

Commandant Opening Remarks

25th IMO Assembly

Thank you Mr. President and congratulations on your election as our President for this 25th session of the Assembly.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General and Distinguished delegates:

Although this is my first time at IMO representing the United States, I have long been aware of your importance and significance to building global maritime safety, security and environmental protection regimes. We have shared goals, vision, and values - “Protecting the people from the ocean and the ocean from the people” is in essence the U.S. Coast Guard’s mission. We are about saving lives, keeping ports and shipping safe and secure, and protecting the world’s oceans.

Often when I meet with people to discuss the importance of maritime safety and security, I steal a quote from a British author - Arthur Clarke, who said “How inappropriate to call this planet earth when it is quite clearly **Ocean**.” Seventy percent of the Earth's surface is covered by water. And as you know, over 80 percent of world trade by volume moves through the maritime domain.

It is an honor and a pleasure to meet with you personally at this 25th Assembly of the IMO – to discuss the important issues we face collectively with members and nations who fully comprehend and appreciate this reality. I look forward to working with each of you.

Hawaii Marine National Monument

First, on behalf of the United States, thank you for your support of the U.S. initiative to establish a particularly sensitive sea area and ship reporting system for the Papahānaumokuākea (pronounced papahan umoku akea) Marine National Monument in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands. This will protect the fragile environment, and preserve this area with its cultural importance.

Environment in the News

You may have noticed today's Lloyd's List article about the Cosco Busan Oil Spill in San Francisco. The exact circumstances leading up to that spill are being investigated. However, the public and political reaction underscores the value that the public places on the environment. This creates a sense of urgency for us, not only in preventing oil spills, but also in establishing meaningful standards to reduce environmental pollution from other ship sources.

Ballast Water Management

A significant environmental issue facing the IMO is ballast water management. We must prevent the unwanted spread of non-indigenous species. The United States applauds the IMO as you complete the guidelines for implementation of the Ballast Water Management Convention. And it is also significant and noteworthy that IMO has granted basic approval to a treatment system.

This means we are seeing the development of the necessary treatment system technologies. We also note that the important issue concerning the availability sufficient technologies and how to resolve that issue is before us at this Assembly. The United States supports the Secretary General, and we look forward to a meaningful discussion on the options. We will arrive at a solution and move forward.

Maritime Security/ISPS

Maritime security continues to be an issue for us all, not only because we are concerned with the safety and protection of our people and our countries; it is vital to the world's economy too. In today's age of globalization, security is part of the equation with international shipping and global trade.

It is clear that our collective efforts must focus on the full application and implementation of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. The U.S. Coast Guard, through our International Port Security program, includes voluntary, mutual and reciprocal visits with other countries to mutually verify ISPS implementation. Our inspectors have visited 110 countries on all continents. Most ports are aware of the ISPS Code requirements, and I am told that the physical security within ports is also generally good. However, we still have areas for improvement - such as in cargo documentation, drills and exercises and sustainability.

The IMO has been and will continue to be very active in building the infrastructure and governance to fully implement the ISPS code. We applaud the Secretary General for the important steps taken in this regard, including the establishment of a section within the Secretariat dedicated to maritime security and for the initiative to develop an International Maritime Security manual. No doubt, this will assist countries in implementing the ISPS Code and structuring a meaningful maritime security regime.

The United States has long advocated including the ISPS Code within the scope of the Voluntary Member Audit Scheme. Based on our observations, it is our firm view that there is sufficient experience and knowledge throughout the SOLAS parties for inclusion. We look forward to the day when this is accomplished.

LRIT

During the last session of the Maritime Safety Committee, the IMO made significant progress on long range identification and tracking (LRIT). LRIT will provide the transparency necessary to enhance the maritime security of flag states, port states and coast states while also providing significant benefit to both safety and environmental protection. We realize significant issues remain; we are extremely confident that IMO will successfully conclude them at MSC 84. The U.S. will do whatever it can to reduce the costs of providing information to the system and enable the IMO to transition to a more permanent solution for the operation the International Data Exchange from the U.S. to an internationally agreed alternative.

