

U. S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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**TESTIMONY OF
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ON

“THE INTERNATIONAL ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD”

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE**

MARCH 10, 2020

Introduction

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is my pleasure to be here today to discuss the U.S. Coast Guard’s global operations, our support to the Department of State (DOS), and the Department of Defense (DoD) Geographic Combatant Commanders, as well as the role we play in the execution of the National Security and National Defense Strategy amidst the resumption of great power competition.

The U.S. Coast Guard is a multi-mission, maritime service responsible for the safety, security, and stewardship of the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. At all times a military service and branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, a federal law enforcement agency, a regulatory body, a first responder, and a member of the U.S. Intelligence Community, the U.S. Coast Guard operates on all seven continents and throughout the homeland, serving a nation whose national security and economic prosperity are inextricably linked to vast maritime interests.

The U.S. Coast Guard protects and defends more than 100,000 miles of U.S. coastline and inland waterways, saves thousands of lives per year, and safeguards the world’s largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), encompassing 4.5 million square miles of ocean. Indeed, the U.S. Coast Guard is fully engaged answering the call and balancing a multitude of dynamic maritime risks facing our nation.

Across the globe, the U.S. Coast Guard is in high demand as an instrument of international diplomacy, recognized as the U.S. maritime service with the most relatable mission profile to many nations’ maritime forces. Our partner nations model their actions after the U.S. Coast Guard, often with our assistance, in their efforts to address the universal challenges posed by transnational crime, human smuggling, maritime safety and security, environmental stewardship, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU), and foreign provocations in their sovereign waters.

Overseas Operations

The U.S. Coast Guard maintains a robust permanent and expeditionary global footprint in the execution of its statutory missions. Our operations overseas protect our national interests by expanding operations beyond our physical borders, enhancing partner nation capability, and disrupting threats away from our shores. Within the scope of our resources, we respond to demand signals from the Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Defense (DoD) to conduct missions for which we are uniquely suited in support of national security and national defense priorities.

Cooperation: The U.S. Coast Guard's network of over 60 multi and bi-lateral agreements and participation in international fora are unlike those of any other military force or government agency. This network provides access to partners in key regions on issues ranging from fisheries enforcement, to counter narcotics, to joint contingency plans for pollution in the Arctic, to anti-terror missions. These partnerships are vital to the Nation's success in the broader context of geostrategic competition and will only become more relevant in the decades to come.

- i) As a result of the U.S. Coast Guard's law enforcement, regulatory, and humanitarian missions, the Coast Guard maintains professional service-to-service relationships and cooperates on maritime economic and national security challenges such as high-seas driftnet fishing with China, dangerous maritime migration with Cuba, and safe navigation of the Bering Sea and Arctic with our counterpart agencies in Russia, while serving as a role model for behavior in the maritime domain.
- ii) As the model example of international cooperation within the marine transportation system (MTS), the U.S. Coast Guard's International Port Security Program, with a permanent overseas presence in the Netherlands, Japan, and Singapore, conducts port security assessments and capacity building under the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code) in over 150 coastal states. This program reduces risk to U.S. maritime interests, including U.S. ports and ships, and facilitates secure maritime trade across the globe.

Competition Below the Level of Armed Conflict: In addition to building and reinforcing partnerships, the U.S. Coast Guard provides specialized operational capabilities in support of national security objectives. The U.S. Coast Guard is uniquely qualified to operate in ambiguous environments requiring a flexible blend of diplomatic, military, economic, and law enforcement tools. By setting and enforcing standards of behavior in the maritime domain, the U.S. Coast Guard upholds a rules-based order in the face of geostrategic competition and leads like-minded nations to counter malign actors below the level of armed conflict. Examples include shaping international norms as a U.S. representative at bodies such as the Arctic Council or the International Maritime Organization (IMO), supporting Combatant Commanders through Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) missions, and United Nation's member states through sanctions enforcement in the South China Sea. The U.S. Coast Guard offers white hulls for gray geopolitical times.

Armed Conflict: The U.S. Coast Guard has served in a combat role during every major armed conflict involving the United States since 1790. The Service remains committed to interoperability with our DoD partners and is ready to fulfill its *complementary* role in the event of armed conflict or contingency operations as an active member of the Joint Force. Whether we are supporting military mobility through our management of the marine transportation system or operating jointly with other services, the U.S. Coast Guard remains *Semper Paratus* (Always Ready) when the Nation calls.

Support to DoD Geographic Combatant Commanders

As one of the five Armed Forces, and the only service with both Title 10 and Title 14 authorities, the U.S. Coast Guard serves as a force multiplier for the Joint Force and deploys world-wide to execute our statutory defense operation missions in support of national security and defense priorities. Our enduring role is not, and never has been, to replace or duplicate DoD assets or capabilities, but rather to apply our unique authorities and capabilities to bridge gaps and create opportunities, enabling the Service to augment DoD's "tool kit" in ways no other Armed Force can. While the DoD is rightly focused on hard power lethality, the U.S. Coast Guard provides the full spectrum of smart power multi-mission flexibility, including trusted access, with both kinetic and non-kinetic options to advance U.S. interests, preserve U.S. security and prosperity, and address wide-ranging threats and challenges.

