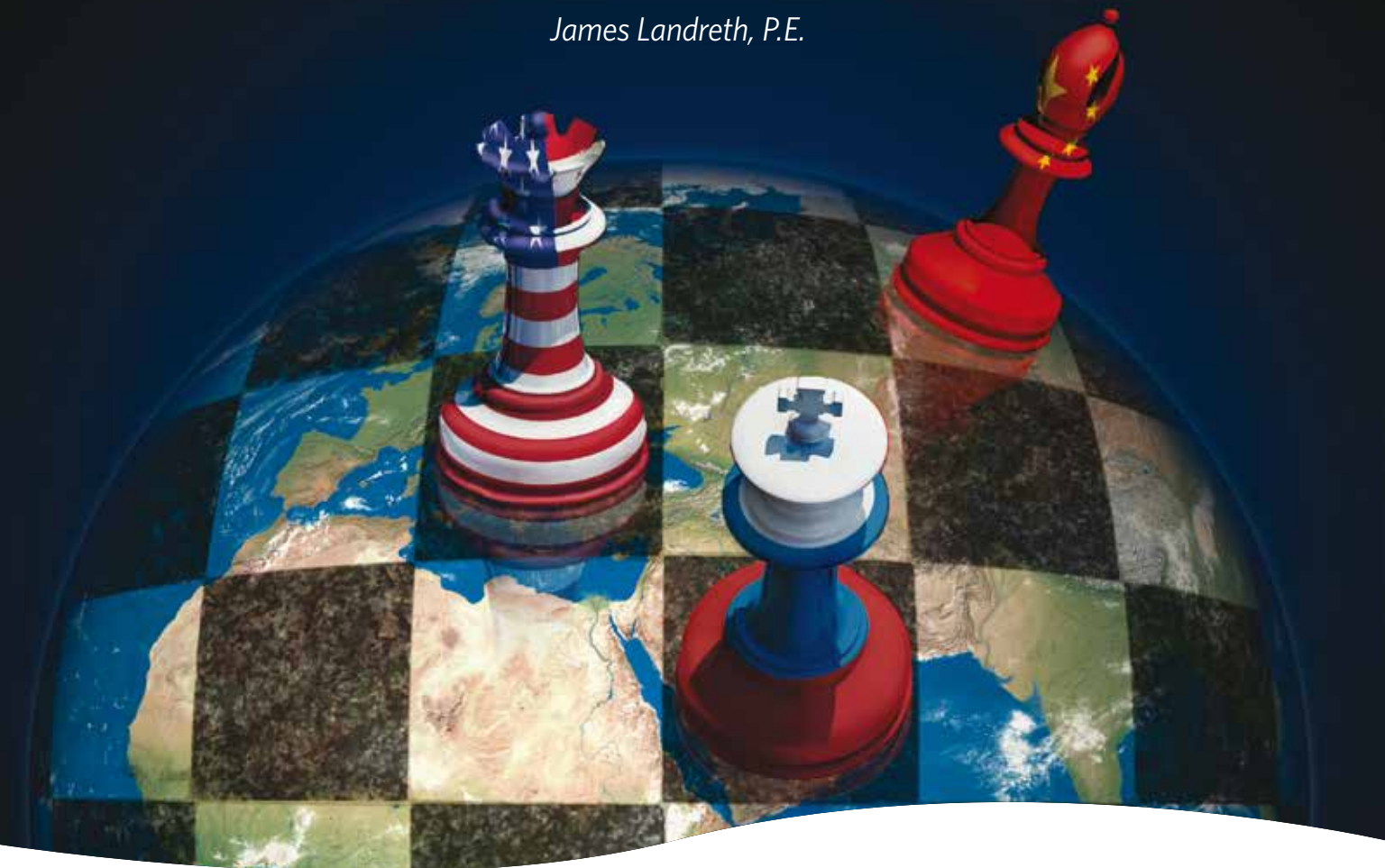


Coast Guard Role in the Great Power Competition

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IN LATE MARCH 2019, THE COAST GUARD CUTTER (CGC) BERTHOLF (WMSL-750) SLICED THROUGH THE waves in a joint exercise with USS CURTIS WILBUR (DDG-54). Though the BERTHOLF normally supports Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) on counter-narcotics, on this mission it led the formation in a freedom of navigation (FON) exercise through the Taiwan Strait.

