

Projecting Presence and Power in the IndoPacific: An Examination of the United States Coast Guard's Contributions to Maritime Security

House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security

September 28, 2023

SPEAKERS:	(R-TEXAS)
REP. CARLOS GIMENEZ (R-FLA.), CHAIRMAN	REP. MARK GREEN (R-TENN.)
REP. CLAY HIGGINS (R-LA.)	REP. SHRI THANEDAR (D-MICH.)
REP. NICK LALOTA (R-N.Y.)	REP. DONALD PAYNE, JR. (D-N.J.)
REP. LAUREL LEE (R-FLA.)	REP. ROBERT GARCIA (D-CALIF.)
DEL. AUMUA AMATACOLEMAN RADEWAGEN (R-A.S.)	REP. BENNIE THOMPSON (D-MISS.)
DEL. JAMES MOYLAN (R-GUAM)	
REP. AUGUST PFLUGER	

WITNESSES:

VICE ADMIRAL ANDREW TIONGSON, Commander, Pacific Area, USCG

BRIG GEN NEIL RICHARDSON, Deputy Director for Strategic Planning and Policy, USINDOPACOM

CAMILLE DAWSON, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Dept of State

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation Maritime Security will come to order. Without objection, the Chair may declare the subcommittee in recess at any point.

Today's hearings will examine how the United States Coast Guard's mission set and unique capabilities advance our nation's goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Without objection, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Pfluger, the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Kim, the gentleman from Guam, Mr. Moylan, and the gentlewoman from American Samoa, Ms. Radewagen are permitted to sit with the subcommittee and ask questions of the witnesses. So ordered. I now recognize Ranking Member Thanedar for the purpose of seeking unanimous consent.

SHRI THANEDAR: Yes. [laughter]

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Ranking, do you have – do you have anybody else that you would like to – to recognize to be able to sit and ask questions?

UNKNOWN: Unanimous consent for Mr. Case to sit to ask questions.

SHRI THANEDAR: Unanimous consent for Mr. Case to ask questions.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: So without objection, so ordered. Without objection, the gentleman from Texas, Mr.

McCaul's statements has been submitted for the record. So ordered. I now recognize myself for an opening statement. Today our subcommittee is discussing the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to the United States national security interests and opportunities for us to operate more effectively in the region.

The Indo-Pacific region spans a huge portion of the globe and includes more than half of the world's population. The waters of the Pacific and Indian Ocean have facilitated global trade for centuries and the shipping lanes through the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea remain critical to today's economy.

Fish stocks in the region oceans continue to provide nourishment to billions of people around the world. The maritime domain drives the region's economies, which together account for 60 percent of global GDP and two thirds of global economic growth. The Indo-Pacific region is crucial not only to overall global economy, but also to the safety, security, and the well-being of American citizens.

The United States is a Pacific nation. Five states, three – three territories, and eight dependencies enjoy direct access to the Pacific Ocean. 80 percent of the United States exclusive economic zone is in the Pacific Ocean.

American businesses utilize access to the world's largest ocean to obtain and deliver goods and services to customers at home and across the globe.

The region is critical to US interests. This is why both the Trump and Biden administrations have promoted the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. To

support this vision we must address the existing challenges facing the region. The **People's Republic of China** presents the most direct challenge to this vision.

With its illegitimate claims over large swaths of the Western Pacific Ocean, the **PRC** is pursuing its own ambitions at the expense of sovereignty of its neighbors and international law. These claims, if accepted, would adversely impact US trade in the region. In 2016, 14 percent of US shipping passed through international waters in the South China Sea. If access to the shipping lanes in the South China Sea was impeded, it would have a significant impact on our economy.

PRC is also continuously disrespecting the sovereignty of countries in the region as its distance water fishing fleet pillages fish stocks in other nations exclusive economic zones. The United States is being adversely impacted by this trend. Illegal fishing by **PRC** vessels is depleting the tuna stocks off the coast of American Samoa, which is having a ruinous effect on the territory's fishing industry.

These fishing fleets also have a wide reputation for – reputation for human rights abuses on their fishing vessels with many crew members reporting physical and verbal abuse and having to work grueling hours without access to sufficient food and water. The **PRC's** malign actions in the region are also facilitating other illegal activities by large and sophisticated transnational criminal organizations.

