the realities, risks, and opportunities in the Arctic, I provide a framework called *Navigating the Arctic’s 7Cs*.

The **7Cs** are: 1) Climate, 2) Commodities, 3) Commerce, 4) Connectivity, 5) Communities, 6) Cooperation, and 7) Competition. To effectively protect the homeland by addressing the challenges and opportunities of a transformed Arctic, the United States must thoroughly consider how it *Navigates the Arctic’s 7Cs*.

1. Climate

Climate change is real, rapid, and palpable. According to NASA, September Arctic Ocean ice extent has decreased from about 3 million square miles in 1980 to less than 2 million square miles this month. The latest IPCC report found with high confidence that the Arctic is warming two to three times faster than the global average. Associated sea ice decline has many implications for the United States, including: a more accessible border along the Alaska's coastline; increased risk to mariners; stronger and more frequent storms; threats to coastal communities due to coastline and permafrost degradation, and; shifting subsistence patterns.

I recommend, as one example of cross-walking federal recommendations and efforts related to the Arctic, a review of the United States Arctic Research Commission's Report on the Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research 2019-2020, where you may find nine recommendations that enhance the nation's ability to "Observe, Understand, and Forecast Arctic Environmental Change."

2. Commodities

According to USGS, the Arctic is estimated to hold 13% of the world's undiscovered oil, 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas, and 20% of the undiscovered natural gas liquids. The increased availability of these resources due to the rapid ice thaw has reenergized the global market's interest in the Arctic for a source of these commodities. This interest is predicted to endure – particularly in the wake of the recent attack on Saudi Arabian oil facilities.

The US Arctic Research Commission's 2019-2020 document notes five recommendations to advance our understanding of Arctic natural resources and may help shape the Committee's further work in this area.

3. Commerce

There has been a five-fold increase in commercial activity along Russia's Northern Sea Route (NSR) since 2014, primarily driven by resource extraction and subsequent transport. According to Business Index North, 22,022 voyages with 20.1 million tons of freight transited the NSR in 2018—twice the tonnage of 2017. Russia derives an estimated 20% of its GDP and 30% of its exports from the Arctic—and aims to quadruple the cargo to 80 million tons per year by 2024. Russia is building out their Arctic infrastructure to support such activities – the United States is not.

Russia's Yamal Peninsula, an epicenter of this commerce, is now emblematic of the new, **global Arctic** – for example China owns a nearly 30% stake of the initial Yamal LNG project, and Arctic LNG tankers are built in the shipyards of South Korea. Meanwhile, the US does not have a **major deep-water port** along 1,500 nautical miles of its Arctic coastline: from Dutch Harbor to Alaska's North Slope. Without a viable deep-water port or string of ports - in the US Arctic - commerce, search-and-rescue, and national security interests will not be met. The June 2019 National Defense Authorization Act includes "requirements to locate and designate 'one or more' US strategic ports in the Arctic."

4. Connectivity

There are many ways to describe connectivity in the Arctic context. We tend to think of connectivity as just an internet connection, but we should focus on a broader application of connectivity—addressing both digital and physical infrastructure.

We do not have a digital or information *divide* in America's Arctic—we have a digital and information *abyss*. Less than 5% of the US maritime Arctic is charted to modern international standards; we lack basic information about our Arctic domain. Insufficient access to reliable internet connectivity hinders education, commerce, search and rescue, and impedes informed infrastructure development and maintenance.

5. Communities

The transformation of the Arctic most acutely affects communities in the region. The US Army Corps of Engineers has identified 31 Alaskan communities as seriously threatened by environmental change and in imminent need of relocation. In other words, 31 communities need to vacate the land their ancestors lived on for thousands of years. These threatened communities are similar to those in New Orleans and perhaps a future Miami. It is the mission of the Department of Homeland Security to guarantee a safe and secure environment to all American communities, including those in the Arctic.

6. Cooperation

There is a high degree of cooperation between the eight Arctic nations, principally through the Arctic Council. For over two decades, this consensus-driven body has fostered and maintained international dialogue, research efforts, and binding agreements among the members, including Russia. Cooperation also exists within the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, with representation from each Arctic nation. The Arctic region is the only place, aside from the International Space Station, where the US and Russia have maintained long-term cooperation, even in times of high tension.

US participation and leadership in the Arctic Council and Arctic Coast Guard Forum is in our nation's best interest. These entities reinforce a rules-based governance structure for the Arctic Ocean, and help to effectively mitigate and address the impacts of a warming Arctic.

7. Competition

The ability to project power in the Arctic can be measured in a number of ways, including a nation's ability to operate in the region. A lens through which we may consider this matter includes the number of icebreakers in service and planned by the United States, Russia, and China.

China, which in 2018 proclaimed itself a "Near-Arctic State," currently has 4 icebreakers and is developing 2 new icebreakers, 1 to be nuclear-powered. This is indicative of China's approach to the Arctic—a long-term, carefully crafted, and purposeful strategy to secure a diverse energy portfolio, presence, and regional influence through economic development.

Russia operates 53 icebreakers, with 6 under construction and 12 more planned. Russia is also revitalizing Soviet-era military installations and establishing new assets along the NSR, with new military bases on Franz Josef Land, Kotelny, and Wrangel Island. This denotes Russia's intent and ability to maintain premier influence in the Arctic.

The US government by comparison has 2 icebreakers, and is cannibalizing parts from the dry-docked *Polar Sea* to maintain our single heavy icebreaker – the *Polar Star*. The recent funding for an additional US icebreaker or "Polar Security Cutter" is a small step forward. The US Coast Guard's 2019 Arctic Strategic Outlook describes the need for 6 new Polar Security Cutters, which will help support our homeland security requirements and provide much needed domain presence.

We should share a sense of urgency to see our Polar Security Cutter fleet fully funded and in service sooner rather than later.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, we often hear the Arctic is an **emerging issue**. I disagree. **The Arctic has emerged**. As I have explained, it is no longer an isolated or remote region; rather it is a critical component of our global political, economic, social, physical, and security landscape. The region is experiencing rapid and dynamic change and these **seven unique drivers**, the **Arctic's 7Cs**, help frame these pressing global issues in a way that may help to better understand and address our future Arctic.