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East Asia and the Arctic: Alaskan and American Perspectives

Jerry McBeath



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Cover photo: The submarine USS *Annapolis* (SSN 760) rests in the Arctic Ocean after surfacing through three feet of ice during Ice Exercise 2009 on March 21, 2009. The two-week training exercise, which is used to test submarine operability and war-fighting capability in Arctic conditions, also involves the USS *Helena* (SSN 725), the University of Washington and personnel from the Navy Arctic Submarine Laboratory. US Department of Defense photo by Petty Officer First Class Tiffini M. Jones, US Navy.



57 Erb Street West
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 6C2
Canada
tel +1 519 885 2444 fax +1 519 885 5450
www.cigionline.org

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Jerry McBeath

*Department of Political Science,
University of Alaska Fairbanks*

Jerry McBeath trained at the University of Chicago (A.B., 1963; A.M., 1964) and at the University of California, Berkeley (Ph.D., 1970). At Berkeley, he became a Sinologist, attending the Inter-university Consortium of Chinese Language Studies (Stanford Center) in 1967-1968, and used both Mandarin and the Amoy dialect to conduct dissertation research on the Philippine Chinese. He is fluent in Chinese (speaking, reading and writing [haltingly]), and speaks some Japanese and Filipino.

Since 1976, McBeath has worked at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), where he is professor of political science and department chair. His research interests comprehend studies of Alaska and US government/politics, federalism, circumpolar northern studies, domestic and foreign policies of China and Taiwan, and environmental politics (domestic, comparative and international).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper concerns the US view of East Asian nations' involvement in the Arctic, emphasizing the perspective of Alaska, the only US Arctic state. It treats six different areas of US/Alaska policy: US national strategy for the Arctic; oil and gas exploration and development; marine transportation; fisheries; investment in infrastructure; and governance. The study finds few differences between the positions of Alaska and the United States, notwithstanding often-hostile rhetoric from leaders in the United States' farthest north frontier. In general terms, both Alaska and the United States have historically sought trade and investment ties with East Asian nations. China has now replaced Japan as Alaska's major trading partner, followed by South Korea and Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

The global competition for natural resources and diminishing sea ice have increased international interest in the Arctic, and involved recently in the charge have been East Asian nations. In particular, China, Japan and South Korea have become frequent visitors to the North, and they have visions of long-term participation in Arctic affairs.

This paper asks how the state of Alaska, the only Arctic state of the United States, and the United States itself view East Asian involvement. Is there a distinctly Alaskan or American position on East Asian engagement? Is the participation of East Asia in Arctic development a political issue, or a matter of public debate?

To answer these questions, this paper treats the roles of Alaska and the United States in six substantive areas: US national strategy for the Arctic; oil and gas exploration and development; marine transportation; fisheries; investment; and governance. In each area, the challenges and opportunities to the state and nation are examined; then consideration is given, in this respect, to whether Alaskan and US attitudes toward East Asian participation are welcoming or hostile.

The global position of the United States is different from that of other Arctic states, and Alaska stands in a different relationship regarding its federation than do other federal states in the Arctic. The United States occupies a unique position in the international system, because currently, it is the only superpower. Superpowers worry about threats to their status and tend to neglect peaceful regions like the Arctic. Global hegemony tends to treat rising powers with suspicion

and regard them as threats. China is a rising power,¹ and for this reason, US reactions to China's behaviour in the Arctic may appear rigid and inhospitable. On the other hand, the United States has military alliances with Japan and South Korea and friendly relations with both. Alaska's relationship with its federal union is different from that of provinces/republics in the other federal nations of the Arctic (Canada and Russia). The US federal system is more centralized than that of Canada, and Alaska is the only Arctic state among America's 50 subnational governments. Alaska is also the second newest US state and is quite sparsely populated (740,000 residents in 2013). Many Alaska policy makers believe that the federal government stands in the way of its development through stringent controls on natural resource management and stifling regulations covering each aspect of economic development.