These trends will undermine the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific and we must address them to realize our vision. The United States Coast Guard plays a critical role in US activity in the Indo-Pacific region. Since this establishment in – in 1790, The US Coast Guard has provided invaluable service to the American people by securing our territorial waters, enforcing our laws at sea, and performing lifesaving missions in our maritime environment.

In the region, Coast Guard vessels patrol the EEZs of the United States and partner nations and Coast Guard personnel on land provide much needed expertise to bolster security and law enforcement capabilities of our allies and partners. The Coast Guard's present – presence in the region strengthens the work also being done by the wider US military, the Department of State, and other federal actors – actors to advance the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

I am grateful that we are joined by a distinguished panel of witnesses who are prepared to speak about this work. Vice Admiral Tiongson– Tiongson. I'm sorry. Is that correct?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Tiongson, sir. Tiongson.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Tiongson. Sorry. Ok. Tiongson. Brigadier General Richardson – did I pronounce that right?

Ok. I'm glad. And Deputy Assistant Secretary Dawson, thank you for testifying before the subcommittee this morning on this important topic. I look forward to your insights and now turn it over to the ranking member for his opening statements.

SHRI THANEDAR: Thank you, Chairman Gimenez, for calling today's hearing and good morning and thank you to our witnesses for sharing their expertise with us here today. The United States Coast Guard faces tremendous challenges in the wide open waters of the Indo-Pacific from limited resources and expanding demands on their mission to aggression for malign state actors and a changing climate.

But the Coast Guard is also well positioned to partner with the State Department, the Department of Defense, and allied nations in the region to support diplomacy, disaster relief, search and rescue operations, and law enforcement to uphold the rules based international order in the Indo-Pacific. I'm eager to hear from our witnesses today on how the Coast Guard can best support diplomatic solutions to counter aggression and lawlessness from the **People's Republic of China** and other nations that violate international sovereignty and global law, including through partnership with other large nations like the country I was born in, India.

I'm also interested to learn more about how the Coast Guard is best positioned to assist small island nations in the Indo-Pacific to invest in a climate resilient future and safeguard their own maritime sovereignty. The **Chinese** fishing fleet has shown alarming disregard for the law and threatens the fishing stock that is vital to many nations and families across the region.

One thing is certain, with a government shutdown only days away, Congress must act immediately to ensure operations in the Indo-Pacific and around the globe are fully funded for this fiscal year. Our national security and the livelihoods of millions of Americans depend on us this week, and we cannot fail them.

The uncertainty created by the right wing Republicans harkens back to the 2019 shutdown that left Coast Guard members working without pay for weeks. We must respect the sacrifice and service of our military families and provide them the paychecks they earn. Thank you again to, Chairman Gimenez, and to all of our witnesses.

I yield back.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Thank you to the Ranking Member. Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. Again, I am pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this critical topic. I ask that our witnesses please rise and raise their right hands.

Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you will give before the House, the Committee on Homeland Security of the United States House of Representatives will be the truth, the whole truth,, and nothing, but the truth.

So help you God. Let the record reflect that the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Thank you and please be seated. I'd like to formally introduce our witnesses, vice – Vice Admiral Andrew Tiongson – sorry -serves as the Operational Commander for the United States Coast Guard Pacific Area, Brigadier General Neil Richardson serves as the Deputy Director for Strategic Planning and Policy for the United States Indo-Pacific Command.

Ms. Camille Dawson serves as the State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. I thank each of our distinguished guests for being here today and I recognize Vice Admiral – Vice Admiral Tiongson for five minutes to summarize his opening statements.

ANDREW TIONGSON: Good morning, Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and members of the committee. I am honored to be – to appear here before you today to discuss the United States Coast Guard's work to advance the United States strategy for the Indo-Pacific region as a trusted partner. First, I want to thank you for your strong support of the Coast Guard, a key component of the Department of Homeland Security.

Continued Congressional support enables our service to protect the homeland save lives, preserve the sustainability of our oceans, and strengthen regional and national stability to – to combat transnational maritime threats. My written testimony has been provided to the committee and I ask that it be entered into the record.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: So ordered.

ANDREW TIONGSON: Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, the Coast Guard operates on all seven continents and throughout the homeland. Our workforce embodies our distinct value proposition, maritime governance. We protect, defend, and save those who live and work on the sea, we protect the sea itself, and we support the rule of law.

