

REVIEW & FORECAST

Modernization: Building the 21st Century Coast Guard

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We are entering an incredibly exciting era in American history. As President Barack Obama has promised, change is coming, and we must be prepared to turn it in our favor. In the U.S. Coast Guard, we are cognizant of the changes swirling around us, and we have dedicated ourselves to modernizing the service to meet the maritime challenges of the 21st century.

Over the past several years, the Coast Guard has faced increasing demands for our services, a deteriorating fleet of operational assets and the need to streamline, simplify and integrate our command and control and mission support structures. However, the courage, dedication and professionalism of Coast Guard men and women have never wavered.

We will continue to leverage our status as an armed service, law enforcement agency and member of the national intelligence community to safeguard the country's maritime equities in this rapidly changing environment. The Coast Guard will remain America's maritime guardian.

We live in an era of globalization, where events unfolding half a world away can impact the cost of a gallon of gasoline or fresh produce on Main Street, USA. The world's oceans form a critical link in the chain of global safety, security and financial stability. Despite their importance, they are largely unregulated. Transnational maritime threats such as piracy, human trafficking, narcotics smuggling, nuclear proliferation, illegal fisheries and environmental pollution are beyond any one agency or nation's ability to resolve. We must also understand these international dilemmas impact our way of life in America. When container ships destined for the United States are rerouted

to avoid areas threatened by pirates, the additional fuel costs are eventually manifested in higher prices at Wal-Mart or Home Depot. It is worth our time and energy to engage.

The Arctic region is a prime example of the importance of the world's oceans. As the polar ice cap recedes, hundreds of miles of open water become available for commercial shipping, tourism and energy exploration. Since this region is estimated to hold 25 percent of the world's energy reserves and can reduce shipping transit times between East and West by more than 3,000 miles, the stakes are high. Russia and Canada have already made sovereignty claims to resolve long-standing boundary disputes. As the only one of eight Arctic border nations not a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the United States has limited ability to make continental shelf claims or to exercise coastal state rights for resources.

The Coast Guard has responsibility for safety of life at sea in the Arctic, but our capabilities are limited. Only two of our three icebreakers are in service, and our small boats and aircraft are not fully capable of operating in this harsh environment. We are establishing a presence in the region, but we are still determining the full range of requirements to effectively do so. The Arctic holds a great deal of promise, but we must develop a national policy position to move forward.

To meet these emerging maritime challenges, the Coast Guard must modernize its organizational structure and enhance its operational capabilities. To maximize our limited resources, we have to focus the entire service on mission execution. All Coast Guard personnel need to either be executing missions or supporting

those who are. This necessitates moving intermediate level support and logistics functions from the unit to the headquarters level while simultaneously flattening the organization to improve command and control coordination. We are confident these organizational changes will improve our service delivery to the maritime public.

Based on the required capabilities to meet our expanding mission suite, we are producing a highly capable mix of ships, aircraft and boats. Our existing fleet is still effective, but age, delayed maintenance and an increasing operational tempo dramatically impact readiness. These systemic problems threaten the Coast Guard's ability to protect America's maritime interests.

The flagship of our fleet is the *Bertholf*, a 418-foot national security cutter (NSC), which is the first replacement of the 378-foot high-endurance cutters. The first of eight planned NSCs, the *Bertholf* was commissioned on August 4. The NSCs will be the most technologically advanced ships ever built for the Coast Guard and are fully capable of supporting U.S. combatant commanders. Touch-screen computer monitors predominate the bridge, engine room and combat information center to control every shipboard system and reduce the required crew size. I like to refer to the NSC as a ship attached to the end of computer.

Additional surface modernization projects are also underway. In September, we announced the contract award for the 153-foot *Sentinel* class of cutters to replace the venerable 110-foot patrol boats. Closer to shore, we have also started production of the response boats-medium (RB-Ms) to replace the 41-foot utility boats. We are planning to deploy 180 RB-Ms around the country by 2015.

We are also modernizing our aviation fleet. In August, we awarded a contract to missionize the fourth of six HC-130J long-range surveillance aircraft—a critical step in providing this highly capable aircraft with the right tools to perform Coast Guard missions. We are also planning to install the SELEX (Basildon, England) Seaspray 7500E radar, a system that provides greater detection capability

and enhanced reliability, on all 16 of our older H-models by 2010.

The Coast Guard is introducing a new medium-range aircraft to replace the HU-25 Falcons. To date, five HC-144A Ocean Sentry aircraft have been delivered, and our plans call for a fleet of 36 fully missionized aircraft by 2020. To read about the specific capabilities of any of these assets visit www.uscg.mil/acquisition.

The Coast Guard offers great value to the nation and the international community. Our robust portfolio of competencies, capabilities and authorities make us uniquely suited to meet emerging maritime challenges. This is crucial, as a safe, secure and efficient maritime domain is necessary for sustaining our national economy and protecting our homeland. The Coast Guard remains "Always Ready" to meet changing threats, and we will continue to modernize in order to best serve the nation and humanity. ■

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