In 2013, Alaska's strategies toward Arctic development have evolved. In 2010, the Alaska state legislature established the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force (ANWTF), which identified needs in several areas, such as oil and gas development, indigenous issues, infrastructure development, fisheries and influence on federal Arctic policy (ANWTF 2012). The ANWTF also recommended the creation of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission to develop a comprehensive Arctic strategy. The state legislature established the commission in 2012, which began deliberations in March 2013.

In the sections that follow, the ANWTF's report and recommendations are mentioned, specifically regarding the needs for Alaska's more aggressive engagement in the Arctic. In this context, comments on the mood of Alaska and US policy makers on East Asian involvement in the Arctic are added where available, but first, the US national strategy is examined.

US NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE ARCTIC

It is noteworthy that the United States was the last of the "Arctic 8" to issue a statement on its goals and objectives

1 On this point, see Jakobson and Peng (2012), which assesses China's Arctic activities in the context of overall foreign policy objectives, and finds that it safeguards its national interest in economic development (including seeking access to shorter shipping routes and means to enhance food and resource security). Underlying this is an objective to attract respect as a major power (*ibid.*, 20). However, the United States may have been motivated by the "China threat" thesis, when in 2005, it strongly objected to China National Offshore Oil Corporation's attempt to purchase Unocal. For a discussion of China's strategy in the Arctic, and particularly its status quo and revisionist dimensions, see Rainwater (2012) and Kraska (2011).

for the Arctic region.² The strategy announced by President Obama in May 2013 is predictably general and vague. It focusses on US security interests,³ emphasizing "responsible Arctic region stewardship" and strengthened engagement with international organizations (The White House 2013, 2). The details of the strategy are outlined in the subsections below.