The Coast Guard serves a nation whose economic prosperity and national security rely on free and open oceans. The Coast Guard's Pacific area encompasses 74,000,000 square miles of ocean, more than half of the world's population, and 77 countries. Within this area are three of the five largest global economies through which nearly \$4 trillion in annual maritime commerce flow.

This area includes eight of the ten largest US trading partners, seven of the world's ten largest militaries, and 80 percent of the United States exclusive

economic zone. Regional partners are challenged by malign activities on the sea. Impacts to vital fish stocks from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing threaten worldwide protein security, an existential threat to many Pacific Island nations.

Threats to global supply chains and infrastructure pose a risk to trillions of dollars in economic activity, while these same risks pose the potential to disrupt prosperity, stability, and freedom of navigation. Natural disasters exacerbated by a changing climate and rising sea levels also threaten fragile economies and ecosystems.

This complex maritime environment requires governance by, with, and through trusted partnerships that enable prioritization of limited resources and sustained multilateral efforts to counter the most critical threats and challenges. The Coast Guard supports partner nations in developing legal frameworks and capacity to protect their sovereign rights.

We model good governance through our operational approach. We must always see threats and challenges through our partners' eyes and strive to meet them where they are with what they need. Our highly visible white ships with orange racing stripes allow us to demonstrate maritime governance wherever we go. In last year -in the last year alone, the Coast Guard participated in exercises with our partners across the Indo-Pacific, deployed advisors during the motor vessel Princess Empress large scale oil spill response, and regularly provided search and rescue technical assistance and security and law enforcement training to partner nations.

Our efforts to uphold and build sound maritime governance in the Indo-Pacific focuses on countering malign activities. These activities erode the customary balance between coastal state rights, freedom of navigation, and lawful use of the high seas. We aim to bolster the capacity of likeminded nations to do the same and reinforce our position as a trusted partner.

Again, thank you for Congress's continued support and for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Thank you, Vice-Admiral Tiongson. I now recognize Brigadier General Richardson for five minutes to summarize his opening statement.

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the US Coast Guard's critical role in support of the INDOPACOM mission. On behalf of Admiral Aquilino, I'd like to thank you for your continuous support to the men and women of US INDOPACOM and their families.

Your support is instrumental to our ability to accomplish our missions every day. The Indo-Pacific is the most consequential region in the world, encompassing more than half of the world's population, the busiest maritime trade routes, and key allies and partners. It is also the epicenter for great power competition with the **People's Republic of China**.

Ensuring stability and security in the Indo-Pacific is not only vital for maintaining a regional peace, but also for global commerce and safeguarding American interests. The US Coast Guard and INDOPACOM work together every day to prevent conflict in this region. INDOPACOM is dedicated to preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific where nations can thrive economically and maintain their sovereignty without external coercion.

Foundational to our approach is a campaign of integrated deterrence in which we use our military tools in concert with all instruments of national power to convince potential aggressors that they cannot achieve their objectives through force. US forces must be postured and operating in the right places, with the right capabilities, at the right time, and executing the right missions alongside the likeminded allies and partners to deliver integrated deterrence, and if deterrence fails, prevail in conflict.

The Indo-Pacific region has many nations with military that performs Coast Guard duties or law enforcement agencies in place of militaries. The US Coast Guard's dual role as both a law enforcement agency and a military service makes it an ideal tool for capacity building and outreach to these nations. The Coast Guard's collaboration with these allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific fosters regional cooperation and strengthens the US network of likeminded nations.

The US Coast Guard's versatility as well as unique capabilities and authorities make it well suited to address a wide range of challenges in the region, many of which are high priorities to our allies and partners, including maritime security, law enforcement, and environmental protection in support of the INDOPACOM mission.

Simply put, the Coast Guard is frequently the right force, in the right place, at the right time, with the right capabilities. I have seen firsthand the utility of the Coast Guard during a recent visit to Oceania where our partners expressed an insatiable appetite for increased presence, activities, and training with the US Coast Guard.

As you know, presence matters. And the Coast Guard's presence in the Indo-Pacific sends a strong message that the United States is committed to upholding the rules based international order. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated, or IUU, fishing is a major threat to marine sources and the economies of many of our partners in the Indo-Pacific.

