



**TESTIMONY OF
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ON**

“U. S. COAST GUARD INDO-PACIFIC OPERATIONS”

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
TRANSPORTATION & MARITIME SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE**

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Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Gimenez and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is my pleasure today to discuss the Coast Guard’s efforts to promote a free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific in support of the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. At all times a 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 Coast Guard operates on all seven continents and throughout the homeland, serving a Nation whose national security and economic prosperity are inextricably linked to the sea.

The United States has direct strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific comprising 1.3 million square miles, which is 28 percent of the 4.5 million square miles of ocean that is the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Coast Guard safeguards this EEZ, protects and defends more than 100,000 miles of U.S. coastline and inland waterways, and saves thousands of lives per year. The Coast Guard is working to answer an increased demand for Indo-Pacific engagement within available resources, balancing numerous dynamic maritime risks facing our Nation.

Around the globe, the 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. Partner nations often structure and model their actions after the U.S. Coast Guard to help address the universal challenges posed by transnational crime, human smuggling, maritime safety and security, environmental stewardship, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and provocations in their waters under their jurisdiction from fleets flying foreign flags.

The Coast Guard’s strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific is to build a more free, open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific with unrestricted, lawful access to the maritime domain for all nations, advancing the existing rules-based international order and solidifying the United States as a trusted partner for maritime safety, security, and prosperity in the region. To effectively achieve this vision, the Coast Guard works closely with U.S. interagency partners to provide capacity building and we also work to ensure our deployments are planned strategically.

The U.S. Coast Guard supports national strategic guidance with our operations, activities, and investments by synchronizing efforts across the interagency, and with allies and partners. We prioritize operations through three Lines of Effort (LOE): Prepare a Ready Force; Generate Combined Effects; and Uphold Governance. This vision, and all of the Coast Guard's actions in the region, directly align with the Administration's five objectives in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy:

1. Advance A Free and Open Indo-Pacific;
2. Build Connections Within and Beyond the Region;
3. Drive Regional Prosperity;
4. Bolster Indo-Pacific Security; and
5. Build Regional Resilience to Transnational Threats.

The Coast Guard has operated in the Indo-Pacific for more than 150 years, and the Service is increasing efforts through targeted patrols with our National Security and Fast Response Cutters in support of Coast Guard missions and to enhance our partnerships. With a modest regional Coast Guard footprint, the Service partners with the Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Defense (DoD) to engage partners. Across Oceania, we actively leverage our 12 bilateral law enforcement agreements with Pacific Island Countries to assist our partners in enforcing their respective domestic sovereign rights, building strong maritime governance regimes, and forming a unified front against malign activity.

Coast Guard Indo-Pacific Engagement

The Coast Guard maintains a permanent and expeditionary global footprint to execute its 11 statutory missions. U.S. Coast Guard operations with partners and allies protect national interests by expanding operations beyond the U.S. EEZ, enhancing partner nation capability, and disrupting and deterring threats further from our shores.

In the Indo-Pacific, Coast Guard operations focus on issues that directly confront local populations. This includes strengthening maritime governance and solving problems that protect people's livelihoods through protection of fish stocks, ensuring the safety of life at sea, preparing for climate induced natural disasters, marine environmental protection, and protecting routine transportation and commerce against mishap and malicious activity.

Operations At Sea: In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, multiple Coast Guard National Security Cutters participated in multi-national initiatives, including Operations BLUE PACIFIC and NORTH PACIFIC GUARD. The deployments supported the U.S. SEVENTH Fleet during U.S. Navy led Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training, Rim of the Pacific, and Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training exercises. National Security Cutters supported the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) targeting IUU fishing in Oceania. Finally, Coast Guard deployable specialized forces 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.

Defense Readiness: The Coast Guard has served in every major armed conflict involving the United States since 1790. Around the world, on any given day, Coast Guard members are deployed in direct support of geographic Combatant Commander priorities. In the Indo-Pacific theater, Coast Guard capabilities and authorities are leveraged to advance important strategic national security objectives.

National Security Cutter deployments support the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and provide opportunities to engage partner nations. The Coast Guard also supports USINDOPACOM with small adaptive force packages and professional engagements in Oceania. 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. Whether we are supporting military mobility through our management of the marine transportation system or operating jointly with other services and combatant commanders, the Coast Guard remains *Semper Paratus* (Always Ready) to protect and serve whenever our Nation calls.