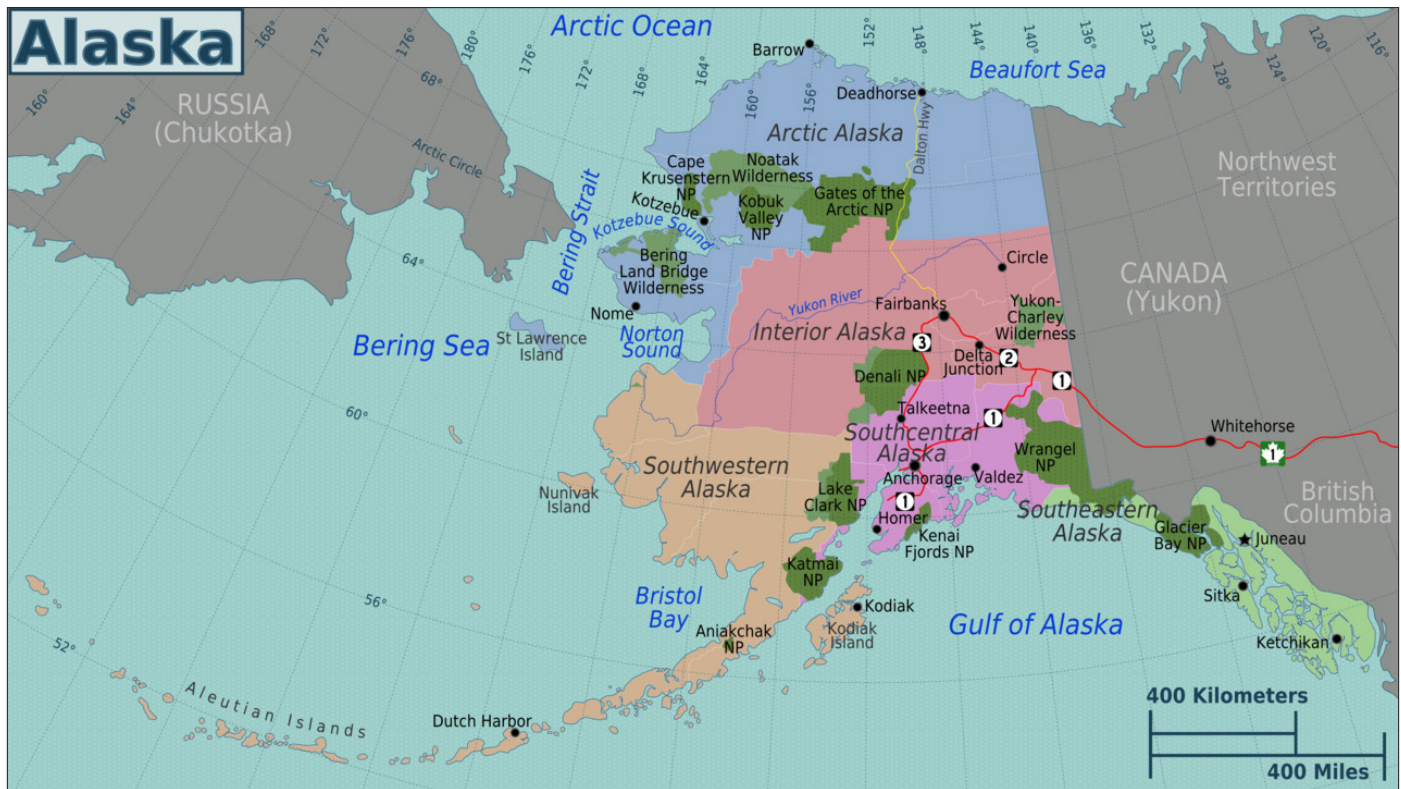
US SECURITY INTERESTS

In general, the strategy describes the priority of protecting the US people, territory and natural resources through a "combination of independent action, bilateral initiatives and multilateral cooperation" (The White House 2013, 6). Four specific efforts are mentioned:

- The US federal government's continued development of Arctic infrastructure and improvement of strategic capabilities through cooperative work with "the State of Alaska, local and tribal authorities, as well as public and private actor partners" (*ibid.*). This section includes "the capacity to respond to natural or man-made disasters" (*ibid.*)
- Increased "Arctic domain awareness" (*ibid.*). This section addresses the limited knowledge of Americans about both the Arctic and rapid climate change, with the objective of improving understanding of conditions and circumstances potentially affecting US safety, security, environmental or commercial interests.
- Preserving Arctic region freedom of seas and airspace through enhanced national defence, law enforcement, navigation safety, marine environment response and search-and-rescue capabilities. Although the US Senate has yet to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the strategy commits the United States to strategic partnerships in development of Arctic waterways management regimes and free flow of trade (7).
- Finally, the search for energy security through a comprehensive ("all of the above") approach is emphasized, including the development of "renewables, expanding oil and gas production, and increasing efficiency" of use and conservation (*ibid.*).

2 The eight nations comprising the Arctic region are: the United States, Canada, Russia, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark (Greenland).

3 For a full discussion of US national security interests in the Arctic, see Department of Defense (2011).



Travel regions of Alaska. (Image by Peter Fitzgerald.)

RESPONSIBLE ARCTIC REGION STEWARDSHIP

This dimension of US strategy focusses on natural and human resource management and use. It includes: the protection of the Arctic environment and conservation of the region’s resources; integrated management to balance economic development, environmental protection and cultural values; continued scientific research (on changes manifested in land/sea ice, biodiversity and permafrost), along with traditional knowledge in a holistic approach; and charting and mapping the Arctic region.

STRENGTHENED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The strategy emphasizes four cooperative approaches that the United States should employ: forging bilateral and multilateral agreements with other Arctic states to promote prosperity, protect the environment and enhance security; working through the Arctic Council to advance US interests; ensuring US accession to UNCLOS; and cooperating with non-Arctic nations and non-state actors to advance common interests.