The Coast Guard works closely with our allies and partners to combat IUU fishing through surveillance, enforcement, and building partner capacity. This allows the Coast Guard to help enforce and maintain international law and support partner nations' sovereignty. This is especially critical in the Indo-Pacific where many distant water fishing fleets are common and the Pacific island countries often lack the capacity to detect and interdict these vessels on their own.

Similarly, bilateral law enforcement agreements allow for the exchange of ship riders between the United States and partner nations, permitting partner law enforcement personnel to embark on Coast Guard vessels and aircraft to enforce their laws and vice versa. These agreements allow the Coast Guard to work more effectively with partners in the region to enforce applicable national laws, combat illegal activity on the high seas and in the waters under the jurisdiction of our partners, and build maritime law enforcement capacity in those partner nations.

Additionally, the Coast Guard's capabilities and responsibility for environmental protection and disaster response aligns with ally and partner priorities. Many allies and partners in the region consider climate change to be the single greatest threat to their livelihoods, security, and well-being. By enforcing environmental regulations and responding to pollution incidents and natural disasters, the Coast Guard helps to preserve and – the delicate marine ecosystem of many Indo-Pacific nations and contributes to the sustainable development of the region, which is essential to long term stability.

A whole of government approach is essential to succeed in the Indo-Pacific strategy and in our competition with the **PRC**. The Coast Guard's contributions to the – to INDOPACOM are an integral part of this effort. Its versatility, cooperative relationship with allies and partners, and ability to promote maritime security and the rules based order make it an invaluable asset in the region.

INDOPACOM supports strong and robust funding and resourcing for the Coast Guard to ensure it can continue and where possible grow its valuable contributions to peace and security throughout the region. Finally, as we navigate the complex challenges of the Indo-Pacific, let us not forget the steadfast service of the Coast Guard personnel who work to ensure that the seas remain safe, secure, and open for all.

Their dedication is a testament to the United States enduring commitment to a prosperous and peaceful IndoPacific for generations to come. Sir, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Thank you, General Richardson. And I recognize Ms. Dawson for five minutes to

summarize her opening statements.

CAMILLE DAWSON: 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 US maritime security interests in the Indo-Pacific. As we are all aware, the Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges, particularly from the **People's Republic of China**.

The **PRC's** coercion and provocations span the globe, but they are 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.

We are taking a range of measures to address these challenges. At the same time, our approach to the region is about much more than just one country. Our approach is driven by the Indo-Pacific strategy, our shared affirmative vision for a region that is free and open and evermore connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient.

We work through a whole of society and whole of government approach in close coordination with our colleagues across the interagency, including the Coast Guard, INDOPACOM, and others in the 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. One, diplomacy to promote respect for international law and the rules based order; two, capacity building programs for the region's maritime law enforcement agencies and militaries; and three, our operations to demonstrate that all countries can fly, sail, and operate anywhere.

That international law allows close cooperation with likeminded 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. We work through multilateral architecture such as ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum in the Indian Ocean Rim Association, as well as newer flexible arrangements such as the Quad, AUKUS, Partners in the Blue Pacific, trilateral cooperation with the Republic of Korea and Japan, and with the Philippines in Japan, and the US Indo – US-EU Indo-Pacific consultations.

We have taken steps to advance our maritime security objectives through activities such as implementing the Indo-Pacific – the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, conducting the first ever joint USEU naval exercise in March this year, and strengthening our diplomatic presence by opening additional embassies and expanding our staffing in the Pacific Islands.

We have also used public diplomacy and legal diplomacy to advance maritime

security goals. One example of this is State Department attorneys briefing government scholars and thought leaders around the world using the Department of State's Limits in the Seas publication to counter the PRC's unlawful maritime claims in the South China Seas.

Capacity building is also central to our efforts, both as a development tool and a way to build and maintain relationships, and we appreciate our strong collaboration with Congress on this priority. In FY 2022, State's Bureau of Political Military Affairs provided \$286 million in security assistance to the Indo-Pacific region, much of which had a maritime security focus.

State and the Coast Guard also pursue bilateral maritime law enforcement agreements to counter illicit transnational maritime activities, including IUU fishing and the trafficking of humans, wildlife, arms, and drugs, including fentanyl. The most recent maritime law enforcement agreement in the region was with Papua New Guinea which entered into force in August.

