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TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Garamendi, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to be here today to discuss the Coast Guard's role in the prevention of and response to the arrival of a radiological dispersion device (also called a "dirty bomb") in a U.S. port.

In my role as Assistant Commandant for Response Policy, I oversee the development of Coast Guard response doctrine and policy; this includes the response to incidents of terrorism in the maritime domain.

The U.S. maritime domain is vast and challenging in its scope and diversity and is not limited to the nation's shorelines. It encompasses the expanse of our ports and coastal waters, our Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, and our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Securing our maritime borders requires multi-faceted authorities, capabilities, competencies and partnerships. Because of its broad reach in the maritime domain, the Coast Guard plays a role in the whole of the government effort to mitigate the risks posed by the transportation of a dirty bomb to a U.S. port during all phases of the risk mitigation spectrum: from prevention and detection - to protection and response - to recovery.

Through a layered security approach, the Coast Guard pushes border security well beyond the Nation's shoreline and EEZ by fostering strategic relationships with partner nations to detect, deter, and counter threats as early and as far from U.S. shores as possible in order to prevent an attack on the homeland.

Prevention

The Coast Guard's effort to prevent dirty bombs from nearing U.S. ports and shores begins overseas, with robust international partnerships that provide access at maritime points of origin.

The Coast Guard conducts foreign port assessments and leverages the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code to assess effectiveness of security and antiterrorism measures in foreign ports. Through the International Port Security Program, the Coast Guard performs overseas port assessments to determine the effectiveness of security and antiterrorism measures exhibited by foreign trading partners.

Since the inception of the ISPS Program in 2004, Coast Guard personnel have visited more than 150 countries and approximately 1,200 port facilities. These countries generally receive biennial assessments to verify continued compliance with the ISPS Code. Vessels arriving in foreign ports that are not compliant with ISPS Code standards are required to take additional security precautions while in those ports. They may also be boarded by the Coast Guard before being allowed entry to U.S. ports, and in some cases are refused entry into the United States.

To more effectively counter maritime threats in the offshore region and throughout the Western Hemisphere, the Coast Guard maintains more than 40 maritime bilateral law enforcement agreements and arrangements with partner nations. The Coast Guard is also the U.S. Competent Authority for 11 bilateral Proliferation Security Initiative ship boarding agreements, which facilitate international cooperation to board vessels at sea suspected of carrying illicit shipments of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, or related materials by establishing procedures to board and search such vessels in international waters. These agreements and arrangements facilitate coordination of operations and the forward deployment of boats, cutters, aircraft, and personnel to deter and counter threats as close to their origin as possible.

To foster international cooperation and build partner capacity, Coast Guard personnel are posted at several embassies throughout the world and at all Department of Defense Combatant Commands. These individuals develop strategic relationships with partner nation maritime forces that facilitate real-time operations coordination and enduring maritime security cooperation.

The Coast Guard's membership within the intelligence community provides global situational awareness, analysis, and interagency collaboration opportunities with various counterterrorism components, including the Central Intelligence Agency, National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis, among others. The Coast Guard enjoys unique access through liaison positions, the Defense Attaché program, the Joint Duty Assignment program, and the Coast Guard Cryptological Group. This access provides insight into counterterrorism events where the Coast Guard is able to bring expertise and focus on maritime-related situations.

The Coast Guard's authorities through the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 (Pub. L. No. 107-295) (MTSA) provide a regime of security plan compliance and inspections for both maritime facilities and vessels; this reduces the Nation's vulnerability to terrorist attacks in or involving the ports. In U.S. ports, Coast Guard Captains of the Port (COTP) are designated as the Federal Maritime Security Coordinators (FMSC). In this role, COTPs lead the Nation's 43 Area Maritime Security Committees (AMSC) and oversee the development, regular review, and annual exercise of their respective Area Maritime Security Plans. AMSCs assist and advise the FMSC in the maintenance of a coordination and communication framework to identify risks and vulnerabilities in and around ports.

Additionally, AMSCs coordinate resources to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from Transportation Security Incidents. AMSCs have developed strong working partnerships between all levels of government and private industry stakeholders.

Detection

Building on prevention efforts, the Coast Guard brings both agility and mobility to the Nation's detection regime with its ability to deliver detection capability anywhere in the maritime domain.

The Coast Guard conducts over 400 routine inspections and general law enforcement boardings every day to ensure that vessels comply with international maritime law and safety standards, applicable U.S. law and regulations, and any control procedures required to access the Nation's ports. Coast Guard personnel that visit boats, vessels, or regulated facilities carry a basic detection device designed to alert the user to the presence of radiation.

In 2004, the Coast Guard developed and implemented a Coast Guard-wide Maritime Radiation Detection program and has since maintained a close relationship with the DHS Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) to standardize equipment and enhance the national capacity for detection with layered levels of organic capability. The Coast Guard actively participates in DNDO strategic joint radiation detection acquisition programs that seek to standardize or increase compatibility of radiation detection platforms among the key components, including the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). The Coast Guard also participates in inter-component training sponsored by DNDO. The result of joint acquisitions and training is successful, ongoing Coast Guard support to CBP seaport inspections as well as to TSA Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response Teams at major intermodal and passenger ports.