The strategy concludes by identifying the guiding principles that serve as the foundation of US Arctic engagement:

- safeguarding peace and stability in the region;
- using the best available information in decision making;
- pursuing innovative arrangements and new thinking on public-private and multinational partnerships; and
- consulting and coordinating with Alaska Natives, pursuant to tribal consultation policy.

OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In a notable 2008 report, the US Geological Survey (USGS) estimated that 13 percent of the world’s yet-to-be-discovered oil reserves and 30 percent of the undiscovered gas reserves are in the Arctic (USGS 2008a). The estimate includes some 90 billion barrels of oil, about 1,700 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and more than 40 billion barrels of natural gas liquids (USGS 2008b).

The USGS report estimates that most (84 percent) of the new deposits will be located offshore. According to a map created by the Department of the Interior (2010), approximately one-third of the estimated oil is expected to be found in the circum-Arctic region of Alaska and the Alaska Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). This means

that Alaska will likely remain a vital part of Arctic oil and gas exploration and development activity, and that is good news for this highly natural-resource-dependent state, as approximately 85 percent of the state's general fund revenues are derived from production taxes, oil and gas royalties, and oil industry corporate income taxes.

Nearly 16 billion barrels of oil have been produced in Alaska since the discovery of oil on the North Slope in 1968, and most of this oil has been produced from wells in that area. Since the peak of production in 1988, when 2.1 million barrels of oil daily entered the pipeline and supplied about 25 percent of the total US oil production, oil from the legacy fields of Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk has declined. Today, oil from these fields and from new wells in Alpine, Endicott and other sites has fallen to less than 600,000 barrels daily. Just over 100 wells have been drilled in the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Sea. The history of oil and gas development in Alaska has occurred largely onshore; the safety and environmental record of onshore production has been generally good, with no major spills (the largest, in 2006, was 270,000 gallons) or casualties (McBeath et al. 2008).

The decline of in-state oil production has increased interest in new exploration and development opportunities. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System has carried oil from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez since 1977, but in 2013, it moved less than one-third of the average daily flow of the late 1980s. Declining throughput increases difficulty of oil flow through the pipeline, creating additional support for increasing oil production.

Some 16 percent of the Alaska population is Alaska Native, and these indigenous people have lived in the region sustainably for thousands of years. The majority of the North Slope population is Inupiat Eskimo, which has benefitted economically from oil and gas development. Most Native Alaskans, however, differentiate onshore from offshore oil production, supporting the former and opposing the latter. Inupiat Eskimos believe emphatically that exploration for, and development of, OCS oil resources may endanger the bowhead whale population, which is both symbolically and actually vital for the survival of its whaling culture.

Nearly 700 gas wells have been drilled in Cook Inlet, supplying energy for most homes in south-central Alaska. There is a prospect for commercialization of natural gas produced from the North Slope and adjacent areas, which involves fewer environmental risks in terms of production, storage and transmission than crude oil. To date, however, this gas has been "stranded" on the North Slope, both because natural gas prices have fallen in recent years, reducing the incentives for production and transmission of expensive Alaska gas, and because the state, the company it has contracted with to build

a pipeline to the Midwest (TransCanada Corporation) and the producers have failed to reach an agreement on production. The cost of such a pipeline — currently estimated to be between US\$45 billion and US\$65 billion — means that the decision will be made carefully and will require further negotiations between companies and the state over fiscal terms (Bohrer 2012).

