



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

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SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on “The International Role of the United States Coast Guard”

PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will hold a hearing entitled “The International Role of the United States Coast Guard” on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to examine the worldwide presence of the Coast Guard. The Subcommittee will hear testimony from the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard or Service) and experts on international relations.

BACKGROUND

On August 4, 1790, President George Washington signed the Tariff Act authorizing the Revenue Cutter Service and the construction of ten vessels, referred to as “cutters.” Those cutters were intended to enforce the federal tariff and trade laws and to prevent smuggling.¹ In 1915, the Revenue Cutter Service merged with the U.S. Life-Saving Service and was renamed the Coast Guard, making it the only maritime service dedicated to saving life at sea and enforcing the Nation’s maritime laws. In 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the transfer of the Lighthouse Service to the Coast Guard and officially assigned it the responsibility of maritime navigation. In 1946, the Commerce Department transferred the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, which oversaw merchant marine licensing and merchant vessel safety, to the Coast Guard. In 1967, the Coast Guard was transferred to the Department of Transportation (DOT) where it resided until 2003 when it was transferred to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Under Section 102 of Title 14, United States Code, the Coast Guard has primary responsibility to enforce or assist in the enforcement of all applicable federal laws on, under, and over the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States; to ensure safety of life and property at sea; to carry out domestic and international icebreaking activities; and, as one of the

¹ United States Coast Guard. [“The Coast Guard: America’s Oldest Maritime Defenders.”](#)

five armed forces of the United States, to maintain defense readiness to operate as a specialized service in the Navy upon the declaration of war or when the President directs.

The law enforcement and peacetime duties of the Coast Guard include the inspection of commercial vessels, the direction and maintenance of aids to navigation, the maintenance of an extensive network of search-and-rescue stations, international ice patrol, collecting data for the National Weather Service, the protection of marine life and the ocean environment, and the interdiction of illegal drugs and migrants.

As one of the Nation's five armed forces, the Coast Guard has assisted in the defense of our nation during times of war and has played a crucial international role in every major American military conflict. During the War of 1812, the Revenue Cutter Service executed the first capture of a British vessel. In World War I, while the Service protected domestic shipping and safeguarded the waterfront, six Coast Guard cutters escorted hundreds of naval vessels between Gibraltar and the British Isles as well as patrolled the Mediterranean Sea. During the Vietnam War, the Service sent 26 cutters and some 8,000 servicemembers that inspected vessels for contraband, destroyed enemy craft, set up and operated a long-range navigation system, and installed and maintained buoys.

The International Role of the Coast Guard

Today's Coast Guard actively supports military commitments on all seven continents. While previous foreign missions were typically related to specific wars or military engagements, the Coast Guard's international presence is primarily focused on non-military capacity building and strategic partnerships. Since the Service is involved in numerous missions that do not have a direct defense link, the Coast Guard is uniquely situated to advance American interests internationally. More than 2,000 servicemembers are deployed annually around the globe to support Department of Defense Combatant Commanders, to promote peace, fortify alliances, uphold customary maritime norms and the rule of law, and challenge threats far from U.S. soil. In addition, the Coast Guard has 11 cutters, two maritime patrol aircraft, five helicopters, two specialized boarding teams, and a Port Security Team supporting international defense operations daily.²

Arctic

The Arctic provides a prime example of the importance of an international Coast Guard presence, its operational limitations, as well as underscores the indelible role the Coast Guard fills in facilitating international cooperation and partnerships among Arctic states.

With the ongoing melting of sea ice and the opening of new sea passages in the Arctic, the Coast Guard recognized the strategic importance of the region by implementing Operation Arctic Shield in 2012. The goal of Arctic Shield is to perform Coast Guard missions and activities, broaden partnerships, and enhance and improve preparedness, prevention, and response capabilities. The Coast Guard's capabilities, though, pale in comparison to those of Russia. Specifically, Russia has 46 icebreaking vessels with 12 more under construction in comparison to the Coast Guard's two

² Admiral Karl L. Schultz. "[Testimony of Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard on "The Coast Guard's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request" Before the House Homeland Security Committee Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security.](#)" *House Committee on Homeland Security*. April 9, 2019.

operating icebreakers (one heavy and one medium) in the polar regions.³ While the Coast Guard has awarded the construction contract for the first three new Polar Security Cutters, at present it is forced to stretch its other assets and capabilities to secure a wide mission set at each pole with limited resources until delivery of the first ice breaker in 2024.⁴

Due to constraints on Coast Guard resources, international cooperation is integral to ensuring the United States retains a presence in the Arctic. Established in 1996, the Arctic Council is made up of eight Arctic nations (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States as well as 13 non-Arctic Nations with observer status.⁵ In 2009, the Arctic Council called upon the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to formulate and adopt the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, referred to as the Polar Code.⁶ The Polar Code went into effect on January 1, 2017, and enacts mandatory requirements intended to improve vessel safety and prevent pollution from vessels transiting in the Arctic, including standards for ship construction, navigation, crew training, and ship operation.⁷ As a key participant in the IMO, the Coast Guard will continue to help shape Arctic policy through implementation of the Polar Code.