The Chinese media challenged the legitimacy of a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) vessel patrolling so far from the U.S. coast, BERTHOLF's presence provided a clear signal of the U.S. commitment to FON in the Western Pacific. The deployment of a USCG asset on this particular mission also underlined the U.S. commitment to the international order while minimizing the perception of escalation that would be triggered by the presence of U.S. Navy (USN) combatants.

Beginning with the 2012 "Pivot to Asia" and fully emphasized with the 2018 National Defense Strategy, U.S. strategies increasingly focus on the "Great Power Competition" (GPC) unfolding between the United States and its near peer competitors. The majority of the USCG's missions support homeland security, but its responsibilities to the Department of Defense (DoD) as a military Service necessitate support for the GPC. To ensure readiness to support U.S. policy amidst

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the GPC, the USCG must define its unique contributions to the GPC, articulate budgetary requirements to fulfill its intended roles and deliver outsized return on investment (ROI) through robust joint and multi-national partnerships.

The USCG Role

The USCG possesses myriad authorities and capabilities for the GPC that differentiate it from its significantly larger sister Service, the USN. However, the USCG leadership must balance requests for forces (RFF) from the DoD against its normal Department of Homeland Security (DHS) mission set. In order to ensure that delivered forces provide the maximum benefit to DoD without draining readiness for its DHS portfolio, the USCG must advertise its unique capabilities to act as a force multiplier for DoD assets at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war.

■ **Strategic Level.** Due to its fluency in DHS, DoD, intelligence community (IC), law enforcement and interagency realms, the USCG's combination of authorities and capabilities bridge a number of strategic initiatives outlined in the 2017 National Security Strategy. Traditionally viewed as a junior partner in joint operations with DoD, the USCG must grasp and assert the value it brings to the GPC. The USCG maintains an adequate footprint among the Services at the Pentagon, but the USCG must build upon its success with the U.S. Southern Command and deepen its relationships with geographic and functional combatant commanders (COCOM). Similarly, as a member of the intelligence and law enforcement communities, the USCG must conduct key leader engagement to ensure that its equities are well represented across the agencies.

Finally, even when not obligating assets, the USCG should participate in as many joint planning exercises as possible. As recently articulated by Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, any future conflict in the GPC environment will require dynamic force employment globally. Since COCOM RFFs regularly exceed the capabilities of all the military Services, a modest investment in planning and liaison officer participation will pay significant dividends in communicating the types, quantity and endurance of units requested for GPC contingencies.

■ **Operational Level Basing.** The USCG bases its assets to provide operational level contributions globally. The homeport strategy for the National Security Cutters (NSC) provide a great example of this flexibility. Basing in Alameda, California, and Charleston, South Carolina, ensure that the USCG's capital ships can respond to contingencies on either side of the Panama Canal. Furthermore, basing in Honolulu, Hawaii, provides geographic proximity to the Barents Sea and the Western Pacific. Finally, the homeport strategy of the NSCs integrates with the wider

distribution of USCG medium endurance cutters, patrol boats and aircraft to ensure the quality of rapid force generation capabilities.

■ **Global Reach.** The range of the ice breakers, NSCs and the high endurance cutters make the USCG's "long range enforcer" platforms suitable for international support. BERTHOLF's deployment through the Taiwan Strait provides an excellent example of this capability. And long-term relocation of smaller units, such as those deployed with Patrol Forces South West Asia (PATFORSWA), display the USCG's ability to build partner capacity far from the homeland.

The USCG's acquisition of the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) will increase both the number of ice breaker hulls and the U.S. ability to maintain presence and project power in the Arctic. The USCG's unique combination of law enforcement, defense and other authorities are critical at the planet's poles. Receding polar ice, increasing natural resource exploration and northern transportation routes are opening a new front in the GPC (e.g., Northwest Passage from Europe to the U.S. West Coast, China's Arctic Road from East Asia to Europe). Critical to the PSC acquisition, the USCG and USN created an integrated program office (IPO) that combine the business acumen of both Services' acquisition corps. Not only will the joint venture provide expanded human capital for the USCG, but the IPO will provide a model of interService collaboration to address GPC challenges.