The state of Alaska has a long-standing interest in exporting natural resource products, particularly oil and gas to East Asian nations. Since the early 1980s, for example, the Usibelli coal mine in Healy has been exporting coal to the Suneel corporation in South Korea (with a gap in exports in the early 2000s) and this contract is still in effect. The company also exports some coal to Taiwan. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline Authorization Act of 1973 required all petroleum from Alaska's North Slope to be sent to US refineries. Shortly after pipeline construction, however, state officials and congressional representatives sought to remove this restriction, believing the lowered transportation costs to Asia (as compared to shipping to refineries in California or Texas) would increase the state's take of production revenue. As a 1995 Cato Institute report noted:

The natural market for North Slope oil is Japan, Korea, and northern East Asia, to which oil can be shipped for about 50 cents per barrel, but North Slope producers are required to use domestic tankers and market exclusively in the United States and its territories, a mandate that has often resulted in shipping costs of \$5 per barrel. That price distortion has led to artificially low domestic prices for heavy crude on the West Coast, discouraging otherwise profitable exportation and production investments in Alaska and California. (Van Vactor 1995)

These export restrictions were lifted in 1996, toward the end of Frank Murkowski's tenure in the US Senate (he was the chief advocate for lifting the ban). From 1996 to 2004, the state exported 95.5 million barrels of crude oil (equal to 2.7 percent of Alaska production) to: South Korea, 46.2 million barrels; Japan, 24.5 million barrels; China, 16.5 million barrels; and Taiwan, 8.3 million barrels (US Energy Information Administration 2013). The economics of shipping have changed since that period of time, primarily because of the steep rise in oil prices, and in 2013, none of the North Slope production is exported outside the United States.

Japan and South Korea have high rates of dependence on imported oil and gas. China, once an oil exporter, has entered the global market for oil and gas purchases in the last decade, and now imports more than 50 percent of its oil and gas needs (Moyo 2012, 28). All three East Asian

countries are already Alaska's major trading partners, and certainly the state welcomes increased trade with them. In 2012, Alaska's top trading partners were: China, at 29.1 percent of Alaska's total exports; Japan, at 17.2 percent of Alaska's total exports (dropping from its former first-place position in 2010, which it had held for more than a decade); and South Korea, at 15.0 percent of Alaska's total exports (US Census Bureau 2013). These countries also import large volumes of Alaska zinc, lead, copper, gold and even some rare earth elements (*ibid.*), and they are also a market for Alaska's coal and natural gas.

In fact, Alaska Governor Sean Parnell's latest proposal for moving stranded natural gas from the North Slope to market entails the production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) there and its ultimate trans-shipment to markets in East Asia. Parnell's second foreign trip since being elected to his first full term in 2010 was to Japan and South Korea, where he promoted Alaska natural gas. Meeting with Japanese and South Korean officials, he remarked: "We look forward to capitalizing on the enormous potential that exists for Alaska's North Slope natural gas in our state and in Pacific Rim nations... This is a great opportunity to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones that will grow economic opportunity with Japan and South Korea" (Office of Governor Sean Parnell 2012).

The transportation route for Alaska's future shipments of natural gas to Asia is uncertain. The state has already committed to the construction of a large-diameter pipeline to move natural gas to the south, but it has devoted little attention to shipping natural gas on vessels across the Arctic Ocean. Reasons provided include shallow waters in Alaska near the Beaufort and Chukchi seas, and little interest of companies such as ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, BP and TransCanada Corporation, in backing the natural gas pipeline project to transport LNG via the Arctic Ocean (Burke 2013).

MARINE TRANSPORTATION

According to James Holmes (2012), the loss of perennial sea ice is likely to open Arctic waters to new shipping routes for part of each year sometime between 2035 and 2040, and East Asian nations would be major beneficiaries through a significant reduction in the time needed to move their goods to market. The Northern Sea Route, which passes along Russia's Arctic coast, would provide a direct route to northern Europe, while the Northwest Passage, which crosses the Canadian Arctic islands and the Alaska Arctic Ocean, would open up trade with the Atlantic coast of North America (Blunden 2012). Indeed, Arctic shipping could resolve the "Malacca dilemma," especially for China, but also for Japan and South Korea, as they import oil through this narrow chokepoint. There is, however, no certainty that a new global shipping route will be opened soon, as, according to polar shipping

specialist Lawson Brigham, there is still too much ice blocking traffic and that the gains of a new trade route do not yet outweigh the costs (quoted in CBC News 2012; also see Brigham 2011).

