



Coast Guardsmen assigned to Tactical Law Enforcement Team 109, Cape Cod Maritime Safety Security Team, and Sailors assigned to USS *Sioux City*, participate in noncompliant vessel pursuit tactics exercise in rigid-hull inflatable boat, Atlantic Ocean, April 1, 2021 (U.S. Navy/Marianne Guemo)

Security Cooperation for Coastal Forces Needs U.S. Coast Guard Leadership

By Daniel E. Ward

The third decade of the 21st century has opened with an array of potential maritime threats laid out against the United States and its allies, including near-peer-level competition with China and Russia and regional hotspots in almost every

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navigable waterway of the world. U.S. maritime forces must effectively and efficiently utilize the tools at hand and place the best assets in areas that they are best suited for. This confluence of events provides the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) a unique opportunity to define a specific role within the defense mission set and to fill a critical niche that is currently devoid of leadership. The USCG is the best asset to take point as the U.S. maritime leader for coastal force security cooperation.

The USCG has unique capabilities and skills that do not exist anywhere else in the U.S. military system, given its nature as a constabulary-style force that blends military, law enforcement, compliance, inspection, and safety missions into one Service. This force is uniquely capable of interacting with similar organizations operated by other nations, many of which are forces that have virtually no compatibility with blue-water assets but instead operate multi-mission coastal patrol forces with many

similarities to the USCG. However, the USCG's skills and opportunities are not being fully exploited.

The two issues that must be addressed are a foundational acceptance of the Coast Guard into the operational fold of the total naval force with its Department of Defense (DOD) brethren and strong USCG leadership to direct and organize its forces into a construct that can meet this mission head on. Pulse operations, cutter visits, and short-term (that is, 1 to 2 weeks) mobile training are not sufficient. Successful security cooperation requires a dedicated presence over an extended time frame. Although such a presence does exist in select areas, it is generally at a more strategic versus operational or tactical level. The USCG must reestablish capacity for long-term deployments for international engagement and training and be willing to maintain a steady state where needed, through the rotation of teams to designated nations requiring a sustained advisory presence.

Current strategic policy—including *Advantage at Sea*, the new tri-Service maritime strategy, and the *Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018–2022*—and doctrine—in the form of Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, and JP 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations*—are replete with the fact that the U.S. naval force—considered here as the aggregate of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard—must engage with international partners to promote security and stability, providing a bulwark against regional conflict and serving as a pillar of strength in competition with near peers. Explicit to the tri-Service strategy is using each Service's unique capabilities where and when they are most advantageous for the entire naval force. *Advantage at Sea* unequivocally states that the “Coast Guard's mission profile makes it the preferred maritime security partner for many nations vulnerable to coercion” and that integrating its unique authorities “expands the options we provide to joint force commanders for cooperation and competition.”¹ The USCG should serve as the naval force leader for security cooperation with coastal patrol

forces globally. To achieve this aim, the USCG must be willing to dedicate resources to long-term international engagement. The current construct focuses on short-term mobile training teams as well as exchanges during cutter patrols and visits to partner nations. Aside from a few Embassy-level positions, the USCG does not currently deploy teams or personnel to spend lengthy periods embedded with host-nation forces for dedicated cooperation and support. Establishing a cadre to work alongside foreign partners for longer durations would provide long-lasting dividends; embedded advisory personnel could better assist and train local forces. To meet this objective, the USCG should adapt existing assets such as Deployable Specialized Forces (DSF) and the International Mobile Training Branch (MTB) into a more cohesive structure that can utilize existing resources to conduct long-term deployments and embed personnel with partner-nation forces. This structure would provide enhanced cooperation that could benefit both the host nation and the United States.