Around the world, on any given day, more than 2,000 U.S. Coast Guard members are deployed in direct support of Geographic Combatant Commander priorities. In the Middle East, the U.S. Coast Guard has over 240 personnel assigned in Manama, Bahrain, including six patrol boats, a maritime engagement team, and an advanced interdiction team which support U.S. Central Command's maritime security, theater security cooperation (TSC), and counter-piracy initiatives. Likewise, the U.S. Coast Guard regularly supports U.S. Africa Command's African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership program with cutter deployments and deployable specialized forces to stem maritime security threats that destabilize the region and our partners. The Coast Guard supports TSC in Africa through the provision of a maritime advisor to the Liberian Coast Guard. Coast Guard security cooperation with littoral-focused navies fill a crucial skills and capability gap that our partners need in order to better control their maritime zones, counter illegal trafficking, and to counter power projection by global adversaries that is often justified by the lack of safe shipping lanes for commercial use.

In the Indo-Pacific theater, U.S. Coast Guard capabilities and authorities are leveraged to advance important strategic National Security objectives. National Security Cutter deployments in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) enforce United Nations sanctions enforcement while building partner nations' security capabilities. The U.S. Coast Guard also supports INDOPACOM through cutter deployments and professional engagements in Oceania, and by deploying the nation's only heavy icebreaker in support of both Joint Task Force-Support Forces Antarctica and in ensuring Antarctica Treaty compliance.

Closer to home, the U.S. Coast Guard is a key federal agency and force provider performing counter-maritime illicit trafficking operations as well as Detection and Monitoring in the Western Hemisphere Transit Zone; providing more than 4,000 hours of Maritime Patrol Aircraft and over 2,000 major cutter days to U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) annually. Coast Guard law enforcement teams are also deployed aboard DoD, and Allied, assets to bring specialized law enforcement authorities that other military services lack. Spanning a maritime operating area roughly the size of the continental United States, the Coast Guard deploys aircraft, cutters, intelligence teams, and specialized law enforcement personnel to defend maritime approaches to the Homeland.

Interdicting illicit cargoes at sea creates space and opportunity for our Central American partners to thwart the rampant violence and corruption that illegal drugs induce in fragile democracies, and bolster the rule of law within their own countries. With the Service's unique authorities and capabilities, the U.S. Coast Guard continues to yield large-scale successes in its counter-drug mission in USSOUTHCOM's area of responsibility. Over the past four years, the U.S. Coast Guard removed more than 1.8 million pounds of pure cocaine from the transit zone, resulting in 24 billion dollars in drug proceeds denied to Transnational Criminal Organizations. Exercising expeditionary maritime law enforcement capabilities, Port Security Unit detachments provide USSOUTHCOM 24 hour/7 day a week anti-terrorism and force protection presence in the Naval Defensive Sea Area of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The U.S. Coast Guard supports the Defense Security Cooperation Agency via mobile training teams, developing partner nation capacity all over the world, including Georgia, Honduras, Jordan, and Tunisia. The service also supports Foreign Military Sales and Foreign Military Financing; fundamental tools of U.S. foreign policy that advance national security priorities. The Coast Guard fills several critical Senior Defense Official positions in U.S. embassies in the Western Hemisphere, and Coast Guard attaché billets in other embassies globally.

While not internationally based, the U.S. Coast Guard also provides domestic operational support to DoD, specifically with our 15 years of aircraft and air intercept crew support for low/ slow air threats to the National Capital Region as part of Operation NOBLE EAGLE, as well as deployable Rotary Wing Air Intercept capabilities in support of U.S. Northern Command. The U.S. Coast Guard also provides Maritime Force Protection Units (MFPU) to defense bases in Bangor, WA, and Kings Bay, GA, where Coast Guard units protect strategic DoD assets on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

At U.S. Cyber Command, U.S. Coast Guard personnel serve in critical technical and intelligence capacities to defeat our adversaries in cyberspace. The U.S. Coast Guard recognizes the cyberspace operating environment as key terrain that can impact and drive mission and economic success in all domains. Partnering with other like-minded nations, the U.S. Coast Guard is building information sharing relationships between major ports to provide resiliency for the free flow of commerce during cyberattacks that may attempt to corrupt or slow U.S. supply lines. The Service is building our cyber workforce to assist in protecting America's maritime commerce and economy. Our first Cyber Protection Team is building capacity while integrating with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency to deploy and protect critical infrastructure and U.S. economic stability.

Global Power Competition in Arctic and Indo-Pacific

Arctic

The United States is an Arctic nation with extensive sovereign rights and responsibilities, and our national security interests in the Arctic are significant, in part due to the reemergence of global power competition in the region. Actions and intentions of Arctic and non-Arctic states shape the security environment and geopolitical stability of the region. In particular, our two near-peer competitors, Russia and China, are demonstrably intent on exploiting the maritime domain to advance their interests.