In 2012 alone, some 7,000 vessels operated in, or moved to, the Arctic for purposes of tourism, minerals mining, oil and gas exploration, military operations and other activities (ANWTF 2012, 14). Although search-and-rescue procedures have improved in the last two years (the United States reached agreement on search and rescue with the Arctic Council in 2011), other monitoring systems have not kept pace with increases in shipping and marine traffic. For example, vessel tracking and identification systems and pollution monitoring systems are insufficient, putting resources such as fisheries at increased risk.

The joint Alaska-US environmental regulatory regime in Alaska's Arctic waters is reasonably comprehensive and rigorous. The Alaska response to increased marine transport from East Asian nations would be apprehensive in the absence of new risk assessment and risk reduction options, such as those developed in response to the 2004 grounding and subsequent oil spill of the merchant vessel *Selendang Ayu*. The response to that disaster was a joint venture of the US Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the US Coast Guard and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. A program for enhanced vessel monitoring and reporting, enhanced towing capabilities and increased coast guard cutters in the Aleutians, and installing additional towing systems have since been implemented (ANWTF 2012, 16).

Addressing the opportunities and challenges of burgeoning marine transportation at a conference in Norway, Alaska Lieutenant Governor Mead Treadwell said that the lessons of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill needed to be applied, and marine shipping safety emphasized. In Treadwell's words, "Domestically, the United States regulates and monitors both tank and non-tank vessels to the hilt... So do other Arctic states. But we have little say today about the environmental or human safety plans for the traffic that's sailing through Alaska's front yard in the Bering Strait" (quoted in Restino 2013). Nonetheless, the Arctic Council was successful in reaching consensus of the parties to the 2013 Arctic Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response Agreement.

FISHERIES

Overfishing is a global condition that is especially pronounced in East Asian nations, but the North Pacific fishery is the most productive in the United States. Alaska's North Pacific Fishery Management region, the largest in ocean area, is regarded as the best-managed council. Alaska exports large volumes of fish products

to the East Asian region, and this demand will continue to be strong. Indeed, demand may strengthen further, as some commercial fish species move into northern waters.

East Asian nations' seafood purchases figured in the recent change of Alaska's top trade partners. Formerly, Japan held the top position, primarily because of its purchases of fisheries products including king salmon, Alaska pollock and salmon roe. Then, as noted, China overtook Japan to become Alaska's largest trading partner in 2011. More than half of Chinese imports were seafood products. Overall, seafood composed half of Alaska's US\$5 billion export economy. While the state ranks 42 of 50 states in terms of total exports, calculated on a per capita basis, Alaska is in the top 10.

However, good scientific information about changes in the population ecology of the 100 known species of fish in northern Alaska waters, their productivity parameters (rates of growth, recruitment and natural mortality) and the effects of fisheries on other fish species, marine mammals and seabirds are not well understood. Scientists lack data that could be used to estimate the biomass of potentially harvestable species. Without such information, it is not possible to develop estimates on potential sustainable fishery yields. For these reasons, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a moratorium on commercial fishing north of the Bering Strait and included both the Chukchi and Beaufort seas (North Pacific Fishery Management Council 2009). The Council represents Alaska government agencies, Washington and Oregon fisheries interests, and US fisheries-related agencies; the moratorium follows the precautionary principle, because based on limited available scientific evidence, it is not clear that fishing could continue without harm to existing fish populations, including resources used for subsistence.

In 2011, the Canadian federal government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Inuvialuit people of the western Arctic prohibiting the issuing of new commercial fishing licences in the adjacent Beaufort Sea until a management plan was devised. Meetings among the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway and Denmark, which began in April 2013, may lead to an international moratorium (Cheney 2013).

INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The engagement of East Asian nations with the Alaska-American Arctic will require a significant expansion of infrastructure. Oil, gas and mineral exploration and development will require construction of new roads, ports and harbours. The Alaska Department of Transportation

and Public Facilities has conducted multiple studies of roads that can be used for industrial development (its "roads to resources" program), arctic ports and harbours studies, studies of needed airports and pipelines — as well as how the built environment will be affected by climate change.

To date, US federal funding has paid for the lion's share of new road, port and harbour construction, and this funding has been significantly reduced — a reduction of 20 percent to 30 percent for 2014 is anticipated — as federal deficits and debt have mounted. For the last decade, Alaska has enjoyed high budget surpluses in most years because of high oil prices. Healthy budgets have made possible capital budgets of US\$3 billion annually in the last few years, but these will not continue into the future. Reduced oil production and the conservative Republicans' reduction in the progressivity of the Alaska petroleum production tax in 2013 will increase the need to attract substantial new sources of capital investment. It is clear that the US Arctic policy, signed by President George W. Bush in 2009, and the US National Arctic Strategy of 2013 aim to improve the safety, security and reliability of transportation in the Arctic region. What is not clear, however, is whether, at either the state or federal level, long-term partnerships can be crafted easily with East Asian governments. This is more likely for mineral development projects.

The United States made a commitment to the Arctic Council's search and rescue response program in regions of the Arctic, which seems to necessitate a permanent base of the Coast Guard on the Alaska North Slope. At present, the most northern Coast Guard base in the United States is in Kodiak, which is more than 1,000 miles from Chukchi Sea drilling sites and from shipping lanes in the Bering Strait (ANWTF 2012, 19). This lack of a forward base influences the ability of Alaska and the United States to facilitate marine transportation (and of course, oil/gas and other mineral exploration and development) in the Arctic region.

The third issue concerns the limited ability of Alaska and US interests to navigate areas with ice. The United States today has only one polar class icebreaker, the Coast Guard's Healy. Its other polar class icebreaker, the Polar Star, is under repair in Seattle and not expected to return to service until later in 2013. The Polar Star's sister ship, the Polar Sea, was decommissioned in 2011 (*ibid.*). In contrast, Russia has a fleet of eight nuclear powered icebreakers, including a container ship, and a ninth is under construction — although its fleet serves a far larger population, resource and territorial base. China's merchant vessel the Xue Long ("Snow Dragon") receives good press for its frequent visits to the Arctic. It is the world's largest non-nuclear icebreaker; a second will join it in 2013. Both Japan and South Korea are adding icebreakers to their fleets (*Global Security* 2011).

GOVERNANCE

The United States has been a less serious participant in Arctic governance than the other Arctic states, but this condition is changing. Certainly, with the winding down of military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Arctic has gained attention as a future priority, indicated by its inclusion in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review. Yet, the United States is the only major maritime power and the only Arctic state that is not a party to UNCLOS, ratified by more than 160 nations. The US objection to the treaty — that it diminished national sovereignty — was resolved under President George H. W. Bush and finalized in the Clinton administration, and both Presidents G. W. Bush and Obama endorsed it for ratification, but it has been stalled in the Senate. The current Alaska US Senate delegation, composed of Senators Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski, is working to persuade conservative colleagues to ratify UNCLOS. Senator Begich (2013) has said that, “Regrettably, a small number of Republican Senators — enough to deny the two-thirds majority needed for ratification — blocked a vote on this important treaty.”

The signing of UNCLOS would be significant, because it extends OCS claims of nations to additional oil and gas reserves. Under treaty terms, nations can claim submerged lands and the resources of those lands (for example, minerals), if they can demonstrate that their continental margin extends beyond the 200-mile exclusive economic zone. The convention also secures open sea lanes (important to the United States in its dispute with Canada regarding the status of the Northwest Passage under international law) and corridors for submarine cables and pipelines (ANWTF 2012, 4).

