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U.S. Department of State

“Projecting Presence and Power in the Indo-Pacific: An Examination of the United  
States Coast Guard’s Contributions to Maritime Security”

September 28, 2023

House Homeland Security Committee, Transportation and Maritime Security  
Subcommittee

Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and Members of the  
Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify  
on Department of State efforts to advance U.S. maritime security interests in the  
Indo-Pacific. We deeply appreciate this committee’s leadership and support for  
policies that advance our maritime objectives.

As you are all aware, the Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges,  
particularly from the PRC. The PRC’s coercion and aggression spans the globe,  
but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific, including in the maritime domain. We have  
seen a clear and upward trend of PRC provocations, most notably in the South  
China Sea, to include an assertive expansion of unlawful maritime claims and  
interference with freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of  
the sea.

However, our approach to the region is about much more than just one  
country – it is a whole of society approach, driven by the Indo-Pacific Strategy  
(IPS), our shared, affirmative vision for a region that is free and open and ever

more connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient. We work in close coordination with our colleagues across the interagency, including with the Coast Guard and Department of Defense, to advance that vision.

The origin of the free and open Indo-Pacific as a concept is rooted in connecting two oceans and promoting a free and open maritime space. Protecting this critical maritime domain falls into three key lines of effort: 1) our diplomacy together with likeminded partners to promote respect for international law and the rules-based order, and the need for peaceful settlement of disputes; 2) maritime capacity building programs for the region's maritime law enforcement agencies and militaries; and 3) our own operations, including Freedom of Navigation Operations and routine presence operations, to demonstrate that all countries have the right to fly, sail, and operate anywhere that international law allows.

To advance the maritime security priorities of the IPS, the Department of State works closely with like-minded partners to keep the region open and accessible and ensure the region's seas and skies are governed and used according to international law. This close cooperation with allies and partners lies at the heart of our approach to the Indo-Pacific region because we recognize that no one country can meet the challenges alone. In particular, we build support for rules-based approaches to the maritime domain, including in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait. Prominent examples of this approach

include our work through existing regional multilateral architecture, such as ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, as well as newer, more flexible arrangements such as the Quad, AUKUS, Partners in the Blue Pacific, trilateral cooperation with the Republic of Korea and Japan, and the U.S.-EU Indo-Pacific Consultations.

The Quad works to ensure the Indo-Pacific remains free and open. Through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), the Quad is committed to supporting regional partners' efforts to improve their maritime domain awareness. This year, the Department of State also hosted the first-ever Quad Maritime Conference in Washington, D.C.

Our enhanced trilateral security partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom—AUKUS—supports Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines at the earliest possible date. AUKUS also enhances our joint capabilities and interoperability through a concrete program of work on advanced capabilities, including cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea capabilities.

Launched by the United States and likeminded partners in June 2022, Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) is rooted in our shared determination to support a prosperous, secure, resilient, free, and open region that benefits people in the Pacific. We advance a range of maritime initiatives under the PBP framework,

which is forging ever-closer partnerships with Pacific Island nations through activities such as the PBP workshop on illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and maritime domain awareness that we hosted in Hawaii in January.

At the Camp David Summit last month, U.S., ROK, and Japan leaders also agreed to establish a trilateral maritime mechanism to synchronize partner capacity building in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Additional actions that advance U.S. maritime security interests include the first ever joint U.S.-EU naval exercise, conducted this year through the U.S.-EU Indo-Pacific consultations; progress opening embassies in the Pacific that will strengthen our presence and partnerships; and public diplomacy programs to advance maritime security goals. In partnership with DOD, we launched a public engagement program in the Philippines to provide cameras to fisher folk to record IUU fishing. We also offered legal exchange programs and consultations around the region related to maritime law, where attorneys at the Department of State explain their publication “Limits in the Seas #150” and advise officials from the region how to counter the PRC’s baseless claims in the South China Sea through appropriate legal fora. The Department of State also sponsored a maritime boundary workshop for ASEAN nations to enhance their legal capabilities and solve their disputes peacefully.

Capacity building is central to our maritime security efforts in the Indo-Pacific, both as a development tool and a way to build and maintain relationships, and we appreciate our strong collaboration with Congress on this priority. We maintain robust security assistance intended to build maritime capacity and maritime domain awareness, and we see the need to expand this effort. Through our Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the Department of State funds nearly \$20 million of Coast Guard capacity building efforts to strengthen maritime governance while protecting the security of the American people. Similar programs extend to combating cyber threats in the maritime domain to help partner countries defend against cyberattacks on critical maritime infrastructure, such as ports and navigation systems. The Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Security Assistance Office provided \$286 million in FY22 security assistance to the Indo-Pacific region. Security assistance efforts in the region include building partner nation maritime security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and military professionalization. This security assistance develops and enhances partner nation capabilities and advances a range of U.S. interests.

Additionally, the Department of State and Coast Guard continue to pursue new bilateral maritime law enforcement agreements which cover a spectrum of illicit transnational maritime activities, including IUU fishing, drug and migrant

smuggling, and illicit transport of weapons of mass destruction. These agreements enable the U.S. government to engage with and support partners who are still building or expanding their capacity for maritime domain awareness or at-sea enforcement, and provides them the tools to do so. The most recent agreement with Papua New Guinea entered into force in August and was successfully utilized earlier this month during an historic joint operation with Papua New Guinea Defense Force shipriders and the Coast Guard Cutter *Myrtle Hazard*.