Antarctica

While United States presence in the Arctic is important, the Coast Guard is also vital in maintaining United States presence in the Antarctic as well. This year marked the 23rd journey that the Coast Guard's heavy icebreaker, POLAR STAR, made to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze.⁸ Operation Deep Freeze is an annual joint military service mission to resupply the United States' Antarctic research stations. In accordance with the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, the Coast Guard, in coordination with the Department of State, National Science Foundation, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also conduct inspections of foreign research stations, installations, and equipment. The inspections serve to verify compliance with the Antarctic Treaty and its Environmental Protocol, including provisions prohibiting military measures and mining, as well as provisions promoting safe station operation and sound environmental practices. Inspections emphasize that all of Antarctica is accessible to interested countries despite territorial claims and reinforce the importance of compliance with the Antarctic Treaty's arms control provisions.⁹ The Coast Guard's presence in Antarctica also reinforces compliance with and enforcement of marine resource conservation and protection measures established under the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).¹⁰

³ Ronald O'Rourke. "Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter (Polar Icebreaker) Program: Background and Issues for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*. Updated March 1, 2019.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Arctic Council. "[The Arctic Council: A backgrounder.](#)"

⁶ International Maritime Organization. "[Polar Code.](#)"

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ United States Coast Guard. "[United States' only heavy icebreaker completes Antarctic Treaty inspections and resupply mission.](#)" *United States Coast Guard*. News Release.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. "[CAMLR Convention.](#)"

Asia

Originally established in 2002 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia (PATFORSWA) remains the Coast Guard's largest unit outside of the United States.¹¹ PATFORSWA is currently supporting Operation Enduring Freedom by providing a continued maritime humanitarian presence on the seas, assisting the Navy's Fifth Fleet with combat-ready assets, utilizing unique access to foreign territorial seas and ports, formulating strong and independent relationships throughout the Arabian Gulf, conducting vessel boardings, and developing maritime country engagements on shore. PATFORSWA is comprised of six 110-foot cutters, shore side support personnel, Advanced Interdiction Teams, Maritime Engagement Teams, and other deployable specialized forces operating throughout the U.S. Central Command Area of Operation.

In 2016, the United States initiated the Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) which includes Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Brunei, and Taiwan. The MSI aims to improve the ability of these countries to address a range of maritime challenges including China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. Specifically, the Coast Guard assists those nations by providing training for each host nation's coast guard, organizational development, human resource capacity building, technical skills, and educational and training partnerships. In the Philippines, the Coast Guard transferred the high-endurance cutter (HEC) BOUTWELL to the Philippine Navy in order to maintain a greater maritime presence and patrols throughout its Exclusive Economic Zone. More recently in May of 2019, the Coast Guard conducted a joint search-and-rescue exercise with the Philippine Coast Guard and then made a port call to Manila which was the first visit of its kind in seven years.¹² Of interest, the Coast Guard intends to decommission the last two High Endurance Cutters (HECs) in Fiscal Year 2021¹³ providing two additional hulls that could be transferred to partner states to improve the readiness and capabilities of their respective coast guards.

Through the Southeast Asia Maritime Law Enforcement Initiative, the Coast Guard has partnered with Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency to help train coast guards from the region.¹⁴ In June of 2019, the Coast Guard supported a Technical Experts Workshop which featured participants from Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.¹⁵ The purpose of the event was to share expertise in dealing with nontraditional transnational and regional maritime threats. At that particular event, the focus was on drugs and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) high seas fishing, but the annual workshop seeks to explore different issues aimed at strengthening the capacity of partner countries.¹⁶

¹¹ United States Coast Guard Atlantic Area. "[Patrol Forces Southwest Asia](#)."

¹² Prashanth Parameswaren. August 27, 2019. "[What's Behind the Rising U.S.-Southeast Asia Coast Guard Cooperation?](#)" *The Diplomat*.

¹³ Department of Homeland Security. "[U.S. Coast Guard Budget Overview Fiscal Year 2021 Congressional Justification](#)."

¹⁴ Ni Komang Erviani. June 30, 2019. "[Southwest Asian countries complete maritime law enforcement exercise](#)." *The Jakarta Post*.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

Africa

The African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP) program enables African partner nations to build maritime security capacity and improve management of their maritime environment through real world combined maritime law enforcement operations.¹⁷ Typically, a Coast Guard law enforcement boarding team will accompany the host nations while conducting at-sea vessel boardings. These boardings consist of identifying a target of interest, employing small boats with teams aboard, directing the suspect vessel to stop, and embarking on the vessel to investigate. AMLEP directly supports U.S. Africa Command's (AFRICOM) efforts to counter human, weapon, and drug trafficking, maritime pollution, piracy/kidnapping, and IUU fishing.

