

Put Information Support to Work | Space: The Race Is On

PROCEEDINGS

U.S. NAVAL INSTITUTE | The Independent Forum of the Sea Services

**A New
ARCTIC
Task Force**

**The Polar
Chessboard**

**Secret Life of
Icebreakers**

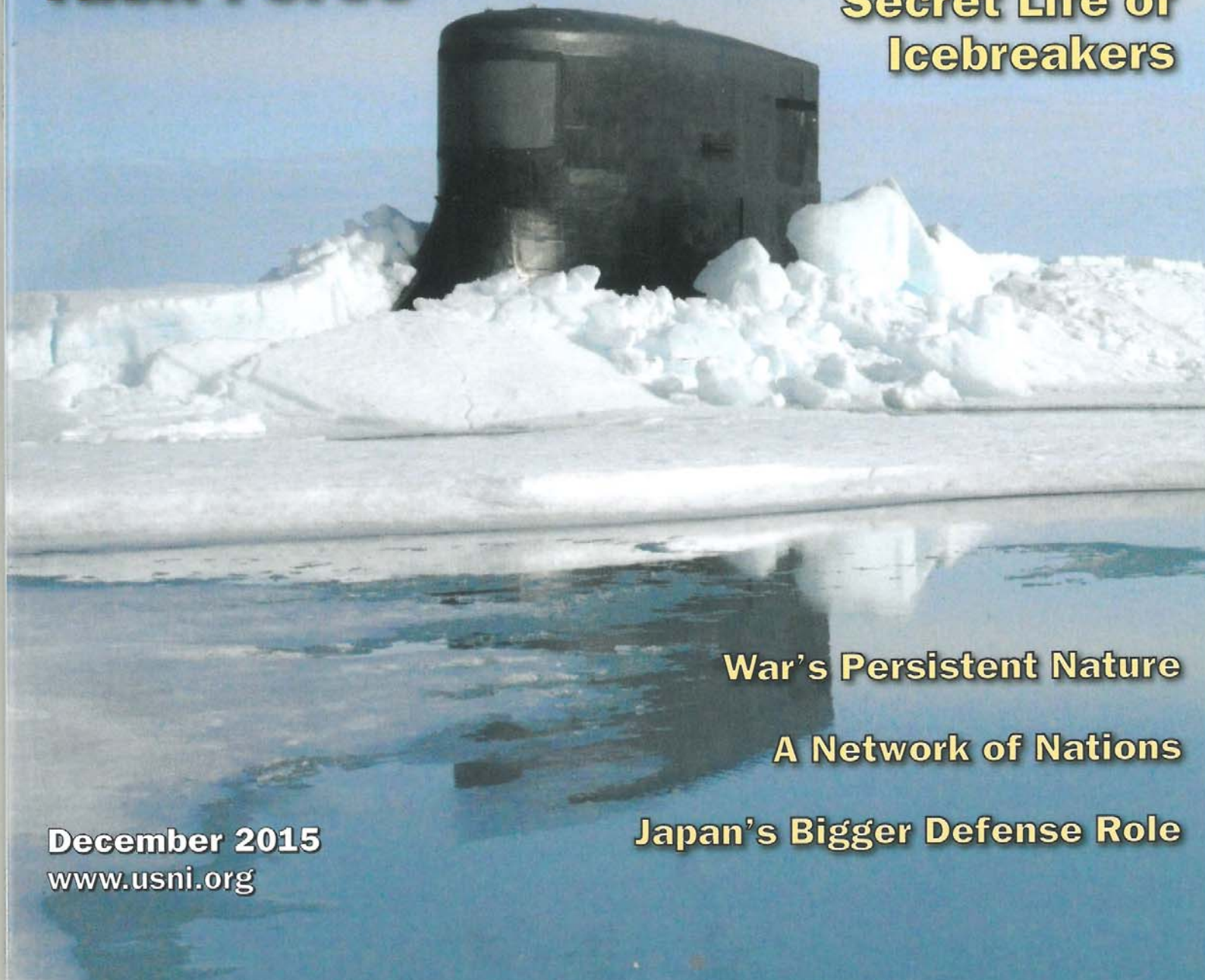
War's Persistent Nature

A Network of Nations

Japan's Bigger Defense Role

December 2015

www.usni.org



A Mechanism for Arctic-Crisis Response

By Paul Arthur Berkman and Admiral James G. Stavridis, U.S. Navy (Retired)

With the opportunities presented as the sea ice recedes also come risks. The United States should lead an international effort to increase Arctic infrastructure.

The High North is opening to the world. In April the United States began its two-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the high-level international forum for the region. President Barack Obama traveled to Alaska in August as the first U.S. President to visit the Arctic while in office. And the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker USCGC *Healy* (WAGB-20) arrived at the North Pole on 8 September. All of these recent developments highlight the responsibilities of the United States as an Arctic nation.

