



## TESTIMONY OF

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#### ON “DRUGS, THUGS, AND FISH: EXAMINING COAST GUARD LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS”

#### BEFORE THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

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#### Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Ezell, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to be here today to discuss the U.S. Coast Guard’s efforts to deliver peace through strength to control, secure, and defend America’s borders.

The United States is a maritime nation. With more than 95,000 miles of shoreline, 361 commercial ports and 25,000 miles of navigable waterways, the maritime domain fortifies our national security and economic prosperity. Over 90 percent of overseas trade enters or leaves the United States by sea, facilitating more than \$5.4 trillion in maritime commerce annually. The security of this domain is not optional – it is foundational to our national security. The Coast Guard is the Nation’s leading agency in this domain.

In the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard serves as the Nation’s finest maritime fighting force. We are one of the six Armed Services, a federal law enforcement agency, and member of the Intelligence Community. The Coast Guard controls, secures, and defends the U.S. border and maritime approaches with 53,000 people and a 2025 budget of \$13.5 billion; ensures the safe and secure flow of commerce vital to economic prosperity; and responds to crises and contingencies that often come with little or no warning.

The Coast Guard leverages unique authorities, specialized capabilities, and enduring partnerships with international, federal, state, local, and tribal leaders to operationalize a layered approach to secure our maritime border and protect the American People from foreign terrorists, transnational criminals, and other maritime threats.

In response to the national emergency at the southern border, the Coast Guard rapidly surged forces and assets to defend U.S. territorial integrity and advance national security objectives. Coast Guard commanders continuously prioritize and strategically reallocate aircraft, cutters, and specialized law enforcement teams to areas of highest operational need. Last year alone, the Coast Guard tripled the deployment of resources dedicated to border security, disrupting maritime threats before they could reach the United States.

Under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Noem, the Coast Guard is changing and growing to meet the needs of Americans. This effort is Force Design 2028, a bold blueprint to build a stronger, more agile and responsive fighting force. Under the leadership and vision of DHS Secretary Noem, this effort directly enhances our ability to enforce the law, secure maritime approaches, protect commerce, and respond to crises. By expanding our workforce and deploying advanced assets and technologies, the Coast Guard is better postured to secure our Nation's maritime borders and sovereign interests against these persistent threats.

## **Maritime Drug Interdiction**

Maritime drug trafficking remains one of the most direct threats to U.S. homeland security and public safety. Transnational criminal organizations depend on the maritime domain to move cocaine, methamphetamine, fentanyl precursors, and other illicit substances towards the United States. The Coast Guard is often the only agency with the authority, capability, and presence to act at sea where they interdict more illicit drugs than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.

As directed by the President, the Coast Guard is on the front lines securing the global supply chain against drug trafficking and reducing the availability of illicit drugs that devastate American communities. Narco terrorists exploit maritime routes to move drugs, generate enormous profits and fuel violence, instability, and crime. These revenues are increasingly leveraged by hostile actors and transnational networks to fund human trafficking, weapons smuggling, sanctions evasion, and other malign activities that destabilize regions and drive illegal migration. The Coast Guard's role in countering these organizations is both a law enforcement and a national security imperative.

Since January 2025, the Coast Guard has seized over 511,000 pounds of cocaine from the maritime domain - representing over 189 million potentially lethal doses and an estimated value exceeding \$3.8 billion - during operations in the Eastern Pacific and Caribbean, the two primary drug transit corridors. This all-time historic high more than doubles the cocaine removed in FY 2024 and nearly triples the removals from FY 2023.

Estimates indicate that the Coast Guard counter-drug and law enforcement operations save American taxpayers over \$10 billion in avoided costs, including over \$2.3 billion in healthcare costs from cocaine interdictions alone. These results are driven by increased operational presence, improved detection, and decisive law enforcement action.

The southern border is not the only route for illegal trafficking; the Great Lakes and northern border are also vulnerable due to their complex geography and limited law enforcement presence. The U.S. Coast Guard does not have enough resources to effectively counter drug trafficking in these areas.

Combating fentanyl and its illegal precursor chemicals remains one of the Administration's top priorities, and the Coast Guard has taken significant action in this effort. Fentanyl has been the leading cause of U.S. drug-related deaths since 2016, accounting for approximately 70% of drug overdose deaths in 2023, with Mexican narco terrorists being the primary source of the synthetic opioid flow into the U.S.