Policy for a Joint Naval Service

Many U.S. maritime missions involve a critical need to control littorals and maritime borders. Such control in turn provides exponential returns on the security conditions in each region, even without extensive blue-water deployments. The key element to such engagement is prolonged relationships, which create long-term stability and partnerships. The United States needs to increase its hands-on approach to engagement with coastal forces to leverage partner nations in service of security and stability. While command- and Embassy-level coordination is important, personnel must work alongside their host-nation counterparts at operational and tactical levels to build trust and true cohesiveness. The Coast Guard itself has acknowledged this need within the past decade, noting that, among other things, “more in-country presence and more long-term mentorship are a formula for more impact and greater regional cooperation.”²

No DOD construct that can fit this requirement currently exists. The one with the closest mission, the Navy's Maritime Civil Affairs and Security Training (MCAST) Command, was decommissioned in 2014. Its general purpose was to provide deployable teams to conduct maritime civil affairs and security force assistance operations. Interestingly, even during its existence, the MCAST mission to work with coastal forces almost exclusively fell into parameters that could best be defined as USCG skill sets, including areas such as maritime security, port operations, small boat maintenance, and marine resource regulation. This demonstrates the reason MCAST, or another similar unit under Navy or Marine Corps leadership, would not be best positioned for success in security cooperation with coastal forces.

If the naval force is to conduct cooperative missions with other nations' coastal forces, which are focused largely on the Coast Guard's areas of expertise, then the USCG should, logically, be placed in charge. Such tasking would place the USCG as the lead element for maritime security cooperation with coastal forces of partner nations, including aspects such as security force assistance and civil-military affairs. As noted in analysis of the new tri-Service strategy, “Total naval services cultural integration . . . would greatly benefit not just the nation, but the Coast Guard particularly, which sometimes finds itself on the outside looking in with respect to major DOD muscle movements.”³ This construct would leverage the best-suited components and capabilities of the naval force for this need.

Enhancing international tasking with the USCG is critical, and integration into the DOD framework with Navy and Marine Corps policy and doctrine must reflect this importance. As outlined in the 2021 Government Accountability Office report *Coast Guard: Information on Defense Readiness Mission Deployments, Expenses, and Funding*, there are limited resources dedicated to USCG defense readiness missions, such as joint military training, domestic support to DOD, and provisions to assist with multiple



Lieutenant (junior grade) Jacob Behne, assistant operations officer on USCGC *Midgett*, talks about Coast Guard missions with Lieutenant Joshua Mavin and Warrant Officer Jason McGraw, members of Australian Navy, during visit to *Midgett* in Honolulu, Hawaii, July 9, 2022 (U.S. Coast Guard/Taylor Bacon)

regional conflicts. However, the report also outlines how essential USCG roles with DOD often fall under the Global Force Management process, in which the USCG supports geographic combatant commands through its statutory missions. Examples include working with partner nations in the Pacific to combat illegal fishing, working with African nations to battle illicit maritime activity, and conducting robust drug-interdiction patrols.⁴ Although enhanced international engagement would incur costs and funding is not expected to increase, through the use of existing forces and missions that are already funded, the naval force as a whole could efficiently refocus assets toward deployments that derive the greatest benefit versus asking to fund a new enterprise. The alignment of international engagement with both national and departmental priorities objectively means

that the USCG must “orient time and resources toward international activities that maximize return on investment to national and Coast Guard priorities” and “[f]oster international capacity-building efforts.”⁵ The answer lies in existing doctrine, which already acknowledges the need for USCG involvement.

JP 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, and JP 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations*, all delineate recognition for the Coast Guard as the leader for engagement with coastal forces. The next step is to put this designation into practice. JP 3-20 notes:

Security cooperation . . . encompasses all . . . DOD interactions, programs, and activities with foreign security forces . . . and their institutions to build relationships that help promote U.S. interests . . . and/or to build and apply [partner nations’]

*capacity and capabilities consistent with U.S. defense objectives.*⁶

This enormous undertaking can involve tasking such as foreign internal defense, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, counter-drug operations, stability activities, foreign humanitarian assistance, civil-military operations, and countering threat networks. These areas all are defined as USCG missions or noted within DOD publications as areas in which the USCG can serve as a maritime leader.