All operational Coast Guard units such as Sectors, Deployable Specialized Forces, Cutters, and Boat Stations possess a radiological detection capability that can identify specific isotopes, distinguish between man-made and natural sources, and can "reach back" to interagency experts for technical assistance. The Maritime Security Response Team (MSRT) provides the nation with maritime capability for nuclear and radiological detection, identification, personnel protection, and self-decontamination in either routine or hostile situations. MSRT capabilities are designed and implemented to integrate with other interagency or DOD response forces.

Complementing an array of personal and shipboard detection devices, the Coast Guard conducts vessel screening at the national and tactical levels. At the national level, through the Intelligence Coordination Center's Coastwatch Branch, which is co-located with CBP at the National Targeting Center, the Coast Guard screens ship, crew, and passenger information for all vessels required to submit a Notice of Arrival (NOA) prior to entering a U.S. port. In 2014, Coastwatch screened approximately 124,000 NOAs and 32.7 million crew and passenger records. Additionally, through partnership with CBP, the Coast Guard has expanded access to counter-terrorism, law enforcement, and immigration databases, which has led to greater information sharing and more effective security operations. At the tactical level, each of the Coast Guard's Area Commanders receives support from a Maritime Intelligence Fusion Center (MIFC), which screens commercial vessels operating in its area of responsibility for unique indicators.

The MIFCs focus on screening characteristics associated with the vessels itself, such as ownership, associations, cargo, and previous activity. Screening results are disseminated through Regional Coordinating Mechanisms (ReCoMs) to interagency partners to evaluate and take action on any potential risks.

Response

The Coast Guard's response to a dirty bomb discovery would be part of a coordinated interagency effort in order to bring the most appropriate national resources and capabilities to bear.

The response to a radiation detection alarm begins with determining the source and type of material, which is then correlated with the legitimate cargo listed in the ship's manifest and the NOA. In these instances, the Coast Guard collaborates closely with CBP Laboratory Scientific Services to identify the specific isotope present and to otherwise determine if a threat exists.

If a dirty bomb is suspected or identified within a port, interagency Maritime Operational Threat Response (MOTR) protocols would be employed to provide coordinated interagency actions to achieve a solution. In such a scenario, the Coast Guard COTP would apply existing broad security authority to direct vessel movements and control port access until the issue was resolved. The COTP could establish and enforce maritime safety or security zones within the port to protect people and infrastructure - or could issue orders directing any particular vessel to operate or anchor in a specified manner. Coast Guard vessels, stations, or other shore-based forces such as Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSSTs) or the MSRT would be deployed to enforce security zones, creating a visible deterrence and a potential disruption to attack planning.

The Coast Guard's MSRT is also equipped to directly respond to such maritime threats. In the case of a suspected dirty bomb, the MSRT can provide a tactical search capability to detect, identify, and classify such a device. The MSRT is capable of operating in a contaminated environment while engaging hostile threats in order to locate and secure a dirty bomb; it does not, however have the capability to disarm or "render safe" a device. The MSRT is a force multiplier for ambiguous or multiple threat scenarios in cases where DOD or FBI assets may also be responding.

Recovery

During the recovery phase of a dirty bomb detonation, the Coast Guard would be focused on the safe restoration of commerce, as quickly as possible.

Under the Nuclear/Radiological Incident Annex of the National Response Framework, the Coast Guard serves as the "coordinating agency" for incidents that occur in the coastal zone. The Coast Guard works with other agencies to determine how best to cooperatively respond consistent with the National Contingency Plan model.

Because of our unique maritime jurisdiction and capabilities, the Coast Guard can provide security, command and control, transportation and support to other agencies that need to operate in the maritime domain. The FBI is the lead federal agency for criminal investigations of all terrorist related incidents and must be contacted in any incident involving radiological materials.

The National Strike Force (NSF) includes the Strike Force Coordination Center and thePacific, Gulf and Atlantic Strike Teams. Each Strike Team has the capability to support the Federal On-Scene Coordinator in the event of a dirty bomb/radioactive material contamination to monitor and assess the situation. The NSF can operate in a radiological environment; conduct radiation surveys; monitor personnel exposure; conduct site, personnel, and equipment decontamination operations; and monitor and supervise contractors in a radiological environment.

A dirty bomb detonation in a port could lead to disruption or suspension of port activities. The scope would depend on the affected port(s) but could have significant national economic impacts. To enhance port recovery efforts in the event of an incident, a Coast Guard Maritime Transportation System Recovery Unit (MTSRU) may be established to prioritize backlogged shipping entering and leaving the port.

Conclusion

From our efforts to push out our maritime border and strengthen our international and domestic partnerships to our investments in cutter, boat and aircraft recapitalization, the Coast Guard continually adapts to evolving maritime border security threats while facilitating the safe flow of legitimate commerce. While a dirty bomb scenario would require a coordinated interagency effort, the Coast Guard's layered security strategy is well suited to address the broad range of offshore and coastal threats that could impact our national security and economic prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard. I would be pleased to answer your questions.