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The Power To Protect

In the post-Sept. 11 era, the Coast Guard fulfills a duty of many dimensions.

By U.S. Coast Guard Vice Adm. Jim Hull & Joe DiRenzo III

In today's era of asymmetric warfare, the protection of some 95,000 square miles of vulnerable American coastline presents a daunting challenge. Nuclear power plants, oil refineries, factories, airports, military bases and major cities hug the shores of the waterways of our nation. Ninety-five percent of U.S. overseas trade moves through 361 American ports. Vessels of all size and dimension from all corners of the planet come and go. The list of potential coastal targets for U.S. enemies in the war on terror is nearly as extensive as the list of ways in which national security could be breached along our oceanic borders. In "The Art of War," the ancient military strategist Sun Tzu wrote that "the spot where we intend to fight must not be made known; for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at several different points." That is precisely the kind of multiple-point preparation now undertaken by today's U.S. Coast Guard, which since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, has had its role amplified in ways unseen since World War II. The Coast Guard is a critical partner for many U.S. security elements, from the local to the international level. It is the primary federal agency responsible for maritime protection under the Department of Homeland Security. The Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 added new emphasis on a traditional Coast Guard mission: port security. The Coast Guard collaborates with agencies ranging from the Maine Marine Patrol to the New York Police Department to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The Coast Guard and Customs jointly board ships to search cargo and containers, along the way reducing with unprecedented effectiveness the number of stowaways and absconders, crewmembers who simply walk away from their ships. Before Sept. 11, 2001, surprisingly little attention was paid to that particular method of illegal immigration. The transfer of most Navy PC-170 patrol boats to Coast Guard operations has substantially helped the service perform its expanded duties. The patrol boats are augmented with seven-member Coast Guard Law Enforcement Teams that are trained to board high-interest vessels before they reach American shores. The Coast Guard also has a more active part than ever in the international intelligence community, in partnership with the Office of Naval Intelligence in establishing Maritime Intelligence Fusion Centers both on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and through its own Field Intelligence Support Teams, known appropriately as FIST. The Coast Guard Investigative Service works with local law-enforcement partners to buffer America from terrorist attack. And the Coast Guard is uniquely capable of gathering information and tracking vessels from long range, uniting with international maritime partners, and stopping terrorism dead in the water. The strategic relationship between the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard further includes providing escorts and pier-side security for ship deployment in Operation Iraqi Freedom at 11 different on-load ports on the east and west coasts. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Tom Collins said at the Naval War College's 2003 International Seapower Symposium that collaboration with multiple agencies, organizations and industry is central to the service's evolving identity. "At the international level, an integrated approach among all international maritime partners can improve the security and safety of all nations and protect their economies," he said. "Strong international regulations through

the (International Maritime Organization) and steadfast compliance efforts by all classification societies will help harden individual ships from terrorist activity. Programs like the Proliferation Security Initiative and related long-range ship-tracking and surveillance initiatives will reduce security risks. Sharing of security, safety, commercial and law-enforcement information can create global maritime domain awareness that allows nations to create layered, multi-agency, integrated maritime security defenses to combat the threats of terrorists and transnational criminals." During the past two years, the Coast Guard has commissioned seven new 100-person Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSSTs) - often described as maritime SWAT teams - in port cities including New York; Norfolk, Va.; Houston; Seattle; Los Angeles; and Boston. The teams are highly trained in homeland security, waterborne escort, maritime law enforcement and special security. The Coast Guard's new Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron also has significantly tightened port security and deterred illegal drug traffic. Helicopters armed with machine guns and sharpshooters can provide accurate delivery of fire in a congested port environment if necessary. It is a multilayered operation, a "defense-in-depth" strategy that has pushed outward U.S. maritime borders, reduced vulnerabilities, preserved the free flow of trade and attained levels of national security that were unheard of before Sept. 11, 2001. New port-security requirements have been a tall order for the Coast Guard, but with essential support from Auxiliary and Reserve components, it's an order the service is fulfilling swiftly and efficiently. But this is not exactly new territory for the Coast Guard, which initially became involved in port security by virtue of the Espionage Act of 1917. That law gave the service "powers to prevent sabotage at the nation's harbors." Following that was the Magnuson Act of 1950, which provided "authority for the protection of harbors, ports and waterway facilities" through the Coast Guard Captain of the Port. The Ports and Waterways Safety Act later created security zones and the requirement of advance-arrival notification for incoming merchant vessels. Most recently, the Maritime Transportation Security Act 2002, which goes into effect in July, emphasizes security-plan development and review, relationships with the commercial shipping industry, and other responsibilities. Three primary planks in the Coast Guard's strategy for reducing risks at ports are:

- Preventing attacks.
- Reducing vulnerability.
- Minimizing damage and recovery.

The Coast Guard's response plans are now being integrated into a single, all-discipline, all-hazard national response plan, the initial draft of which was released last September. The plan is designed to unify government and non-government public-safety organizations to build a comprehensive national incident-management system - a pooling of resources and response capabilities. The MTSA also ushers in several additional Coast Guard functions designed to reduce maritime risks, including:

- Port-threat profiles and vulnerability assessments. Threat profiles will be created to evaluate risk at 55 critical ports around the country. Also, approximately 10,000 vessels and 5,000 facilities are subject to vulnerability assessments, to be conducted by the owners, along with the development of security plans for Coast Guard review and approval.
- Industry response plans. Key industrial sectors will be required to develop security-incident response plans, subject to Coast Guard review and approval.
- Automatic identification systems. Detailed ship information allowing the tracking of vessels within U.S. waters will improve maritime domain awareness.
- Extension of seaward jurisdiction. The MTSA extends certain Coast Guard authorities as far as 12 nautical miles offshore, allowing the service to obtain information about incoming vessels farther out at sea, with authority to exercise protective actions and measures.

Three main areas of emphasis in the Coast Guard's future are maritime domain awareness which will broaden

the service's ability to collect data, analyze it and assess conditions and trends, increased teamwork with industry on port security, and continued efforts to improve secure communications with other Department of Homeland Security partners in Customs and Border Patrol. New Coast Guard capabilities, new plans, new emphases on traditional roles, and new international and inter-agency partnerships are forging a shield of national security that is making America safer than it was not only before Sept. 11, 2001, but perhaps safer than it has ever been in history. But while many successful miles have been logged, the voyage is far from over. And every day, the U.S. Coast Guard is making our ports safer, more secure, and less attractive to any terrorist who might like to test them. Vice Adm. Jim Hull is Commander Coast Guard Atlantic Area. Joe DiRenzo III is Coast Guard Atlantic Area's anti-terrorism coordinator.