From a military perspective, Russia's long Arctic coastline, in a future stripped of sea ice, will be open to support naval fleets readily deployable between the Atlantic and Pacific. The Russian government is currently rebuilding and expanding military bases that had previously fallen into disuse. These renewed capabilities include air bases, ports, weapons systems, troop deployments, domain awareness tools, and search-and-rescue response. Additionally, Russia has the world's largest number of icebreakers. With over 50 icebreakers that include four operational, nuclear-powered heavy icebreakers, and plans to build an additional seven nuclear powered icebreakers, Russia maintains the capabilities, capacities, experienced crews, and infrastructure necessary to operate and surge into the Arctic year-round.

Likewise, with the release of their Arctic Policy paper in January 2018, the People's Republic of China (PRC) declared itself a nation intrinsically tied to the Arctic, and signaled its intent to play a security and governance role in the region. In 2019, the PRC launched its first domestically-built icebreaker and has begun designing an even more powerful and potentially nuclear-powered polar icebreaker expected to have twice the icebreaking capability of its newest vessel. With three icebreakers, the PRC will have greater Arctic access and capacity than the United States. PRC activities, and the manner in which they seek support for their Arctic ambitions may potentially disrupt the longstanding cooperation and stability in the region. Around the globe, the PRC uses coercion, influence-operations, debt-trap diplomacy, and implied military threats to persuade other states to acquiesce to its global agenda. The PRC incorporated the Arctic as a component of its One Belt, One Road initiative, recently dubbed the Polar Silk Road and continues to emphasize its self-proclaimed status as a "near Arctic state". The PRC's ambitions and outreach are fraught with risk, often times diminishing the sovereignty of states and fracturing the rules-based governance in the region.

The ability for the United States to lead in the Arctic, both strategically and operationally, hinges on having the capabilities and capacity (presence) to protect our sovereign rights, and homeland security interests. The foundation of the U.S. Coast Guard's operational presence and influence is U.S. icebreakers, whose purpose is to provide assured, year-round access to the Polar Regions for the execution of national security missions within existing Coast Guard authorities.

The U.S. Coast Guard's icebreaker capacity lies in one heavy-class polar icebreaker, USCGC POLAR STAR – commissioned in 1976, and one medium-class icebreaker, USCGC HEALY – commissioned in 2000. However, due to the strong support of the Administration and Congress, in April of 2019, the joint U.S. Coast Guard and Navy Integrated Program Office (IPO) awarded VT Halter Marine Inc., of Pascagoula, Mississippi, a fixed price incentive (firm) contract for the detail design and construction of one Polar Security Cutter (PSC). We are as close as we have ever been in over 40 years to recapitalizing our icebreaking fleet, and continued investment to grow the fleet will ensure we meet our Nation's national security objectives in the Polar Regions.

Indo-Pacific

The U.S. Coast Guard has a specific and irreplaceable national security role to advance the rules-based maritime governance of the Indo-Pacific region. The maritime domain is the lifeblood of the Indo-Pacific, and the U.S. has direct sovereign interests in the region, including the Territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa; this includes the 1.3 million square miles, or 43 percent, of the U.S. EEZ located in the Western and Central Pacific. Expanding commitments to meet security and defense needs of the sovereign states of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands under the Compacts of Free Association further cement the need for U.S. Coast Guard engagement in the region.

The concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific is challenged by China's coercive and antagonistic activities across the region, while the Pacific Island Countries and Territories specifically face inter-related threats of debt-trapping, economic and societal impacts of IUU fishing, and transnational crime and corruption.

As part of a whole of government approach to addressing challenges in Oceania and the broader Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. Coast Guard offers transparent, persistent engagement and partnership at both professional and personal levels that challenge the PRC's approach in the region. The U.S. Coast Guard is expanding our engagement in the Indo-Pacific by establishing additional permanent presence through diplomatic missions (e.g. Australia, Malaysia) to strengthen regional engagement, working to build the capacity of the Philippines and Vietnamese Coast Guards, and executing new operational concepts, either organically, or in conjunction with the DoD, by providing specialized capabilities and expanding information sharing efforts with our partners.

Beyond regular multi-mission patrols across the Indo-Pacific by our National Security Cutters, the U.S. Coast Guard is demonstrating our enduring commitment to the region by homeporting three of our newest Fast Response Cutters (FRC) in Guam over the next three years. Recently, FRCs and a U.S. Coast Guard buoy tender conducted ports visits to the Pacific Islands and discussed partner nation capacity building opportunities in an effort to strengthen operational partnerships. We anticipate these cutters will significantly increase U.S. Coast Guard operational presence throughout the region, and protect our EEZ from threats of IUU fishing and transnational crime.

Conclusion

Through international engagement, partnership, and presence, the U.S. Coast Guard's international role and multi-mission flexibility serves as an important bridge between diplomacy and DoD's lethality. The Service is well-positioned and comfortable operating in the gray zone (the competitive space below the level of armed conflict) which provides time and decision space along the competition continuum. The U.S. Coast Guard anticipates an increasingly dynamic future of global competition, where the Service will be asked to move between cooperation, competition, and even conflict at a moment's notice.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for all you do for the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard. I look forward to answering your questions.