Small Vessel Threat

Perhaps the most probable maritime security threat scenario involves vessels below the current SOLAS and ISPS threshold. We fully support the current effort within the Maritime Safety Committee to address this issue. We need guidelines that will:

- educate the threat to the states, their maritime industries and their small vessel stakeholders,
- communicate intelligence on possible terrorist actions involving small vessels, and
- coordinate international standards to detect, deter, mitigate and respond to small vessel threats.

In developing these guidelines, it is critical that all non-SOLAS vessels are considered. I realize the difficulty of this when it comes to recreational vessels. Like many countries, we have a significant number of recreational vessels – estimated at 13 million. You would think every American owns a boat.

I believe that “We are all in this together.”

In the United States, I have started a dialogue with the recreational boating community. There are many views on how we should address small boat threats – but it is a conversation that we must have.

It is imperative we all engage in this conversation with our own communities – people need to be educated on the impact, including the impact on individuals, should there be a security incident involving a recreational boat.

The United States has completed a National Small Vessel Strategy which includes strong recommendations for international cooperation and coordination to build a layered security program. We will share these recommendations with all parties through the Maritime Safety Committee.

Piracy

The world's physical and economic security depends in substantial part on the secure use of the world's oceans for unhindered legitimate commerce. Piracy and other acts of violence against maritime navigation threaten that security. Such criminal activity endangers sea lines of communication, impedes freedom of navigation, undermines regional stability, and can be a direct threat to our citizens and interests. Although maritime piracy is declining in some areas, the U.S. remains deeply concerned about the increased incidence of pirate attacks against ships off the coast of Somalia, especially against passenger vessels and ships carrying humanitarian aid, such as those operated under the auspices of the World Food Program. The loss of life, hijacking of ships, kidnapping of innocent crew, and loss of humanitarian aid cargo is especially tragic. In order to improve interagency coordination within the U.S. Government, and to facilitate broader international coordination for addressing piracy, the President of the United States issued a Piracy Policy on May 14, 2007.

The U.S. strongly supports the actions of the Secretary General to combat piracy and armed robbery at sea and we hope all nations located in areas where acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea are prevalent will continue to advance their maritime security efforts. The U.S. supports the draft Assembly resolution as an important step forward in bringing attention to and solving this important issue.

The U.S. also recognizes the need for, and actively supports a stronger and more complete international law framework, and appropriate domestic implementing legislation to address the realities of modern maritime threats and vulnerabilities. The U.S. is prepared to provide subject matter experts to the IMO to participate in bilateral and regional capacity building efforts, especially to implement the recommendations of the sub-regional meetings.

Arctic

The issues I have raised are the most important, critical and significant issues now before us. I would like to look forward beyond the current agenda at this time. In his opening remarks, the Secretary General spoke several times on climate change. I call your attention to a developing issue that will need our collective wisdom, courage and hard work to address in the near future. That is the emergence of the Arctic region and the future increased use of this region for international shipping.

The Arctic has been the focus of extensive media attention – due to its resource potential and the environmental sensitivities of the region. As summer sea ice recedes farther each year and as global pressure for resources increases, this predominantly maritime domain will require greater governance and international cooperation in order to insure safety, security, and stewardship standards are maintained. In the past, the IMO has worked to harmonize ice-capable vessel standards for the Arctic region by creating a "Polar Code."

As human activity increases in the Arctic, I suggest the IMO will need to expand on this framework and look at evolving Arctic issues such as:

- Arctic navigation and crew training standards,
- further clarification of ice-capable vessel construction standards,
- chokepoint traffic separation schemes (i.e. Bering Straits), and
- pollution prevention and response standards.

IMO leadership in these areas will facilitate the world's maritime, and particularly Arctic nations, work together to provide stability and order to this environmentally sensitive region.

Conclusion

As noted by the Secretary General in his remarks, the good news is that the IMO has never been more relevant, more visible and more vital to developing international solutions on the safety, security and stewardship of the oceans. You could also say that the bad news is that the IMO has never been more relevant, visible.... to the issues faced by international shipping in our globalized world. We have much work to do – together.

Thank you Mr. President.