Collaboration across the U.S. government to advance maritime security in the Indo-Pacific enables us to demonstrate physical presence and commitment to meeting the needs of the region. This is powerful evidence that directly disproves the false narrative – propounded by the PRC and others – that the United States is retreating from the region. Our presence and responsiveness to needs identified by countries in the region is particularly relevant in the Pacific Islands, where many of the countries lack sufficient law enforcement capabilities and do not have standing militaries. In such locations, our Coast Guard partners are indispensable, building trust and providing resources and training in a manner that cannot be replicated by any other U.S. agency.

These examples, though not exhaustive, highlight our approach – in collaboration with the Coast Guard, DOD, others in the interagency, and counterparts throughout the region – to leverage our expertise, resources, and

networks to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific region, promote U.S. maritime security interests, and deter PRC efforts to undermine the regional order for its own gain.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering your questions and those of other members of the subcommittee.



**TESTIMONY OF  
VICE ADMIRAL ANDREW J. TIONGSON  
COMMANDER, COAST GUARD PACIFIC AREA  
ON**

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

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

**SEPTEMBER 28, 2023**

**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.

**Statement of  
Brigadier General Neil R. Richardson, U.S. Air  
Force**

**Deputy Director, Strategic Planning and Policy  
Directorate, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command**

**Projecting Presence and Power in the Indo-Pacific: An  
Examination of The United States Coast Guard's  
Contributions to Maritime Security**

**28 September 2023**

Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the U.S. Coast Guard's critical role in support of the INDOPACOM mission. On behalf of Admiral Aquilino, I would like to thank you for your continuous support to the men and women of INDOPACOM and their families. Your support is instrumental to our ability to accomplish our missions every day.

The Indo-Pacific is the most consequential region of the world, encompassing more than half the world's population, the busiest maritime trade routes, and key allies and partners. It is also the epicenter for great power competition with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Ensuring stability and security in the Indo-Pacific is not only vital for maintaining regional peace but also for global commerce and safeguarding American interests. The U.S. Coast Guard and INDOPACOM work together every day to prevent conflict in this region.

INDOPACOM is dedicated to preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific, where nations can thrive economically and maintain their sovereignty without external coercion. Foundational to our approach is a campaign of integrated deterrence, in which we use our military tools in concert with all instruments of national power to convince potential aggressors that they cannot achieve their objectives through force. U.S. forces must be postured and operating in the right places, with the right capabilities, at the right times, and executing the right missions alongside like-minded allies and partners to deliver integrated deterrence, and, if deterrence fails, prevail in conflict.

The Indo-Pacific region has many nations with a military that performs Coast Guard duties or law enforcement agencies in place of militaries. The U.S. Coast Guard's dual role as both a law enforcement agency and a military service makes it an ideal tool for capacity building and outreach to these nations. The Coast Guard's collaboration with these allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific fosters regional cooperation and strengthens the U.S. network of like-minded nations.

The U.S. Coast Guard's versatility, as well as unique capabilities and authorities, make it well-suited to address a wide range of challenges in the region, many of which are high priorities to our allies and partners – including maritime security, law enforcement, and environmental protection – in support of the INDOPACOM mission. Simply put, the Coast Guard is frequently

the right force, in the right place, at the right time, with the right capabilities. I have seen firsthand the utility of the Coast Guard during a recent visit to Oceania where our partners expressed an insatiable appetite for increased presence, activities, and training with the U.S. Coast Guard.

As you know, presence matters and the Coast Guard's presence in the Indo-Pacific sends a strong message that the United States is committed to upholding the rules-based international order. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated or IUU fishing is a major threat to marine resources and the economies of many of our partners in the Indo-Pacific. The Coast Guard works closely with our allies and partners to combat IUU fishing through surveillance, enforcement, and building partner capacity. This allows the Coast Guard to help enforce and maintain international law and support partner nation sovereignty. This is especially critical in the Indo-Pacific, where many distant water fishing fleets are common and the Pacific Island Countries often lack the capacity to detect and interdict these vessels on their own.

Similarly, bilateral law enforcement agreements allow for the exchange of ship riders between the United States and partner nations, permitting partner law enforcement personnel to embark on Coast Guard vessels and aircraft to enforce their laws, and vice versa. These agreements allow the Coast Guard to work more effectively with partners in the region to enforce applicable national laws, combat illegal activity on the high seas and in waters under the jurisdiction of our partners, and build maritime law enforcement capacity in those partner nations.

Additionally, the Coast Guard's capabilities and responsibility for environmental protection and disaster response aligns with ally and partner priorities. Many allies and partners in the region consider climate change to be the single greatest threat to their livelihoods, security, and well-being. By enforcing environmental regulations and responding to pollution incidents and natural disasters, the Coast Guard helps to preserve the delicate marine ecosystems of many Indo-Pacific nations and contributes to the sustainable development of the region, which is essential for long-term stability.

A whole of government strategy is essential to succeed in our Indo-Pacific Strategy, and in our competition with the PRC. The Coast Guard's contributions to the INDOPACOM are an integral part of this effort. Its versatility, cooperative relationship with allies and partners, and

ability to promote maritime security and the rules-based order make it an invaluable asset in the region. Indo-Pacific Command supports strong and robust funding and resourcing for the Coast Guard to ensure it can continue, and where possible grow, its valuable contributions to peace and security throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Finally, as we navigate the complex challenges of the Indo-Pacific, let us not forget the steadfast service of the Coast Guard personnel who work to ensure that the seas remain safe, secure, and open for all. Their dedication is a testament to the United States' enduring commitment to a prosperous and peaceful Indo-Pacific for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.