When discussing security force assistance activities, and specifically force selection, JP 3-20 states, “USCG training teams, personnel, and platforms are well suited to support the development of stable, multi-mission maritime forces to respond to many transnational threats.”⁷ JP 3-22 further highlights the unique



USCGC *Oliver Henry* crew arrives in Port Moresby for port visit on August 23, 2022, following patrol in parts of Coral Sea, and Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea exclusive economic zones (U.S. Coast Guard/Karl Wethe)

advantages of the Coast Guard over its naval force associates in these constructs, stating that “a common constabulary and multi-mission nature promotes instant understanding and interoperability and makes USCG a valued partner for many naval and maritime forces.”⁸ In addition, “USCG [foreign internal defense] activities reach beyond normal military-to-military relations to a broader [host nation] maritime audience.”⁹ Therefore, the doctrine exists to place the USCG as the lead Service for security cooperation with coastal forces. The next logical step is to fully implement these concepts.

The new tri-Service strategy gives the Coast Guard an opening into an era of foundational engagement, with a concrete understanding that “maritime security capacity building with like-minded partner nations and allies” focuses largely on the partners, most of which “are not particularly interested in U.S. Navy-like force projection, but are instead concerned about being able to effectively govern and protect their own maritime borders.”¹⁰ It is imperative to assist these partners with missions that are solidly in the USCG wheelhouse to create a broad-band maritime posture. The tri-Service

strategy concepts must be backed with rubber-meets-the-road action. The doctrinal focus exists and has been highlighted with the new strategy, so there is a strong foundation to build on. Current USCG engagement posture focuses on liaison officers and attachés coordinating at command and strategic levels, the USCG MTB conducting short-term training evolutions alongside tactical-level personnel, and even recent developments such as the exercise of ship rider provisions to place USCG personnel onboard foreign platforms. What is missing?

Long-Term Focus: Programs and Ideas

The Coast Guard has the tools in its proverbial arsenal to dedicate resources to long-term advisory deployments. The DSF include subject matter experts in areas critical to international engagement, and the MTB has extensive short-term deployment experience that could be expanded to operations outside the mobile training footprint. To effectively train, collaborate with, and coordinate with partner nation forces, U.S. advisors and trainers must be given the opportunity to spend extended amounts of time

alongside their counterparts, both in the schoolhouse and in the field, to build lasting relationships with permanence rather than simply acquaintanceship. The shared experiences derived from long-term work together is the grease that allows smooth interchanges at the operational and tactical levels. Although Embassy- and command-level diplomacy and interaction are necessary, it is the daily toil of training and joint operations that in many cases of maritime coordination is a gaping void. The USCG could serve as the expedient multi-tool that has the expertise and subject matter knowledge to fill this function among partner-nation maritime forces, many of which mirror the USCG in their multi-mission duality as military and security/law enforcement services.

How could such a force be organized, taking into consideration existing forces and the reality of limited new resources and personnel? The backbone of knowledge for such a mission resides in both the DSF and the MTB. Rather than standing up a new command, reworking the current MTB footprint—including long-term regional deployments to support naval force needs while creating a

direct link by placing it organizationally in line with DSF—would be a first step to formalizing these functions. Whereas many DOD commands have USCG personnel attached, this structure calls for a USCG command with a detailed presence from Navy and Marine Corps counterparts. Attaching those personnel to this USCG structure would cement the recognition of such a unit as the leader for coastal force engagement and assist with obtaining DOD resources and funding, as needed, to complete its missions. The capacity would allow the USCG to lead joint naval force teams for engagement. USCG control of such a unit would also address shortages for this specific niche in the existing civil affairs community—an acknowledgment that the needs for coastal force and maritime specialties are greater than current ad hoc efforts can meet.¹¹

One general construct would be to make the MTB the command hub for international coastal security cooperation, folding tasks such as civil affairs, internal defense, and force assistance under its umbrella. Liaisons from the Navy and Marine Corps could constitute a small footprint of senior noncommissioned officers and junior officers. The Coast Guard could place regional managers at the unit to oversee geographical areas, likely with particular focus on the commanders of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Southern Command, and U.S. Africa Command. Leadership of the unit at the O6 level would be on par with necessary coordination. Then Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps coordinators would have reachback beyond the core team of USCG personnel at MTB, pulling from USCG's DSF and similar Navy and Marine Corps units for needed manpower and resources.