Cooperation: The Coast Guard's network of more than 60 multi- and bi-lateral agreements and participation in international fora are unique among government agencies and military forces. The bilateral agreements authorize personnel with enforcement authority from the partner nation to embark Coast Guard cutters and conduct combined law enforcement operations inside the partner nation's EEZ.

Operations pursuant to these agreements, combined with activities within the U.S. EEZ surrounding American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Marianas, expand opportunities that bolster a rules-based order to address challenges ranging from fisheries enforcement and counter narcotics, and support joint contingency plans for disaster and pollution response. These partnerships are vital to America's ability to secure our EEZ and our success in the broader context of geostrategic competition.

The Coast Guard's law enforcement, regulatory, and humanitarian missions promote professional service-to-service relationships and enhanced cooperation on maritime, economic, and national security challenges. In this context, the Coast Guard works through the security cooperation, Security Assistance, and capacity building programs in DoD and DOS to provide bilateral and multilateral training to partners, including hosting resident training, deploying Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), and exchanging subject matter experts (SMEs). Since 2009, the Coast Guard has hosted more than 900 students from the Indo-Pacific region and conducted more than 200 MTT deployments and SME exchanges with 78 course offerings ranging from maritime law enforcement to international leadership and management.

The Coast Guard works with the Pacific Island Countries to assess their needs and develop strategies to improve their capabilities; for one nation this may mean advanced law enforcement training, and for another this may include disaster response training to build climate change resiliency. Beyond building capacity through a consistent training presence, these efforts demonstrate commitment to the region and promote the United States as a trusted partner. Additionally, these engagements enable long-term relationships as foreign military students continue interacting with Coast Guard personnel as they advance in their respective organizations.

Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Building and reinforcing partnerships, the Coast Guard provides specialized operational capabilities in support of national security objectives in the Indo-Pacific. The Coast Guard employs a unique blend of diplomatic, military, economic, and law enforcement tools. By setting and enforcing standards of behavior in the maritime domain, the Coast Guard represents rules-based order and provides options for like-minded nations to counter malign actors.

As part of a whole of government approach to addressing challenges in Oceania and the broader Indo-Pacific region, the Coast Guard offers transparent, persistent engagement and partnership at both professional and personal levels. The Coast Guard is expanding our engagement in the Indo-Pacific by establishing additional long-term presence as attaches, liaisons, and advisors to strengthen regional and partner engagement, working to build the capacity of the coast guards and maritime law enforcement agencies in the region in coordination with DoD and DOS, creating a multi- and mini-lateral friendly and encouraging environment. We are also working closely with like-minded partners to coordinate capacity building efforts and expand information sharing in the region.

Beyond regular multi-mission patrols across the Indo-Pacific by our National Security Cutters, the Coast Guard is demonstrating our enduring commitment to the region by homeporting three of our newest Fast Response Cutters (FRC) in Guam and is relocating a major cutter to the region in FY 2024 with the specific missions of promoting maritime governance, establishing persistent U.S. presence, and conducting meaningful engagements. These cutters increase Coast Guard operational presence throughout the vast Indo-Pacific region and help to protect our EEZ from threats of IUU fishing and transnational crime.

In the FY 2024 Unfunded Priority List, the Coast Guard also requested \$400 million for four FRCs to further the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States through expanded presence and engagement to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. Additional FRCs would begin to transform the Coast Guard from an organization which currently provides episodic presence, to be persistent and visible, strengthening coordination with Allied and partner nations to bolster regional security.

Conclusion

The Coast Guard has operated in the Indo-Pacific with our key partners for more than 150 years and is proud to be considered a trusted partner in maritime security, safety, and stewardship. Partnership with relevant U.S. government agencies and like-minded partners is critical to the Coast Guard's continued capacity building efforts and regional presence. Through international engagement, partnership, and presence, the Coast Guard can bridge gaps between the DOS diplomacy and DoD force. The Service is well-positioned to operate in this region, while continuing its other critical missions.

The Coast Guard recognizes this consequential new period of American foreign policy requires additional Coast Guard presence in the Indo-Pacific. U.S. interests in the region have become ever-clearer, just as they have become more difficult to protect. The Coast Guard has a valuable role to conduct persistent and effective operations to uphold rules-based maritime governance. The Coast Guard anticipates an increasingly dynamic future and stands ready to increase cooperation, promote order, and deter conflict.