These examples, though not exhaustive, highlight our approach to leverage our expertise, resources, and networks to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific region, promote US maritime security interest, and deter PRC efforts to undermine the regional order for its own gain. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering questions and those of members of the subcommittee.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Thank you, Ms. Dawson. Members will be recognized in order of seniority for their five minutes of questioning. I will go a little bit out of order and ask for consent to allow the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, to go first. He has – he needs to go to another hearing.

CLAY HIGGINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the indulgence. Gentlemen, ma'am, we'll be moving quickly during my five minutes of questioning here. Admiral Tiongson, General Richardson, and Secretary Dawson, some of my inquiries are directed at all of you and I thank you for – for being here today. We're focused on the United States Coast Guard engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

And – and overall, I'd like to address America's need for enhanced presence in the region in order to maintain the growing potentials for economic stability and growth and to hedge against the threat of military conflict and China's influence in the region. So as it relates to our discussion today, China is a key factor.

And I think we all acknowledge that. This is the – this is the balance that we seek to invest American treasure effectively, efficiently, appropriately in order to counter the growing threat of China, both militarily and through economic oppression or interference in the area. The United States Coast Guard has a very important role to play there as does the Air Force and the United States Navy.

So I'd like to – to ask you all to – to give me your – your considered response regarding shipbuilding as it relates to your – your plan moving forward in the larger strategic considerations and planning for what the next decade looks like in the Indo-Pacific region. I have done a tremendous amount of work with – with your – with your counterparts and colleagues in the United States Navy, both in uniform and in the civilian realm, ma'am, regarding shipbuilding and what the larger mission is in the Pacific, and there's a growing concern about the United States government stepping away from the – from the long established historical success of – of using smaller shipyards across the country who have proven to be very responsive and efficient and flexible with regards to providing vessels for the United States Navy, United States Coast Guard in order to accomplish changing mission parameters.

As opposed to doing business increasingly with – with large, internationally owned shipyards that sometimes even have direct ties to **China**, including partnerships with **China**. This is a concern for the United States government to step away from a long proven and successful relationship with many smaller shipyards across the country to provide the vessels that we need and – and slide towards coordinating the – the construction of those vessels and funding the construction of those vessels with huge mass of international corporation shipyards that sometimes have heavy ties with **China**.

This is a concern. We believe that that American vessels should be built in American owned shipyards with American technology, American engineering, and American workforce. I have shipyards in south Louisiana, Bollinger Shipyards has delivered its 180th vessel to the United States Coast Guard over 35 year period.

That's another fast response cutter. I have a shipyard named Metal Shark. They have an international footprint, do a lot of business with the government. They're building vessels for Bangladesh and Vietnam through the United States government protocols and parameters and laws. So I would like all of you to please respond briefly to – to my concern and know that – that my office and all of my colleagues stand with you to move forward with this vision.

Admiral?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We are very grateful for the administration and Congress' support in our recapitalization efforts. As you know, we are in the middle of recapitalizing our fleets of vessels. We have national security cutters that have been supported throughout the administration and Congress. We have our two highest priority acquisitions right now being supported, the offshore patrol cutter and the polar security cutter as well.

And sure, as you – as you mentioned, our fast response cutters are being built and coming out right now out of Louisiana. That's excellent support for our recapitalization efforts to put those ships throughout the world where our

demand is, where there's demand for the Coast Guard.

CLAY HIGGINS: I thank the Admiral for your answer. My time has expired. Mr. Chairman, perhaps the General and Ms. Dawson will be able to provide answers to – to my questions in writing after the – after the hearing.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: The gentleman's time has expired. I now recognize the Ranking Member from Michigan, Mr.

Thanedar.

SHRI THANEDAR: Thank you, Chairman Gimenez. Without immediate action, government funding will run out on Saturday at 11:59 pm. In recent years, Coast Guard members and other government employees have suffered because of dysfunctional Republican spending fights. Admiral, how would a lapse in appropriations

affect the Coast Guard's readiness in the Pacific area?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Sir, first, our top priorities during a lapse in appropriation would be those missions that support national security and the safety of – of people as – as well as property. What that means is accepted missions would include things like search and rescue, counter drug mission, illegal migration operations, defense readiness.

The operations that we are conducting within the Indo-Pacific fall under the defense readiness heading. So we would continue to do that. As you recalled in 2019, the Coast Guard was not funded. We were not funded for 35 days. And what that means in the Indo-Pacific is your ships will be deployed and Coast Guard members will not be receiving paychecks.

