Amplifying the U.S. Coast Guard’s International Impact

Ways to Meet Growing Global Demand for the Service

The U.S. Coast Guard’s global reach—with operations on every ocean, on every continent, and in 160 countries—creates abundant opportunities and challenges for greater impact. The current commandant, ADM Linda L. Fagan, has expressed her strong support for expanding the service’s international efforts to support national goals. The disparity between the service’s overall responsibilities and its resources underscores the need to carefully chart the course to enhanced international impact.

To help leaders make key decisions about how best to manage the Coast Guard’s international affairs, Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center researchers analyzed how the service can enhance its coordination of international activities, more effectively prioritize them, and improve evaluation and communication of international impact.

In Improving the Effectiveness of U.S. Coast Guard International-Affairs Efforts, the research team identified two main impediments to increasing the service’s international impact:

- The Coast Guard’s international efforts are not well-coordinated or standardized, which results in inefficiencies and lost opportunities.
- Documentation and data are not widely accessible, which limits organizational awareness of relevant information.

From analysis of stakeholder interviews and extensive documentation, the research team characterized the Coast Guard’s international-affairs goals and approaches and developed a logic model to help articulate the scope of its international-affairs work. The team also suggested metrics to assess impact and to inform strategic decisions and identified ways to prioritize international efforts.

The report’s key recommendations are as follows:

- **Improve coordination and standardization of Coast Guard international efforts.** Headquarters (HQ), area, and district commands often have only limited awareness of one another’s efforts or how different activities contribute to strategic goals.

- **Clearly define and scope Coast Guard international-affairs efforts.** To date, there is no standard definition of Coast Guard–wide international affairs, which results in varied perceptions of what it constitutes and how to achieve goals.

- **Increase Coast Guard international-affairs capacity.** There are significant shortfalls in capacity to conduct international affairs at multiple levels in the service, even as demand from domestic and international partners is large and growing.

### KEY FINDINGS

- U.S. Coast Guard international efforts are not clearly defined, well-coordinated, or collectively prioritized.

- Documentation and data related to international efforts are not widely accessible.
The U.S. Coast Guard’s International Challenge

The Coast Guard’s international activities happen at all levels of the service and span all 11 of its statutory missions, often requiring coordination with partner agencies, including the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the U.S. Department of State.

Efforts around the globe include areas of heightening strategic interest, such as the Indo-Pacific, in addition to a long presence in such places as the Americas and the Arctic. Global activities include:

- operations and exercises
- training
- engagement with military and political leaders
- humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR)
- port inspection
- onboard personnel exchanges
- providing older Coast Guard assets to partners
- programs with a specific regional focus or that are related to specific mandates.

Coast Guard international-affairs efforts are decentralized, with involvement by the Atlantic and Pacific Area commands, the nine districts, the Office of International Affairs and Foreign Policy, and Force Readiness Command, among others. In 2020, more than 2,000 Coast Guard members were deployed globally to support DoD combatant commands for at least part of the year. In 2023, more than 120 Coast Guard members were stationed overseas on a full-time basis.

The Coast Guard undertakes global and domestic responsibilities with scarce resources; its annual budget is $13 billion, 7 percent of the U.S. Air Force’s budget. Its 41,700 active-duty personnel, 7,800 reservists, and 8,300 civilian employees make it less than one-quarter the size of the U.S. Marine Corps. The disparity between the service’s overall responsibilities and its resources underscores the need for it to effectively coordinate and prioritize its international efforts.

Achieving Greater Cohesion, Collaboration, and Impact

To provide all stakeholders with a common understanding of what Coast Guard international-affairs efforts are and how they can be improved, the research team proposed the following:

- a definition and scoping statement for the service’s international affairs
- a logic model—an illustration that clarifies how resources and activities contribute to various levels of organizational and national goals
- multiple metrics to measure the impact of international-affairs efforts
- a standardized, service-wide prioritization approach that is dynamic enough to reflect an ever-changing geopolitical landscape.

A Definition and Scoping Statement

From an analysis of documents, interviews, and discussions with Coast Guard stakeholders, the researchers proposed the following definition and scoping statement to reduce confusion among service personnel and external stakeholders:

- **proposed definition:** Coast Guard international-affairs efforts include all Coast Guard interactions with non-U.S. entities, internationally focused coordination with domestic partners, and operations outside U.S. waters or territory.
- **proposed statement of scope:** Coast Guard international-affairs efforts include operations, training, exercises, communications, coordination, visible engagement, exchange of personnel, sharing of information, policymaking, and providing materiel. Together, these efforts entail engaging with both domestic partners and partner nations, operations in all regions of the globe, occur at all levels of the Coast Guard and build on the service’s unique expertise, mission set, and authority.

These efforts aim to do the following in support of the goals of the Coast Guard, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), other departments (e.g., DoD, the U.S. Department of State), and the United States by:

- improving partner, U.S., and collective capabilities and capacity
- enhancing global safety, security, and stewardship
- building relationships, enhancing perceptions, and strengthening global norms.