Deployments of such an organization could not only take advantage of USCG expertise but also mesh it with Navy and Marine Corps skills. The attached personnel could essentially serve as coordinators to their branches to augment and blend advisory teams constituted based on partner-nations' needs. This command would also give the USCG reachback for inclusion in DOD resource allotment. *Advantage at Sea* notes that the naval

force will “explore different combinations of existing forces to improve our operational effectiveness” and “test new tailorable formations designed to optimize influence.”¹² No better example exists than placing the Coast Guard at the forefront of security cooperation to coastal maritime forces that are similar in structure to the USCG. Conducting advisory missions “provides a low-cost investment with enormous leverage that can positively influence and shape the pre-conflict phase in threatened states.”¹³ Importantly, such missions “are most effective when conducted by carefully selected, properly trained, and well experienced personnel.”¹⁴ The sharing of blood, sweat, and tears builds such bonds, which in turn benefit the Coast Guard and provide backing for foreign partners to grow and develop. If we want the best “bang for the buck,” then put the USCG in charge of coastal force security cooperation.

What is the goal of security cooperation with partner-nations' coastal forces? The answer is to provide those nations with the best possible training and coordination to benefit both the host nation and the United States as well as to promote enhanced stability and security. The key factors are to use the best tool available to the naval force for such cooperation and to organize those assets in an efficient and effective manner. To achieve success with partner nations, the U.S. Coast Guard must integrate with other members of the naval force while retaining its own unique capabilities to best use its skills toward accomplishing international goals. Historical USCG advisory experience tempers these ideas with the knowledge that we must make changes with strong doctrinal foundation and support from the total naval force. We must seek long-term international engagement, while ensuring that our efforts marry with national and USCG goals and objectives and meet criteria that are acceptable to leadership. Applying these concepts globally to coastal environments along the entire Coast Guard mission spectrum can place the USCG at the tip of the coastal force engagement spear and pay dividends for the entire U.S. naval force. JFQ

Notes

¹ *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 7, available at <<https://media.defense.gov/2020/dec/16/2002553074/-1/-1/0/triservicestrategy.pdf>>.

² *United States Coast Guard Security Sector Assistance Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, July 2015), 11, available at <<https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=819974>>.

³ Michael Sinclair, Rodrick H. McHaty, and Blake Herzinger, *Implications of the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy for America's Naval Services* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, March 2021), 2, available at <<https://www.brookings.edu/research/implications-of-the-tri-service-maritime-strategy-for-americas-naval-forces/>>.

⁴ Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Coast Guard: Information on Defense Readiness Mission Deployments, Expenses, and Funding*, GAO-21-104741 (Washington, DC: GAO, 2021), available at <<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-104741.pdf>>.

⁵ *Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018–2022* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2018), 20, available at <https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/seniorleadership/alwaysready/USCG_Strategic%20Plan__LoResReaderSpreads_20181115_vFinal.pdf?ver=2018-11-14-150015-323>.

⁶ Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, May 23, 2017), v, available at <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_20_20172305.pdf>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, B-11.

⁸ JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, February 2, 2021), IV-20, available at <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_22.pdf?ver=2018-10-10-112450-103>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, VI-5.

¹⁰ Sinclair, McHaty, and Herzinger, *Implications of the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy*, 1–2.

¹¹ Paul W. Taylor, “Maritime Civil Affairs,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 8, 2017, available at <www.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/maritime-civil-affairs>.

¹² *Advantage at Sea*, 19.

¹³ Kevin D. Stringer, “The Missing Lever: A Joint Military Advisory Command for Partner-Nation Engagement,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 81 (2nd Quarter 2016), 86–91, available at <<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-81/Article/702041/the-missing-lever-a-joint-military-advisory-command-for-partner-nation-engagem/>>.

¹⁴ JP 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, II-8.