That will clearly have a morale issue on them as well as impacts to their families and longer impacts in terms of recruiting and retention.

SHRI THANEDAR: Thank you. Ms. Dawson, what kind of effect does regular uncertainty about government funding have on diplomatic relationships in the Pacific and across the globe?

CAMILLE DAWSON: Thank you for the question. So what I would say is that it directly impacts our ability to engage in critical face to face diplomacy. Additionally, we know what the **PRC** narrative is about the United States, what they are trying to push in their public messaging, and that is that the United States is unstable and unreliable.

And a government shut down unfortunately reinforces the **PRC's** narrative in that regard.

SHRI THANEDAR: Thank you. And as an Indian immigrant given today's topic, I'm also interested in the relationship the United States has with India when it comes to maritime security efforts. For all of the witnesses, what efforts do your agencies make to work with India to advance partnership and security in the maritime environment?

ANDREW TIONGSON: I would describe the US Coast Guard's relationship with India as a budding relationship.

We work on international forward together. I would say the Quad, I would also reflect to the Regional Cooperative Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery, ReCAAP. We work with them there as well.

We work with India in shipboard exchanges.

We work with India in training and exercises for maritime law enforcement. In addition to that, I personally am going to be going to India here to strengthen our relationship within the next few months.

SHRI THANEDAR: And finally, the climate change. How does that rep – climate change represents an existential threat across the Indo-Pacific, particularly for low lying and small island nations? Admiral, what effect has the US CG seen from the changing climate in the region already? How are you prepared for worsening climate conditions in the future?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We are definitely seeing types of catastrophic events caused by either climate change or sea level rise. So for example just recently there was a drought in one of the Pacific Island nations of which we worked very closely with our State Department personnel or partners as well as the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance and provided aid to that country.

Additionally, what we do is we provide training in subject matter expertise on how to deal with those types of disasters and humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

SHRI THANEDAR: Thank you so much. My time is up, so I yield back, Chairman.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Gentleman's time is up. And I would hope that the – the my colleagues from across the aisle and on the Democrat side will join the 98 percent of the Republicans who will vote for a continuing resolution at the end of this week so that we don't have a government shutdown. We are – we're in agreement, we don't need to have a government shutdown.

Let's see how many of the Democrats will vote for our continuing resolution. My questions are – questions are about the area of the Second Thomas Shoal.

Admiral, do we – do we patrol there? Do we have a presence there? I personally was – was there about – about a month ago and I saw the activity was happening.

I believe the ship that's called the Sierra Madre, that's – that's on the Second Thomas Shoal and much to my –

my chagrin, I saw a – a **Chinese Coast Guard** cutter there and I saw a – a **Chinese** frigate – I think it was a frigate – there. Do we have any presence in that area? The United States Coast Guard have a presence there?

And then what are your activities there and what do you do there?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We have an outstanding relationship with the Philippine Coast Guard. We do patrol in areas in and around the Philippines, all of that run and coordinated with our DOD friends from the Seventh Fleet. What we do with the Philippines is we prepare their force to – to go ahead and put forth their sovereignty and enforce their sovereignty.

We do that through maritime law enforcement and security training. In fact, in the Philippines that is our – our largest security assistance program that we have. In just a couple of weeks ago or within the last couple of weeks, we opened up an entire training center for those types of efforts as well as how to maintain their equipment and things of that nature.

Our relationship is extremely strong and I have personally engaged with the commandant of the Philippine Coast Guard to always ask what else can we do for you to help you prepare to go out there and enforce your sovereignty.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: The **Chinese** have also built some manmade islands out there that – from what we saw had radar sites. It looked like maybe even anti-aircraft sites. And – and they act as if somehow they own the place.

Do we recognize that? Do we patrol those areas? Or do we make sure that shipping is allowed to – to progress through those – that area without being challenged by the **PRC**?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Sir, we work with several nations in and about that region, all likeminded partners that are interested in maritime governance. And frankly, maritime governance is the key to what's going on here. We want to bolster our partners' capacity and capability to push forth their sovereign rights in all different facets.

