



**TESTIMONY OF  
VICE ADMIRAL PETER GAUTIER  
COAST GUARD DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS**

**ON**

**“GUARDIANS OF THE SEA:  
NATIONAL SECURITY MISSIONS OF THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD”**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE COAST GUARD & MARITIME TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE**

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**Introduction**

Good morning, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is my pleasure to be here today to discuss the U.S. Coast Guard’s (Coast Guard) role in advancing national interests in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic.

The United States is both an Indo-Pacific and Arctic nation and the Coast Guard delivers services across all eleven of its statutory missions to American citizens throughout these regions. In both the Arctic and Indo-Pacific, the Coast Guard serves as a unique instrument of national security, with authorities, capabilities, and partnerships that allow seamless operations across the spectrum of national power. Through routine presence, meaningful engagements, and actions that strengthen maritime governance, the Service promotes a free, open, prosperous, and secure maritime domain during a time when these tenets are being challenged. While the Coast Guard has routinely operated in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic for over 150 years, a changing environment, the intensification of geostrategic competition, and dynamic trends in maritime trade and waterways usage are increasing the demand for Coast Guard leadership, presence, and services. The changing climate is already exerting adverse impacts in both the Indo-Pacific and Arctic regions and the Coast Guard plays a critical role of in protection of the lives of our citizens and our neighbors from the resulting hazards. In response to these demands and in alignment with national strategies and related plans, we continue on a path of growing investments in these regions, reflected most recently in the President’s fiscal year (FY) 2024 budget request.

I understand the significant level of investments required to advance Coast Guard efforts in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic, and I embrace the trust Congress and the American people have placed in the Coast Guard. The Service will continue to prioritize actions that safeguard U.S. sovereignty and interests, honor Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific and Arctic, deliver Coast Guard services within U.S. waters, and promote adherence to international rules and norms.

## **Indo-Pacific Operations and Partnerships**

The Coast Guard's strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific is to support a free, open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient region where the United States is a trusted partner for maritime safety, security, and prosperity. The Coast Guard works closely with the Department of Defense (DoD) and U.S. interagency partners to achieve this vision.

First and foremost, we provide Coast Guard services to Hawaii, the United States' territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, as well as supporting U.S. engagement with the Compact States (COFA). The 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy builds on this legacy of service by directing the Coast Guard to increase both its regional presence and the training and advisory services offered to partner nations. In response, the Service has increased targeted patrols with National Security Cutters (NSC) and Fast Response Cutters (FRC) in support of our regional partnerships. Working with the Department of State (DOS) and the DoD, we have increased engagements with international partners who seek to advance maritime governance within their own territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). Across Oceania, we actively leverage 12 bilateral law enforcement agreements with Pacific Island Countries to assist partners in enforcing their respective domestic sovereign rights, building strong maritime governance regimes, and forming a unified front against malign activity. A free and open Indo-Pacific is best achieved through building collective capacity and encouraging our partners to take on regional leadership roles.

The Coast Guard's law enforcement, regulatory, and humanitarian missions are attractive to nations in this region and the Coast Guard is regularly sought out to help solve issues of mutual interest. We promote professional service-to-service relationships and enhanced cooperation across a wide range of maritime, economic, and national security challenges. The Coast Guard works through Security Cooperation, Security Assistance, and capacity building programs with DoD and DOS to provide bilateral and multilateral training to partners. These efforts demonstrate commitment to the region and promote the United States as a trusted partner.

The Coast Guard employs a unique blend of diplomatic, military, economic, and law enforcement tools to provide integrated deterrence through routine presence, meaningful engagements, and the advancement of maritime governance. Working with DOS, we leverage efforts such as the Southeast Asian Maritime Law Enforcement Initiative (SEAMLEI) to help train and educate partner nations to build a multilateral coalition for enforcing standards of behavior in the maritime domain to preserve their sovereignty and strengthen international rules-based norms. The Coast Guard works with regional partners collectively through forums such as the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum and in bi- or multi- lateral engagements to develop strategies to address common problems. The Coast Guard uses its expeditionary capacity to provide tailored support to partners to enable them to protect their maritime sovereignty while also protecting U.S. sovereign rights in the U.S. EEZ.

To meet increasing challenges and demands in the Indo-Pacific, the Coast Guard has expanded capability in the Pacific by homeporting three new FRCs in Guam and three in Honolulu with the intent to continue to grow FRC capacity with Congressional support. These cutters have proven to be an ideal platform with expeditionary capability to sail to the far reaches of Oceania. They conducted five Oceania expeditionary patrols in FY 2023, embarking ship riders from eight nations and conducting 44 bi-lateral boardings and 74 shoreside engagements.