A Logic Model

The definition and scope clarify what is meant by Coast Guard international affairs, but more is needed to thoroughly explain the diverse activities involved and their impact. To that end, the research team developed a logic model (see figure), that links inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes to national, departmental (DHS), and Coast Guard strategic goals.

Metrics for Decisionmaking

The research team’s metrics, a sampling of which appear in Table 1, could help the Coast Guard shape future investments in human capital, operations, and effective allocation of major operational assets. By measuring how well the Coast
A Logic Model of U.S. Coast Guard International Affairs

### A Service-Wide Prioritization Approach

To better align international efforts and coordinate on what to prioritize across the Coast Guard, the research team proposed a structured approach to inform strategic decisionmaking (see Table 2). It addresses when to engage, where, with whom, and for what purpose.

### Supporting the Service’s “Always Ready” Culture

The Coast Guard’s motto, *Semper Paratus* (Always Ready) is challenged by severe capacity shortfalls and a lack of coordination among HQ, area, and district commands. As international responsibilities continue to grow, operational risks caused by personnel and platform shortages could also grow.

As noted in the key recommendations earlier, the Coast Guard’s international impact is curtailed by lack of coordination, the lack of a centralized database documenting all international efforts, and limited impact measurement. Informed by stakeholder input and document assessment, the research team proposed additional recommendations to enhance the service’s international impact:

- Add billets and platforms (cutters and other boats, plus aircraft) to conduct international efforts.
- Institute formal information-sharing mechanisms (forums, databases, and documentation) to create mutual awareness, address real-time changes more effectively, build relationships, and better articulate impact.
- Improve training opportunities to ensure better international assignment readiness.
- Better define roles and responsibilities across the service.
- Use the logic model to articulate to all stakeholders the direct results of international-affairs efforts and how they contribute to higher-level outcomes and service, departmental, and national goals.
- Use metrics to capture and communicate the impact of Coast Guard international-affairs efforts.
- Prioritize international efforts through a structured process, using data to determine allocation of resources in line with other planning efforts, such as Global Force Management.

The approach proposed by the research team can help the Coast Guard increase its impact around the globe. Both organizational changes and articulation of the value of Coast Guard international efforts to external stakeholders (e.g., Congress; the White House; DHS; partner agencies, such as DoD and the U.S. Department of State; partner nations) can help the Coast Guard amplify its impact.

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NOTE: CONOPS = concept of operations; EDA = excess defense article; FMS = foreign military sale; TTP = tactics, techniques, and procedures; WMD = weapon of mass destruction.
This brief describes work done in the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) and documented in Improving the Effectiveness of U.S. Coast Guard International-Affairs Efforts, by Sarah Weilant, Scott Savitz, Emily Hoch, Dan Abel, Benjamin J. Sacks, Julia Vidal Verástegui, Isabelle Winston, and Michelle D. Ziegler, RR-A2376-1, 2023 (available at www.rand.org/t/RRA2376-1). To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RBA2376-1.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-296, § 305, as codified at 6 U.S.C. § 185) authorizes the Secretary of Homeland Security, acting through the Under Secretary for Science and Technology, to establish one or more federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs) to provide independent analysis of homeland security issues. The RAND Corporation operates the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) as an FFRDC for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under contract 70RSAT22D00000001.

The HSOAC FFRDC provides the government with independent and objective analyses and advice in core areas important to the department in support of policy development, decisionmaking, alternative approaches, and new ideas on issues of significance. HSOAC also works with and supports other federal, state, local, tribal, and public- and private-sector organizations that make up the homeland security enterprise. HSOAC’s research is undertaken by mutual consent with DHS and organized as a set of discrete tasks.

The information presented in this brief does not necessarily reflect official DHS opinion or policy.

For more information on the RAND Homeland Security Research Division, see www.rand.org/hsrd.

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**TABLE 1**
Sample Metrics of U.S. Coast Guard International Efforts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logic Model Category</th>
<th>What to Measure</th>
<th>Example of Proposed Metric</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>Bilateral and multilateral agreements</td>
<td>Total number of international agreements signed annually, by type and country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>The extent of efforts undertaken</td>
<td>The number of Coast Guard personnel-days and Coast Guard platform-days dedicated to exercises, by country, annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Improved awareness of threats, opportunities, and the operational environment</td>
<td>The number of times partner nations inform the Coast Guard of threats in the maritime domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Improved perceptions of the Coast Guard and the United States</td>
<td>Survey data on partner-nation populations’ views of the Coast Guard and the United States</td>
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**TABLE 2**
A Proposed Prioritization Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Who Conducts It</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Personnel in the Office of International Affairs and Foreign Policy, other HQ, areas, districts, Patrol Forces Southwest Asia, liaisons, attachés, and other entities who work with specific countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Participants in recurring institutional forums and, initially, experts with country data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Participants in recurring forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Participants in recurring forums through collaborative discussions during those forums (and between them, in response to major issues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This approach does not rank one country over another. Rather, through data use, stakeholders consider the level of strategic importance, positive engagement, country capabilities and capacity, costs, and operational risks.