



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Frontline Defenders: How the Coast Guard's Deployable Specialized Forces Combat Narcoterrorists and other Maritime Threats on the High Seas

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Coast Guard servicemembers carry out a broad range of critical missions every day, from search and rescue activities to drug interdictions and maritime security. The Coast Guard helps respond to disasters, protect maritime commerce, defend seaports and other critical infrastructure, and secure National Special Security Events. In each of these missions, the Coast Guard's efforts are enhanced by its Deployable Specialized Forces.

These elite teams represent some of the service's most skilled and highly trained units. With 11 statutory missions and a global footprint, the Coast Guard relies on the readiness and expertise of its specialized forces to deploy quickly and respond to crises effectively.

If a cutter is stuck in ice in the Arctic or Antarctic and requires repair, the Coast Guard will call upon its specialized forces. If an oil spill threatens environmental disaster, the Coast Guard will call upon its specialized forces. And if an advanced tactical team is needed to conduct a high-risk interdiction of a suspected drug trafficking vessel, the Coast Guard will call upon its specialized forces—at least, that is, if it is allowed to do so. Under the Trump administration, the Coast Guard is not getting enough calls.

The Trump administration has chosen to illegally and immorally bomb alleged drug boats instead of allowing the Coast Guard's specialized forces to safely interdict narcotics traffickers and turn them over for prosecution. These attacks fly in the face of international law, and though they may deter drug trafficking in the short term, they undermine the Coast Guard's long-term efforts to advance international maritime cooperation and law enforcement.

How can the Coast Guard convince international partners and allies to assist with maritime law enforcement and information sharing when other branches of the U.S. military are illegally blowing boats out of the water? The administration must cease these war crimes immediately. Accountability is coming.

The administration has shown that at least some of its lawyers do in fact understand maritime law, as the Coast Guard's specialized forces have been deployed to conduct a series of successful boardings of sanctioned oil tankers off the Venezuelan coast. These operations stand in contrast to the illegal drug boat attacks—as well as the illegal deployment of U.S. armed forces into Venezuela to depose its president—as the boardings are at least rooted in internationally recognized rules and practices.

The Coast Guard's specialized forces deserve significant credit for carrying out these difficult and dangerous operations without incident. As the Coast Guard works to build upon the successes of its specialized forces, Congress must ensure the service supports its personnel and mission needs with capable vessels and aircraft.

Recently, through their One Big Ugly Bill, Republicans gifted the Coast Guard with \$25 billion—a much-needed investment that unfortunately was paid for by gutting Medicaid. This money was provided with few strings attached, and the Coast Guard has not yet shared its spend plan with Congress.

In the past, the Coast Guard has struggled to manage large acquisitions programs efficiently and effectively. As the Coast Guard works to support its specialized forces and other units with this large investment, the service must act as responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars and ensure money is not wasted.

I look forward to working with GAO and my colleagues in Congress to hold the Coast Guard accountable as it invests in its Deployable Specialized Forces and other units.

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