The Indo-Pacific FRCs also became the first Coast Guard cutters to operationalize the new bilateral agreement with Papua New Guinea (PNG) conducting four counter Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing boardings and shoreside engagements with the PNG Defense Force, Fisheries, and Customs authorities. Similar engagements were conducted with the Philippines and Palau, growing the capabilities of key regional partner states that enable them to govern their own waters.

The Service also relocated the *Harriet Lane*, a medium endurance cutter, to Hawaii this year. The first Famous-class cutter to be homeported in the Pacific, this ship will promote maritime governance, increase persistent U.S. presence in the region, and conduct engagements with partner nations.

The Coast Guard supports the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) with NSC deployments, adaptive force packages, and capacity building engagements. In FY 2023, Coast Guard NSCs participated in several multi-national initiatives. These deployments supported the U.S. 7th Fleet during U.S. Navy-led Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training, Rim of the Pacific, and Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training exercises, and transits through the Taiwan Strait. NSCs also supported the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), targeting IUU fishing in Oceania. Coast Guard deployable specialized forces also embarked on U.S. Navy vessels operating in the Western and Central Pacific in support of IUU fishing enforcement under the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative. The Service remains committed to interoperability with our DoD partners and is always ready to fulfill a complementary role during conflict or contingency operations as a part of the Joint Force.

The Coast Guard's FY 2024 Unfunded Priority List included \$400 million for four FRCs in the Indo-Pacific to advance the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. Additional FRCs in the Indo-Pacific would increase the Coast Guard's persistent and visible presence, strengthening coordination with partners and bolstering regional security.

### **Arctic Operations and Partnerships**

The Arctic is undergoing a dramatic transformation of its physical, operational, and geostrategic environment. Increasing impacts of climate change are opening up new access to Arctic waters. This drives greater activity in the Arctic region, and with it increased risk across the maritime sector. The 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR) establishes priorities within the Arctic, addressing the climate crisis with greater urgency, expanding scientific research, recognizing the need to advance U.S. leadership at home and abroad, and directing new capability investments. The Coast Guard contributed to developing both the National Security Strategy (NSS) and NSAR and continues to be at the forefront of Arctic strategic leadership.

In alignment with the NSAR, the Coast Guard published its Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan last month. The plan underscores the Coast Guard's commitment to promoting safety, sovereignty, and stewardship in the region, describing actions the Service will take over the next decade, including continuing our efforts to build Polar Security Cutters (PSCs) and related shoreside infrastructure, acquiring a commercially-available medium icebreaker, strengthening the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) and Arctic Council, increasing Arctic communications capabilities, and modernizing the U.S. Arctic Marine Transportation System (MTS).

The Coast Guard acts in concert with allies and partners throughout the region to support U.S. strategic objectives, and to assert international leadership to advance cooperation and uphold international law, rules, norms, and standards for Arctic coastal states and other non-Arctic flag states whose ships sail in Arctic waters. The Coast Guard consistently provides guidance and direction through preeminent multilateral forums such as the International Cooperative Engagement Program for Polar Research, Arctic Council, and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Since 2017, the Coast Guard has conducted exercises with partner Arctic states through the ACGF and the Arctic Council to enhance interoperability and provide a platform for direct dialogue among Arctic agencies fulfilling Coast Guard-like functions. The Coast Guard will continue to exhibit model governance grounded in international law, rules, norms, and standards in the U.S. Arctic and to encourage like-minded partners to do the same in their Arctic waters.

This year, Coast Guard Cutter *Healy* completed a voyage from the high Arctic above Asia and Europe to the U.S. east coast before returning to its homeport in Seattle, Washington. *Healy's* operations supported a blend of national priorities across the Arctic, including building international partnerships, reinforcing international norms, and supporting scientific activities in partnership with the National Science Foundation (NSF) along the edge of the Russian EEZ. *Healy* exercised U.S. presence in the Chukchi, East Siberian, and Laptev Seas, in accordance with international law, and experienced numerous professional encounters with Russian vessels and aircraft.

