Coast Guard Releases New Arctic Strategic Outlook

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The U.S. Coast Guard has updated its Arctic strategic outlook for the first time since it published its strategy for the region in 2013 as it focuses more attention on an area of increasing interest regarding national defense, commercial shipping and natural resources exploration.

Released in an April 22 announcement, the new strategic outlook noted that as "the Arctic region continues to open, and strategic competition drives more actors to look to the Arctic for economic and geopolitical advantages, the demand for Coast Guard leadership and presence will continue to grow.

"Since the release of the Coast Guard Arctic Strategy in 2013, the resurgence of nation-state competition has coincided with dramatic changes in the physical environment of the Arctic, which has elevated the region's prominence as a strategically competitive space," the document said. "The United States is an Arctic nation, and the U.S. Coast Guard has served as the lead federal agency for homeland security, safety and environmental stewardship in the Arctic region for more than 150 years."

The shrinking and thinning of the Arctic Ocean ice pack in recent years has tempted Arctic nations – and some non-Arctic nations such as China – to expand their presence in the region and to build ships capable of navigating through the ice. The U.S. Coast Guard this year was funded by Congress to build a new class of icebreakers called polar security cutters. The service does not have any ports on the Arctic Ocean and has only one ship, USCGC Healy, that routinely operates in the Arctic.

“As the nation’s primary maritime presence in the Polar Regions, the Coast Guard advances national interests through a unique blend of polar operational capability, regulatory authority and international leadership across the full spectrum of maritime governance,” the announcement said. “The Coast Guard will continue to work with our allies and partners on the mutual goal of ensuring a safe, secure, and cooperative Arctic, even as our aspiring near-peer competitors maneuver for strategic advantage in the area.”

“The Arctic Strategic Outlook reaffirms the Coast Guard’s commitment to American leadership in the region through partnership, unity of effort and continuous innovation,” said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl L. Schultz. “We understand the significant investment required to secure the Arctic, and we appreciate and embrace the trust the American people have placed in the U.S. Coast Guard. We will remain vigilant in protecting our national interests in the Polar Regions.”

The outlook is organized along three lines of effort, listed below:

• Enhance capability to operate effectively in a dynamic arctic – The Coast Guard has ample authorities and a robust network of strong and resilient partnerships, but there are critical gaps in capability and capacity that must be filled in order to uphold American sovereignty and deliver mission excellence.

• Strengthen the rules-based order – The Coast Guard will lead institutions and cooperate with partners to promote rule of law and prevent malign influence in the Arctic.

• Innovate and adapt to promote resilience and prosperity – The sea service will collaborate with partners and stakeholders to develop innovative ways to deliver mission-critical services – including search and rescue, incident management, law enforcement and marine safety – to the region.