■ **Coastal Defense.** Over the last decade, the U.S. shale gas and tight oil revolution tipped global energy markets in the United States' favor. The epicenter of the U.S. energy revolution and interface with global markets is the Texas Gulf Coast. Because the majority of foreseeable conflicts associated with the GPC involve disruption of energy markets, the Texas Gulf Coast will be a center of gravity for U.S. economic mobilization. While only DoD can provide certain capabilities (e.g., missile defense, anti-submarine warfare), the USCG is uniquely equipped and based to provide a layered defense to critical infrastructure. In addition, the USCG's law enforcement and maritime inspection authorities will be in great demand to ensure coastal safety. And finally, the USCG must align the Auxiliary for the GPC. While the network of Auxiliaries has many legal limitations, these 26,000 patriots provide 1,800 vessels, 160 aircraft and 1,400 radio facilities to any solution set for the many major challenges associated with large scale mobilization.

■ **Tactical.** The USCG's employment in traditional as well as GPC missions offer numerous opportunities for tactical action that directly support the GPC. For example, during traditional DHS counter-narcotics missions, the USCG



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should use biometric enrollment of criminals to ensure national databases receive maximum intelligence gain. Additionally, the USCG should ensure its platforms are interoperable with DoD helicopters, signal exploitation capabilities and unmanned vehicles. While interoperability may require platform modifications, the tactical ability to receive and husband shared assets dramatically increases the potential of each hull operating independently or in a surface action group.

The Never-Ending Budget Battle

As the national security enterprise shifts its focus to the GPC and invests in “high end” capabilities, competition for budgets will become steeper. And increasing non-discretionary spending (e.g., Social Security and interest on national debt) will consume an ever-larger share of total federal outlays. Ensuring resilience while increasing capability will be difficult for financial managers, but the USCG’s history of success in the face of austerity positions it to excel in the future budgetary environment. Certain strategic thinking can further galvanize the USCG’s status as an “anti-fragile” organization in the face of fiscal pressure.

While an increasing number of COCOMs are expressing interest in global support from USCG assets, the USCG’s logistics support enterprise historically optimized itself for the DHS missions. Though the USCG’s participation in global commitments (e.g., PATFORSWA) make it eligible for overseas contingency operations (OCO) funding, the uncertain nature of OCO funding does not meaningfully factor into life-cycle management strategies for major platforms such as large cutters and airframes. Since COCOMs only provide limited financial support for assets under their operational command, the USCG should be able to participate in DoD’s extensive theater logistics enterprise when supporting Title 10 missions. Codified access to Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) assets and contract vehicles provides the most expeditious means to enhanced platform support while requiring the fewest additional resources. Focused efforts such as cross cataloging of supply parts with the Defense Logistics Information Service-DLA will ensure that there is efficient access to resources when engaged in Title 10 support abroad. For any enduring missions like PATFORSWA, the USCG’s equities must be represented in the Joint Theater Logistics plan.

According to Title 14, when directed to do so, the USCG operates as a Service in the USN. Supporting this law, multiple instructions from the Chief of Naval Operations assign the USN responsibilities to outfit the USCG with equipment that will maximize interoperability with the USN. While the USN prioritizes equipping the USCG in its overall planning, programing and budgeting cycle, USCG technology managers must ensure that their assets remain visible on the budget priority lists of USN program executive offices. With all due political savvy, when USN budgets result in a gap for USCG hulls, USCG stakeholders must ensure that their USN counterparts understand the resulting capability loss for GPC scenarios. Furthermore, the USCG should seek entrepreneurial opportunities to benefit from the USN’s purchasing power on critical technologies with expensive developmental cycles (e.g., Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance equipment and unmanned vehicles).

Critical in all aspects of the GPC, USCG personnel must bring creativity and innovation to every problem set. In order to develop leaders and teams with these attributes, personnel must have access to both traditional as well as agile tools for leader and skill development. Although premier institutions such as the USCG Academy, Training Center Yorktown and Training Center Petaluma will remain bulwarks for formal instruction and standard setting, the USCG also must invest in alternative delivery methods to enable agile skill development.

The USCG’s use of the Defense Acquisition University and the Federal Acquisition Institute provides a model of success for blended online and classroom learning. Not only does the blended approach provide scalable skill development, it leverages existing internet hosting services and investment by DoD to deliver the needed training. The USCG Force Readiness Command should identify other affordable and modular training resources capable of augmenting existing formal instruction programs. The USCG should continue to incentivize the accrual of industry credentials. Civilian certifications such as the Merchant Mariner Credential program and Professional Engineer licensure offer the USCG broad benefits at low cost, and these standards organizations provide enhanced technical credibility for participating individuals and all the Services. Finally, the

USCG should continue to integrate itself with DoD's War Colleges and the National Intelligence University. The joint professional military education and decisive leadership skills accrued at these initiations will prove essential for success in the GPC.