The Coast Guard is directly observing increased strategic competition in the U.S. Arctic. Through the operations of the Coast Guard Pacific Area Command and its Seventeenth District (D17), which is responsible for Coast Guard activities for an area of over 3,853,500 square miles including Alaska and the Arctic, the Coast Guard meets presence with presence, through Operation *Frontier Sentinel*. Over the past three years, the Coast Guard has provided operational presence and monitored Chinese military Surface Action Groups, as well as combined Russian-Chinese Task Groups, operating in the U.S. EEZ. In September, an NSC maintained presence to ensure the safety of U.S. fishing vessels during a lawfully conducted Russian military exercise in the U.S. EEZ. In these instances, the Coast Guard's visible forward presence ensured that Russia and China operated in accordance with international law.

Since 2009, the Coast Guard has influenced Arctic governance and sustainable development through Operation *Arctic Shield*. This Operation demonstrates the Coast Guard's operational capability, asserts leadership, and models responsible international governance in a region of key geostrategic importance. Operation *Arctic Shield* delivers a full suite of Coast Guard services to residents and waterway users across Alaska and the U.S. Arctic region.

This work strengthens the MTS, protects the environment, and supports the resilience of Alaska Native communities. This year, Coast Guard personnel conducted extensive marine safety-oriented regulatory activities in 91 villages, inspecting bulk oil facilities and commercial vessels, issuing commercial fishing safety decals, and providing training in areas such as boating safety and ice rescue. Coast Guard presence in the region is by far the largest of any Federal agency. The Coast Guard is also aware of serious challenges facing many communities in Western Alaska stemming from the declines of certain fisheries in the Bering Sea.

Through governing relationships such as the Task Force on the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area (NBSCRA), the Coast Guard is participating with a broad range of Federal departments and agencies in an effort to address these challenges, in partnership with Tribal representatives of affected communities. Safe shipping and noise reduction standards in respect of marine mammal migrations through the NBSCRA region remain Tribal priorities.

In the Atlantic segment of the Arctic, the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area Command actively participates in opportunities to reinforce the Service's role as a trusted, reliable partner in the region. In June, the Coast Guard participated in Exercise ARGUS 2023, the sixth exercise in a series of annual non-military exercises in the Arctic, which included ships and aircraft from Denmark, Greenland, France, and the Coast Guard. Also in June, the Coast Guard, the Danish Joint Arctic Command, the French Atlantic Command, and local Greenlandic authorities executed a Combined Joint Disaster Relief and Search and Rescue (SAR) exercise. The exercise spanned five days, and included force integration training, navigation exercises, towing exercises, damage control exercises, SAR searches, air drops, and hoist exercises. In August, Coast Guard participated in Operation NANOOK along with Denmark, France, and Canada, where those nations operated as a Combined Task Group to exercise capabilities and integration with multinational defense allies and exchange best practices during fleet integration training. Collectively, these exercises improved our capacity to respond to maritime threats and advanced the U.S. government's standing and influence with key Arctic partners.

U.S. operational presence and influence in the Arctic are founded on Coast Guard polar icebreakers. The Polar Security Cutter (PSC) is a top acquisition priority for the Coast Guard and the Navy. The PSC is the capability the Nation needs to ensure persistent presence and robust domain awareness in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The integrated Coast Guard-Navy Program Office continues to work actively with the prime contractor to deliver this critical capability.

The FY 2024 President's Budget also requests \$150 million to support the acquisition of a commercially available polar icebreaker, including initial modifications, crewing, and integrated logistics support required to reach initial operating capability. The purchase of a commercially available polar icebreaker will accelerate U.S. presence in the polar regions in the near-term and increase capacity in the long-term.

In addition to recapitalization of our icebreakers, investment in Arctic-capable Coast Guard surface and aviation assets, properly trained and equipped personnel, enhanced communication and domain awareness capabilities, and logistics resources are crucial to delivering Coast Guard services and advancing our security and sovereign interests in the Arctic. As outlined in the Coast Guard's 2019 Arctic Strategic Outlook, closing gaps in these areas requires a whole-of-government approach, such as our partnerships with scientific research agencies, coupled with consistent investment to seize opportunities and confront challenges in the Arctic.

## **Conclusion**

The physical, operational, and geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic continues to change, driving demand for Coast Guard presence, influence, and services. The Coast Guard has served and shaped national security in both regions for more than 150 years and will remain central to a U.S. whole-of-government approach to secure our national maritime interests and with partners to reinforce the rules-based international maritime order in the regions.

The continued support of Congress to increase Coast Guard Arctic and Indo-Pacific capacity and presence will fortify the Nation's strategic interests in both regions. Coast Guard leadership is vital in maintaining a coalition of like-minded partners to shape the maritime domain in each region as peaceful, stable, and cooperative. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for the enduring actions of this Subcommittee to support the members of the Coast Guard.