South America

Illegal drug trafficking continues to threaten the safety, security, and public health of U.S. citizens and destabilize foreign governments. The ability to intercept these drugs before they enter the U.S. enables agencies responsible for interdiction, like the Coast Guard, to leverage assets and seize drugs in bulk before they are broken into smaller packages inside the United States. In his May 1, 2019 testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Commander Admiral Craig Faller stated that last year Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South) was only able to disrupt about 6% of known drug movements.¹⁸ He also stated that “doing more would require additional ships and maritime patrol aircraft and greater participation by interagency and international partners...”¹⁹

Operation Martillo (Hammer) is the current JIATF-South counter-drug operation seeking to optimize those international partnerships. Operation Martillo brings together 14 countries to disrupt drug smuggling in the Transit Zone, including Belize, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Honduras, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.²⁰ Chile has also assisted Operation Martillo. Since its launch on January 15, 2012, Operation Martillo has supported the seizure of 693 metric tons of cocaine, \$25 million in bulk cash, detainment of 581 vessels and aircraft, and the arrest of 1,863 detainees.²¹

The Coast Guard will not be successful in their drug interdiction efforts without a robust ability to discover, analyze, and disseminate intelligence. This includes access to U.S. Maritime Domain Awareness data as well as strong relationships with partner nations.

Europe

As stated earlier, the Coast Guard strengthens international partnerships through the transfer of decommissioned and excess maritime assets. In October of 2019, the Service provided two

¹⁷ United States Africa Command. [“Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership \(AMLEP\) Program.”](#)

¹⁸ Admiral Craig S. Faller. [“Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller Commander, United States Southern Command Before the 116th Congress, House Armed Services Committee.”](#) *United States Southern Command*. May 1, 2019.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ U.S. Southern Command. [“Campaign Martillo.”](#)

²¹ *Id.*

former 110-foot Island-class patrol boats to Ukraine through the Excess Defense Articles Program of the Coast Guard's Office of International Acquisition.²² The transfer also allows for the outfitting and training of Ukraine navy crews at U.S. Coast Guard facilities. Those vessels were the seventh and eighth 110-foot patrol boats transferred to a foreign nation. Other patrol boats have been transferred to Pakistan, Georgia, and Costa Rica. While originally initiated shortly after the Russian annexation of Crimea, the delivery of the vessels came at a time of increased tensions between the two countries. In addition to the two HECs mentioned earlier, the Coast Guard intends to decommission two additional Island Class Patrol Boats and eight Marine Protector Class Coastal Patrol Boats providing additional opportunities for partner state capacity building.

As a member of the International Port Security Program, the Service seeks to reduce risk to U.S. maritime interests, including ports and ships, and to facilitate trade globally.²³ Through port inspections, the Coast Guard can ensure that foreign ports and vessels are taking the necessary steps to minimize maritime threats. With over 150 partnerships, International Port Security Liaison Officers can share information, offer recommendations, review improvements, and otherwise collaborate to advance mutual goals.

The Future of the Coast Guard

In order to safely and effectively execute its broad portfolio of missions, the Coast Guard must carefully balance and re-balance its resources. While the Coast Guard can and does play a valuable international role, it is not without a strain on resources across its domestic missions. There are a finite number of Coast Guard assets and personnel. In order to be most effective, the Coast Guard relies on cooperative relationships with the Department of Defense, partner nations, and transnational organizations.

In his 2020 State of the Coast Guard address and in reference to the Service's international operations, Admiral Schultz stated, "The aforementioned programs are funded by the Department of Defense, but many of our contributions are not, leaving the Coast Guard on an unsustainable path to support our growing operational requirements...The long-term solution is to recognize the Coast Guard's crucial role in maintaining our national security."²⁴

As the Department of Defense and the Department of State continue to seek the assistance of the Service to advance American interests abroad, it is important to ensure that those activities are funded appropriately and the effect on the remaining Coast Guard missions is considered.

²² Lt. Bobby Dixon. ["U.S. 6th Fleet Turns over Former Coast Guard Cutters to Ukrainian Navy."](#) *Washington Headquarters Services*. News Release.

²³ United States Coast Guard Atlantic Area. ["International Port Security Frequently Asked Questions."](#)

²⁴ Admiral Karl Schultz, Commandant. ["2020 State of the United States Coast Guard "Why I Serve"'"](#) February 20, 2020. Charleston, SC.

WITNESS LIST

Panel I

Vice Admiral Daniel B. Abel
Deputy Commandant for Operations
United States Coast Guard

Panel II

The Honorable David Balton
Senior Fellow, Polar Institute
The Wilson Center

Dr. Stephen E. Flynn
Founding Director, Global Resilience Institute
Northeastern University

Dr. Amy E. Searight
Senior Adviser and Director, Southeast Asia Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies