

Camille Dawson, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific
Affairs

U.S. Department of State

“Projecting Presence and Power in the Indo-Pacific: An Examination of the United
States Coast Guard’s Contributions to Maritime Security”

September 28, 2023

House Homeland Security Committee, Transportation and Maritime Security
Subcommittee

Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and Members of the
Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify
on Department of State efforts to advance U.S. maritime security interests in the
Indo-Pacific. We deeply appreciate this committee’s leadership and support for
policies that advance our maritime objectives.

As you are all aware, the Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges,
particularly from the PRC. The PRC’s coercion and aggression spans the globe,
but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific, including in the maritime domain. We have
seen a clear and upward trend of PRC provocations, most notably in the South
China Sea, to include an assertive expansion of unlawful maritime claims and
interference with freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of
the sea.

However, our approach to the region is about much more than just one
country – it is a whole of society approach, driven by the Indo-Pacific Strategy
(IPS), our shared, affirmative vision for a region that is free and open and ever

more connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient. We work in close coordination with our colleagues across the interagency, including with the Coast Guard and Department of Defense, to advance that vision.

The origin of the free and open Indo-Pacific as a concept is rooted in connecting two oceans and promoting a free and open maritime space. Protecting this critical maritime domain falls into three key lines of effort: 1) our diplomacy together with likeminded partners to promote respect for international law and the rules-based order, and the need for peaceful settlement of disputes; 2) maritime capacity building programs for the region's maritime law enforcement agencies and militaries; and 3) our own operations, including Freedom of Navigation Operations and routine presence operations, to demonstrate that all countries have the right to fly, sail, and operate anywhere that international law allows.

To advance the maritime security priorities of the IPS, the Department of State works closely with like-minded partners to keep the region open and accessible and ensure the region's seas and skies are governed and used according to international law. This close cooperation with allies and partners lies at the heart of our approach to the Indo-Pacific region because we recognize that no one country can meet the challenges alone. In particular, we build support for rules-based approaches to the maritime domain, including in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait. Prominent examples of this approach

include our work through existing regional multilateral architecture, such as ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, as well as newer, more flexible arrangements such as the Quad, AUKUS, Partners in the Blue Pacific, trilateral cooperation with the Republic of Korea and Japan, and the U.S.-EU Indo-Pacific Consultations.

The Quad works to ensure the Indo-Pacific remains free and open. Through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), the Quad is committed to supporting regional partners' efforts to improve their maritime domain awareness. This year, the Department of State also hosted the first-ever Quad Maritime Conference in Washington, D.C.

Our enhanced trilateral security partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom—AUKUS—supports Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines at the earliest possible date. AUKUS also enhances our joint capabilities and interoperability through a concrete program of work on advanced capabilities, including cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea capabilities.

Launched by the United States and likeminded partners in June 2022, Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) is rooted in our shared determination to support a prosperous, secure, resilient, free, and open region that benefits people in the Pacific. We advance a range of maritime initiatives under the PBP framework,

which is forging ever-closer partnerships with Pacific Island nations through activities such as the PBP workshop on illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and maritime domain awareness that we hosted in Hawaii in January.

At the Camp David Summit last month, U.S., ROK, and Japan leaders also agreed to establish a trilateral maritime mechanism to synchronize partner capacity building in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Additional actions that advance U.S. maritime security interests include the first ever joint U.S.-EU naval exercise, conducted this year through the U.S.-EU Indo-Pacific consultations; progress opening embassies in the Pacific that will strengthen our presence and partnerships; and public diplomacy programs to advance maritime security goals. In partnership with DOD, we launched a public engagement program in the Philippines to provide cameras to fisher folk to record IUU fishing. We also offered legal exchange programs and consultations around the region related to maritime law, where attorneys at the Department of State explain their publication “Limits in the Seas #150” and advise officials from the region how to counter the PRC’s baseless claims in the South China Sea through appropriate legal fora. The Department of State also sponsored a maritime boundary workshop for ASEAN nations to enhance their legal capabilities and solve their disputes peacefully.

Capacity building is central to our maritime security efforts in the Indo-Pacific, both as a development tool and a way to build and maintain relationships, and we appreciate our strong collaboration with Congress on this priority. We maintain robust security assistance intended to build maritime capacity and maritime domain awareness, and we see the need to expand this effort. Through our Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the Department of State funds nearly \$20 million of Coast Guard capacity building efforts to strengthen maritime governance while protecting the security of the American people. Similar programs extend to combating cyber threats in the maritime domain to help partner countries defend against cyberattacks on critical maritime infrastructure, such as ports and navigation systems. The Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Security Assistance Office provided \$286 million in FY22 security assistance to the Indo-Pacific region. Security assistance efforts in the region include building partner nation maritime security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and military professionalization. This security assistance develops and enhances partner nation capabilities and advances a range of U.S. interests.

Additionally, the Department of State and Coast Guard continue to pursue new bilateral maritime law enforcement agreements which cover a spectrum of illicit transnational maritime activities, including IUU fishing, drug and migrant

smuggling, and illicit transport of weapons of mass destruction. These agreements enable the U.S. government to engage with and support partners who are still building or expanding their capacity for maritime domain awareness or at-sea enforcement, and provides them the tools to do so. The most recent agreement with Papua New Guinea entered into force in August and was successfully utilized earlier this month during an historic joint operation with Papua New Guinea Defense Force shipriders and the Coast Guard Cutter *Myrtle Hazard*.

Collaboration across the U.S. government to advance maritime security in the Indo-Pacific enables us to demonstrate physical presence and commitment to meeting the needs of the region. This is powerful evidence that directly disproves the false narrative – propounded by the PRC and others – that the United States is retreating from the region. Our presence and responsiveness to needs identified by countries in the region is particularly relevant in the Pacific Islands, where many of the countries lack sufficient law enforcement capabilities and do not have standing militaries. In such locations, our Coast Guard partners are indispensable, building trust and providing resources and training in a manner that cannot be replicated by any other U.S. agency.

These examples, though not exhaustive, highlight our approach – in collaboration with the Coast Guard, DOD, others in the interagency, and counterparts throughout the region – to leverage our expertise, resources, and

networks to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific region, promote U.S. maritime security interests, and deter PRC efforts to undermine the regional order for its own gain.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering your questions and those of other members of the subcommittee.