The question is, can the United States provide international leadership in the Arctic, especially with regard to sustainable infrastructure development in the Arctic Ocean? And given our responsibilities, are we prepared to respond to disasters and fully participate in the High North—with search-and-rescue capability, environmental-disaster mitigation, science diplomacy, and other activities?

Unlike centuries past, when sea ice covered the north polar region perennially, today there is navigable open water from the Bering Strait to the Barents Sea during the summer. This increasing access to rich resources is awakening a number of human activities and associated societal responses, not just from the Arctic states but from the entire world. This leads directly to the hot-button topic of energy exploration, development, and production in the Arctic Ocean.

Oceanic travel across the top of the Earth cuts a third off the distance between Europe and Asia, compared to transits through the Panama or Suez canals. What are the implications for new trade routes or trading patterns, which historically have changed the balance of power among nations? How will we use the Northern Sea Route, Northwest Passage, or Transpolar Route into the future?

Vast fishery enterprises are seeking to feed a hungry world, preparing to jump into areas of the Arctic high seas where marine living resources are unregulated beyond

sovereign jurisdictions. Can nations collectively demonstrate shared stewardship and commercial restraint to ensure the lasting vitality of Arctic marine ecosystems?

Wrapped into charged dialogues about climate change, atmospheric temperatures over the Arctic are rising twice as fast as the rest of the Earth. Can we turn down the vitriol to appreciate that every planet in our solar system has its own changing climate, all influenced primarily by the Sun? The climate dynamics on Earth are no different, except that our planet is influenced by both natural variability as well as human impacts. A reality check is in order here. On a global scale, we are just in our infancy in addressing climate and other planetary-scale impacts that require coordination among all nations.

So, where does this leave us in the Arctic? Can we conceive and build sustainable infrastructure in the Arctic Ocean that will resonate with utility and hope, not just for the region but globally?

In this quest, it is important to recognize that economic prosperity, environmental protection, social equity, and societal welfare all are necessary. We have responsibilities to act in the interests of present as well as future generations. Moreover, in the Arctic Ocean, as elsewhere on Earth, we have a shared struggle to balance national and common interests.

The challenge for the United States and the other Arctic states, with the central involvement of the indigenous peoples and effective engagement of non-Arctic states, is responding in a balanced manner to the opportunities as well as the risks from the opening of the Arctic Ocean.

We need to search for projects that can add value, inspire international cooperation, and improve the ability of humankind to operate responsibly in the High North. One such venture would be a multipurpose platform from which to conduct emergency responses, from search-and-rescue to pollutant cleanup or even critical vessel services. No

such platform exists today, nor is one contemplated. Such an enterprise also could be used as a base for scientific research as well as observance and communication systems.

An appropriate-sized platform needs to be considered, but it could be roughly the dimensions of the larger oil-drilling rigs. It would need to be sustainable throughout the year, no matter the weather and environmental conditions, and possibly could be mobile. Like polar stations elsewhere, it would require year-round operations that could involve international, interagency, and private-sector crews. Such a platform would need to be easily accessible by air and sea. In order to minimize any complications with international law, it could be placed inside internationally recognized territorial waters, or at a minimum, in a nation's exclusive economic zone.

Where precisely should the platform be located? First, in terms of a best spot for emergency response, the Chukchi Sea is at the confluence of the Northern Sea Route, Northwest Passage, any transpolar route, and the Bering Strait region. Providing leadership, the United States would be in the position to assist with safety of life at sea as well as environmental-pollution responses throughout the region, including calls from Canada or Russia. Such international-response capacity recognizes that the marine system operates independently of any geopolitical boundaries.

The offshore area of the Chukchi Sea has water depths less than 1,300 feet, which is shallow enough to engineer and construct a multipurpose facility, yet deep enough to serve as a deepwater port more than 1,000 miles north of Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands. Considerations of any such port along the Alaskan coastline have been problematic in terms of location and funding, especially recognizing that any federal contribution will be absent as long as Alaska continues to be the only ocean-front state in the United States without a coastal zone-management plan in effect.

It is clear from recent protests against Shell Oil Company, for example, that there is strong opposition and justifiable environmental concern about any hydrocarbon-extraction activities in the Arctic Ocean. At the same time, energy companies are planning three to five decades into the future to supply the fuel that we have come to demand on a daily basis, allowing us to warm our homes, run our computers, and travel across cities. How do we balance economic prosperity and environmental protection in the Arctic Ocean?

tional agreements, involving all eight Arctic states, such a facility would contribute to stability and peace in the region.