Accordingly, the Coast Guard leverages its broad authorities to seek out and interdict both fentanyl and its illegal precursor chemicals. On January 31, 2025, our Commandant, Admiral Lunday directed immediate action to bolster these operations, focusing on interdicting precursor chemicals and disrupting the revenue streams that fund fentanyl trafficking.

## **Illegal Migration**

The Coast Guard also secures the Rio Grande River, a 220-mile river border from the Gulf of America to West Texas, part of the U.S. Southern border, and the maritime approaches to San Diego. These areas continue to experience a sustained and above-average rate of illegal maritime migration. This vector presents a persistent threat characterized by continuous smuggling attempts and is targeted through the Coast Guard's Operation Border Trident and Operation River Wall, both of which seek to achieve 100% control of the southern maritime border. Trafficking organizations in this region primarily utilize high-speed boats, jet skis and other personal watercraft, and additional makeshift watercraft. Although a variety of nationalities are encountered, the overwhelming majority of those interdicted are Mexican nationals.

The maritime approaches to the southeastern U.S. are also a primary vector for illegal maritime migration. Most of the migrants encountered originate in Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, or the Dominican Republic, utilizing established transit corridors.

Cuban and Haitian migrants typically journey toward Florida, either directly or through the Bahamas. Meanwhile, Dominican and some Haitian groups often cross the Mona Passage to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. They attempt these journeys on a wide array of vessels, from coastal freighters and high-speed "go-fast" boats to dangerously crude, homemade rafts.

The National Security Strategy established a focus to control migration, stop drug flows, and strengthen stability and security on land and sea in the Western Hemisphere. Under the direction of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard maintains a robust and forward-leaning posture to combat illegal immigration. In 2025 we interdicted, deterred, or transported 11,713 aliens illegally attempting entry. This was 120% more than in 2024. Our persistent presence both serves to deter departures from countries of origin and enables a rapid response to suspicious vessels, in close coordination with our international, federal, state, and local partners. To enhance this posture, we utilize advanced unmanned systems, such as surface drones and small aerial drones launched from our over-the-horizon boats, to provide persistent surveillance and support shore patrols.

## **Countering Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) Fishing**

The Coast Guard sets the standard for combatting IUU fishing – a pervasive security, economic, and environmental threat accounting for an estimated \$50 billion in lost global revenue annually. For more than 150 years, the Coast Guard has been the lead U.S. agency for at-sea enforcement of fisheries laws. The Coast Guard leverages its authorities and capabilities to improve both domestic and international fisheries enforcement, holding bad actors accountable, and adapts its operations as fish stocks migrate and technology improves the ability to find and harvest catch.

Malign, state-supported actors undermine U.S. markets, threaten global food security, and create instability that is exploited by terrorists and transnational criminals, including human traffickers. These actors exploit our partner nations, many of whom lack the resources to secure their own waters. This growing threat increases the demand for U.S. Coast Guard presence and partnership. While our cooperative patrols with such allies as Australia and Japan are effective, our partners require greater technical support and training.

We work to meet these demands, but do so with an aging fleet, strained logistics across a vast geography, and limited forward basing options. This situation presents a risk to our other core missions and underscores the need for a sustainable, long-term solution. Our current force structure, primarily based on the U.S. West Coast, Hawaii, and Guam, cannot meet the growing and persistent demand from across the region for more Coast Guard operational presence.

## **Conclusion**

Maritime drug trafficking, illegal migration, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing are distinct challenges, but they share a common feature: each exploits the maritime domain to evade law enforcement and accountability. Through its unique and enduring law enforcement authorities, the Coast Guard directly confronts these threats – securing and defending the Nation’s borders and maritime approaches every day.

These threats are evolving, and the demands placed on the Coast Guard continue to increase. The Coast Guard’s layered security model – leveraging forward presence, elite capabilities, an exceptional workforce, and unmatched legal authorities – allows us to address risks far from U.S. shores before they reach our homeland.

The changes underway through Force Design 2028 are already accelerating enduring change and showing measurable results. By empowering our workforce and enhancing the ways we conduct our patrols and inspections, recent operations resulted in the seizure of more than 511,000 pounds of cocaine valued at more than \$3.8 billion. These outcomes demonstrate both the effectiveness of our authorities and the return on investment they provide.

Since 1790, in peace and in war, a ready Coast Guard has been an indispensable element of national security. With continued congressional support, the Coast Guard will remain prepared to meet today’s challenges and build a more resilient and capable Service for decades to come.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and look forward to your questions. Semper Paratus.