A second area of improvement lies in the development of clarity regarding US Arctic policy. In 2009, President Bush adopted National Security Presidential Directive 66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25, which calls on the United States to:

- meet national security and homeland security needs relevant to the Arctic region;
- protect the Arctic environment and conserve its biological resources;
- ensure that natural resource management and economic development in the region are environmentally sustainable;
- strengthen institutions for cooperation among the eight Arctic nations (the United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and Sweden);
- involve the Arctic’s indigenous communities in decisions that affect them; and

- enhance scientific monitoring and research into local, regional, and global environmental issues. (The White House 2009, sec. 3)

President Obama signed an executive order establishing the first national policy for the stewardship of the ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes (The White House Council on Environmental Quality 2010). This established the cabinet-level National Ocean Council and governance coordinating committee, and advanced national planning on Arctic issues. As noted above, in May 2013, the United States also formalized its national strategy on the Arctic.

Related to this clarification at the national level, in Alaska, the legislature has established the bipartisan 26-member Alaska Arctic Policy Commission and charged it with developing a comprehensive Arctic strategy by 2014. Altogether, these actions elevate the status of Arctic policy at the state and federal levels, and increase the likelihood that they will take into account the involvement of East Asian nations.

Finally, the United States now pays greater attention to the Arctic Council. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was praised by the other Arctic states for her participation in the council’s ministerial meetings and she was accompanied on one occasion by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar — a significant gesture, as it is rare for the interior secretary to attend international meetings. Newly appointed Secretary of State John Kerry attended the 2013 ministerial meetings in Sweden. Alaska’s senior senator, Lisa Murkowski (2013), was the first US senator to attend a meeting of the Arctic Council, when she attended the Nuuk meeting in 2011.

The state of Alaska certainly emphasizes its international role. The ANWTF proposal reads, “The ANWTF Recommends that the Alaska State Legislature and the State of Alaska Support and Encourage Greater International Cooperation through the Arctic Council and Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska” (ANWTF 2012, 6). The state sends representatives to the Arctic Council meetings and to meetings of senior Arctic officials, and on this point, there is no significant difference whether governors are Republican or Democratic. Unlike a number of regional organizations, the Arctic Council has emphasized environmental security issues, which the Alaska task force endorsed (Ebinger and Zambetakis 2009).

At the 2013 ministerial meeting in Sweden, the Arctic Council expanded the number of permanent observer states. Before the meeting, the Alaska task force, which is composed of both federal and state representatives, commented, “The ANWTF also supports enlarging the number of non-Arctic nations that enjoy Observer status at the Arctic Council, however, not in such a way that would weaken the influence granted to the council’s Permanent

Participants” (ANWTF 2012, 7). The US State Department supported the applications of East Asian nations, as well. The nations admitted as permanent observers are China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, India and Italy. The European Union was admitted technically, but remaining trade differences with Canada have delayed its formal admission.

CONCLUSION

There are few differences between the state of Alaska and the US federal government as to whether increasing East Asian involvement in the Arctic should be encouraged. Alaska, as a state exporting natural resources, and with relatively short transportation lines to East Asia, has already developed strong ties with this region, which it is willing to strengthen further.

There are important value differences between Alaska/America and China, and these are more of an impediment to friendly relations than the value differences between Alaska and Japan or South Korea, which are democratic nations. China remains an authoritarian power under the rule of a survivalist communist party, focussed on economic development at whatever cost, and this is objectionable to many Alaskans and Americans.

This analysis also suggests that East Asian nations will benefit greatly from long-term involvement in the Arctic. They can gain access to natural resources they need to continue economic development and improve food security, and they may be able to reduce transportation costs by crossing Arctic waters. To expedite development, Alaska and the United States are no different from their Arctic neighbours: they welcome the expansion of East Asian nations’ investment in their industry and infrastructure and their respect for the Arctic governance systems.

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57 Erb Street West
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tel +1 519 885 2444 fax +1 519 885 5450
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