Importantly, construction of built infrastructure in the Arctic Ocean will be expensive, tapping precious national and state resources in directions that could compromise other priorities. At this stage, before offshore energy operations emerge, nations such as the United States could establish that the cost of business in the Arctic Ocean involves infrastructure support beyond traditional contingency planning. With addi-

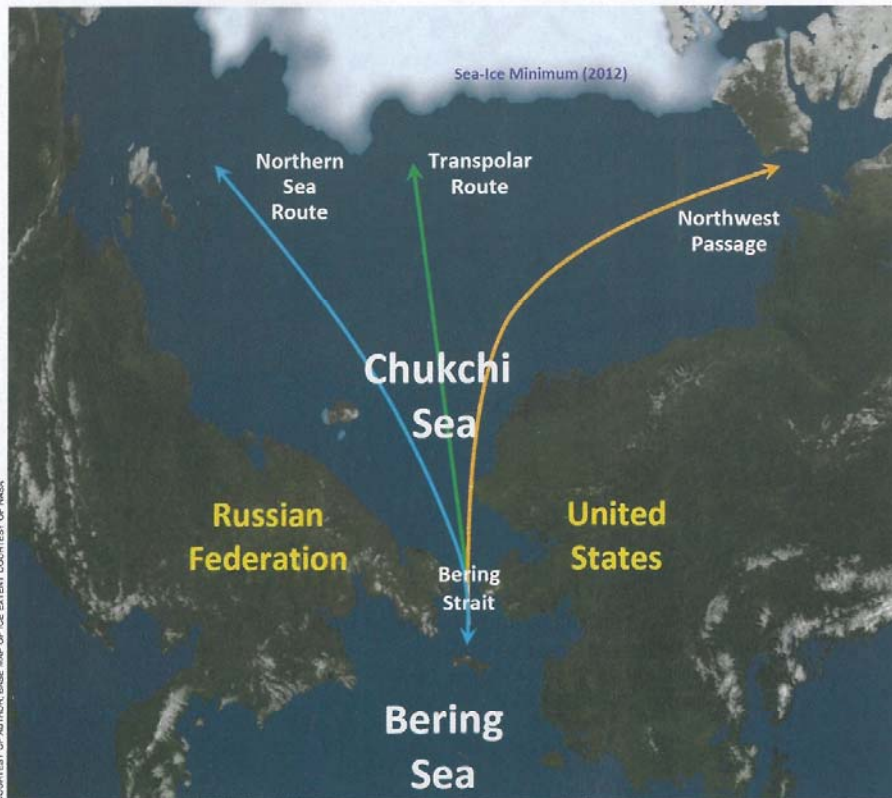
munities in both Alaska and Chukotka. As the choke point into and out of the Arctic Ocean, at only around 50 miles across at its narrowest, the Bering Strait is a gateway region that requires emergency-response infrastructure with increasing urgency as commercial activities accelerate. As the closest connection between the United States and Russia, the region also offers a template for cooperative and consistent coordination among neighbors, which will further promote stability throughout the High North.

How can we go about doing this?

Certainly, Congress could initiate an international, interagency, and public-private partnership to create emergency-response capacity in the Chukchi Sea. The United States would take the lead, but much like the International Space Station, this could be an enterprise that includes other international partners. Several U.S. agencies would want to participate, especially those involved with the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee and the Arctic Executive Steering Committee. Both the United States and specifically Alaska could partner with exploration-oriented companies in offshore leasehold areas to create the emergency-response platform.

Admittedly, the major oil companies are not flush with cash, in light of lower oil prices, and Shell is slowing its exploration in the Chukchi Sea after disappointing tests. However, over the long term, such a platform in the Chukchi Sea, constructed as an international, interagency, and public-private partnership, could be a win-win for all.

We should explore these possibilities over the coming months during the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council. ❄️



COURTESY OF AUTHOR BASE MAP OF ICE EXTENT COURTESY OF NASA

The authors propose an emergency-response platform in the Chukchi Sea at the confluence of the Bering Strait, the Northern Sea Route, the Northwest Passage, and any transpolar route across the North Pole. They envision it to be "multipurpose . . . from search-and-rescue to pollutant cleanup or even critical vessel services."

Building the platform in the Chukchi Sea would become a vital contribution for the 2011 *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic* and the 2013 *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness and Response*, both of which are lacking in infrastructure to become operational. Such a facility would enable the United States to demonstrate active and influential leadership in the Arctic, bringing a fresh focus on Arctic infrastructure. Moreover, in view of the previously mentioned interna-

tional government contribution, such precedent of public-private partnership could help to resolve many of the challenges of oil-spill response in the Arctic that were noted by the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. More broadly, creating integrated response capacity for oil spills, safety of life at sea and other emergencies would be an efficient application of financial, political, and social capital.

The Bering Strait region south of the Chukchi Sea is home to indigenous com-

Professor Berkman teaches Practice in Science Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and is research professor at the Marine Science Institute at the University of California Santa Barbara. He was head of the Arctic Ocean Geopolitics Programme at the Scott Polar Research Institute and Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge.

Admiral Stavridis is Dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts and is Chair of the U.S. Naval Institute's Board of Directors. He retired from the U.S. Navy as Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander, U.S. European Command.