MARITIME INFRASTRUCTURE

A Strategic Approach and Interagency Leadership Could Improve Federal Efforts in the U.S. Arctic

What GAO Found

Maritime shipping activity, as indicated by the number of vessels in the U.S. Arctic, generally increased from 2009 through 2019. Domestic maritime activity declined after the discontinuation of offshore oil and gas exploration activities in Alaska’s Chukchi Sea in 2015. However, since 2015, international activities related to natural gas development, particularly in the Russian Arctic, have increased, according to stakeholders. Factors affecting decisions of ship operators about whether to operate in the U.S. Arctic include increased operating costs of Arctic-capable ships, environmental changes that have caused more volatile weather and ice conditions, and concerns over environmental impacts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that OSTP and other appropriate entities within the Executive Office of the President: develop and publish a strategy to address gaps and designate the interagency mechanism responsible for leading federal efforts. OSTP neither agreed nor disagreed but noted it is considering the need for and role of additional federal coordination. GAO stands by its recommendations.

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