Delivering Outsized Return on Investment

Much has been written about U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) "By, With, Through" approach in the execution of Operation Inherent Resolve, but the USCG has been employing this model successfully and sustainably with its partners in Central and South America for years. While the USCG can learn a great deal from the scale of the successes achieved by CENTCOM, the USCG should confidently advertise its own success in the JIATF counter-narcotics campaign. During steady state operations, the USCG maintains more than 60 bilateral agreements with partner nations to combat transnational criminal organizations (TCO) and counter-proliferation security initiatives. The USCG must continue to build results-driven partner capacity, and dedicate its high-end capabilities to addressing the key vulnerabilities of weak states where TCOs and near peer adversarial powers exert outsized influence.

In addition to direct bilateral agreements, the USCG employs its network of International Port Security Liaison Officers (IPSLO) that represent USCG equities to the Senior Defense Officials at U.S. Embassies abroad. In so doing, the USCG further amplifies the bilateral efforts of the United States in securing the waterways, and it equips the U.S. Department of State to influence countries diplomatically and negotiate appropriate levels of burden sharing. Beyond coordination with diplomats and the U.S. agencies, the IPSLO program offers a means for the USCG to collaborate with international governmental organizations such as the International Criminal Police Organization and the International Atomic Energy Association.

In addition to its involvement with DoD, DHS, IC and inter-agency efforts, the USCG provides critical enablers to the Department of Commerce. The USCG's maintenance of the Marine Transportation System enables the safe movement of \$4.6 trillion of economic activity annually along 25,000 miles of coastal and inland waters. The USCG recapitalization of its inland waterway fleet is under way, but the Service must not merely replace old ships with new ships. The USCG must look for innovative ways to integrate an array of 21st-century technologies to improve the efficiency of operations in our nation's network of rivers. Improved use of information technology, sensor data, radio frequency identification tags and commercially available satellite imagery could all provide asymmetric advantages to the current inland waterway fleet. Additionally, the in-

land waterway fleet could dramatically increase efficiency and reduce operational costs through the employment of unmanned underwater vehicles that help with underwater inspection of aids to navigation, accurately map hazards to navigation and improve awareness of underwater infrastructure health.

Addressing the Critics

Because of the USCG's already complex portfolio, perennial underfunding and concerns over DoD's willingness to drain USCG assets' readiness, some well-intentioned USCG advocates recommend a fundamentalist approach to the USCG's role in U.S. security policy. Specifically, the USCG should focus on its existing and exhausting task list, and force the DoD to handle power projection and management of global security commitments. Absent dramatic increases in long-term funding levels and enhancements to existing infrastructure, significant risk exists that the USCG will be stretched too thin to perform any of its tasks well and will lack resiliency in anything less than optimal scenarios.

While defenders of the status quo present important concerns over budgets, readiness, infrastructure and resiliency, the history of the USCG is replete with evolutionary tales. For example, the name of CGC MUNRO (WMSL-755) pays tribute to USCG World War II Medal of Honor winner Douglas Munro's exploits in the Western Pacific. More recently, the USCG's evolution after Sept. 11, 2001, and incorporation into the DHS reveal the Service's strategic design as a pillar of U.S. maritime policy. Short of an unexpected cataclysm, the mounting pressure of the GPC will define the security needs of the coming decades. In order for the USCG to fulfill its critical role in the U.S. Sea Services, it must remain externally aware of the changing landscape and rapidly adapt in order to fulfill its motto of *Semper Paratus* ("Always Ready").

Conclusion

As the GPC crescendo builds, the USCG must assert its unique contributions in order to maximize its utility to the nation as well as ensure the viability of its long-term investments. However, the ever-increasing assault from the TCOs will continue to require focused attention from the USCG and its interagency partners. Also, beyond the GPC and counter-TCO efforts, the USCG must keep a steady strain on its additional missions such as maintenance of the inland waterways. In order to provide maximum support to U.S. policy in the GPC, the USCG must articulate a precise narrative detailing its strategic competencies for the GPC, develop budgets that provision its existing missions and intended GPC roles and continue to deliver outsized ROI through robust joint and multinational partnerships.

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