

COAST GUARD Compass

Official Blog of the U.S. Coast Guard

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Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Bob Papp was joined by Commandant of the Marine Corps [Gen. James Amos](#) and Chief of Naval Operations [Adm. Jonathan Greenert](#) to discuss maritime strategic issues during the [WEST 2013 Luncheon Town Hall Address](#) in San Diego, Calif. A main point of discussion during the event was the Commander-in-Chief's [strategic guidance](#) that the U.S. military "...will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region."

The Coast Guard assists the [Department of Defense's](#) national defense efforts with its specialized niche capabilities in the region and elsewhere. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard's Patrol Forces Southwest Asia unit in Manama, Bahrain, assists [U.S. Central Command](#) with its six patrol boats and 280 Coast Guardsmen.



Coast Guard and Navy boats patrol the entrance to the Kuwait Naval Base. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Warrant Officer Scott Epperson.

But the Coast Guard's main contribution to the U.S. military rebalancing strategy is principally through maritime governance.

"Maritime governance is what the Coast Guard does every day both along our shores, on the high seas and abroad," said Adm. Papp. "Ninety-five percent of all trade is by sea and most of that is through the Pacific Ocean. As part of our strategy to identify threats well before they arrive in the U.S. we have Coast Guardsmen in places like Singapore to ensure the safety and security of inbound in cargoes."

With maritime governance playing a heightened role in the Asia-Pacific region, the [North Pacific Coast Guard Forum](#) helps foster multilateral cooperation and information sharing to counter

illegal maritime activity. Members include the coast guards and “coast guard-like” agencies of the U.S., Canada, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia.

Instead of the traditional Mahanian “control of the sea” naval approach, countries in the Asia-Pacific region are increasingly using the maritime governance approach which leverages legal authorities and international agreements to resolve disputes and ensure maritime security and prosperity. For example, coast guard vessels instead of naval ships from the involved countries are on the front lines of the ongoing territorial dispute in the South China Sea.

While the Coast Guard’s maritime governance approach is different than the Navy’s and the Marine Corps’ approach, they all share the maritime emphasis. “I don’t think anybody can do it as effectively as Naval forces can,” said Gen. Amos. “We can operate from the sea base using Naval forces and build relationships and trust.”

Included in the Asia-Pacific rebalancing is the increased focus on the Arctic, which was another main topic of the panel. With more open water in the summer resulting in increased maritime activity, the Coast Guard is stepping up its economic, environmental, homeland and energy security efforts in the region. The U.S. is one of eight Arctic nations due to its Arctic waters to the north and west of Alaska and is an active member of the Arctic Council which facilitates Arctic maritime governance. The Arctic Council includes Canada, Russia, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark and Finland.

While the Coast Guard is responsible for carrying out its various missions in the Arctic just as it is for U.S. waters elsewhere, it lacks support infrastructure in the region. “So this past summer we did just as Gen. Amos suggested, we sent a [National Security Cutter Bertholf](#) up there to cover all those duties,” said Adm. Papp. “Bertholf acted as a mobile air and boat station and quite frankly has a better command and control capability than any of our shore-based stations.”



An MH-65 Dolphin helicopter flies by the Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf in the Arctic Ocean. The air crew from Air Station Los Angeles was attached to the ship as part of Operation Arctic Shield. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Timothy Tamargo.

Many years ago the Coast Guard rebalanced its high endurance cutter fleet to the Pacific due to the longer transit distances and harsher weather. But the 12 [high endurance cutters](#) are slated to be replaced by only eight [national security cutters](#). “Regardless of how advanced those eight ships are, they can’t be in all the same places that 12 could be, so I’m very hopeful we can continue the construction of all eight and then get into acquisition of our [offshore patrol cutters](#) because we need those as well. The Pacific is a big part of what we do.”

Fewer of its largest ships combined with an expanding mission space in the Arctic is making it more challenging for the Coast Guard to conduct its other important missions in the Pacific. These include fisheries enforcement, drug interdiction, search and rescue and participation in joint combined naval exercises where the Coast Guard could be further developing partnerships with other Asia-Pacific countries.

The panel of all three sea service chiefs together answering questions was a rare opportunity for the audience. It also underscored the point made by all three leaders that the coordination between the three sea services couldn’t be stronger.

“I hadn’t really made the connection how my ship’s drug interdiction and fisheries enforcement operations in the Pacific are a key part of our national military strategy to rebalance to the Pacific,” said Ensign Andrew Gavelek, a Coast Guard officer aboard the 45-year-old High Endurance Cutter Boutwell.