So if it's transiting their waters or if it's fisheries, the illegal, unreported, unregulated fisheries, we want to help them to do that to the best of our ability.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Have you seen a rise in the intimidation by the **PRC**,

by the CCP towards other nations in the area?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We have – we have certainly seen a rise in that type of aggression from actors like the **China** Coast Guard and we have worked again with our partners to how do you – how do you go about and push your sovereignty forward and defend yourself while that is happening.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Ok. Very good. But again, do we have a presence there? I know you say you work with our partners, but do you – do the United States Coast Guard actually have a presence there to show that we're undeterred by – by **Chinese** aggression, by **Chinese** intimidation, their claims – their illegal claims of sovereignty over some of these islands and the areas around them, their illegal claim to sovereignty over the Second Thomas Shoal.

Do we have a presence there to say that, no, we do not recognize your claims to this and we're here and – and we're here to stay? Do we do that?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We have – over the last year, we've actually had three of our national security cutters deployed into the region to work very closely through INDOPACOM in Seventh Fleet. Right now, we have a national security cutter in the region as we speak. The other way we get about in our regions is through fast response cutters, smaller vessels that work in the Oceania part of the Indo-Pacific.

And there is – there are four additional fast response cutters that are on our unfunded priority -

CARLOS GIMENEZ: I've only got 25 seconds and I need to get this answered. What is the greatest existential threat in the area? Is it climate change or is it the **PRC**?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Talking to many of our partners, our partners' top things are climate change followed -followed by fisheries.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: By fisheries, not the **PRC**?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Followed by fisheries and those malign actors that go ahead and steal their sovereign

food and rights and those types of things. A lot caused by the -

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Is that your personal opinion too or is that your partner's personal opinion?

ANDREW TIONGSON: That is what I have heard through talking -

CARLOS GIMENEZ: I'm asking your personal opinion. What's your personal

opinion?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Sir, my – my personal opinion is that it is – it is – it is about maritime governance and how that breaks down sovereignty of the various nations and what we're trying to do is help bolster that maritime governance.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Fair enough. My time is up. I now recognize the – the gentlewoman from – from American Samoa, Ms. Radewagen. Radewagen? Radewagen?

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: Radewagen.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Yes, there we go.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: [untranslated] and good morning. I want to thank Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thanedar and – for inviting me to participate in today's hearing on the Coast Guard's role in the Pacific, my home district. The Coast Guard is one of the most important and effective tools in that the United States has in countering the **PRC's** malign influence in Pacific waters.

And noting what General Richardson just said – I – said, I can – I can say that everywhere I go in the IndoPacific their leaders tell me the two things they want most are Coast Guard and Peace Corps. But in fact, many Pacific Island leaders have asked me also about the ship rider program, but here we are, we arrive at the crux of the problem, resourcing.

American Samoa is the only US jurisdiction south of the equator and we are a gateway to the South Pacific with the best deep water port within 2,500 miles. Admiral Tiongson, thank you for all you do in the Pacific. Can you tell me how many cutters – you mentioned part of it earlier, how many cutters you have patrolling the South Pacific, including US territorial waters and the compact EEZs?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We have three fast response cutters that are stationed in Guam, a buoy tender that is stationed in Guam. These patrol routinely in the region, but it is episodic at best in the presence that they provide.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: Thank you. So it sounds like that is the only territorial waters where the Coast Guard has these vessels, Guam?

ANDREW TIONGSON: They patrol throughout that entire region of Oceania. I am grateful for the support of Congress and the administration on what is called an Indo-Pacific support cutter that we will have this this fall, this winter time frame who will be stationed out of Hawaii. It will also patrol that

area providing subject matter expert exchanges with the various nations as well as sometimes conducting illegal, unreported, unregulated fisheries enforcement.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: Thank you. As a follow up, at present, do you have the ability to effectively counter IUU fishing in the South Pacific? I mean, I'll be honest, Admiral, American Samoa needs a permanent Coast Guard presence to counter **PRC** IUU fishing. They have been in American Samoa's EEZ. Ok. So what additional resources does the Coast Guard need to meet current operational requirements in District 14?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We – I just – I just mentioned that it's episodic type of presence. What we need to do to continue to be a trusted partner is improve our presence there. The FY '24 budget has four fast response cutters on our unfunded priorities list. Those four FRCs will increase that presence and provide more of the IUU fishery enforcement that you are talking about.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Gentlewoman yields her time back. I now recognize the gentleman from Guam, Mr. Moylan.

JAMES MOYLAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you to the panel members for allowing me to waive in for this hearing. I appreciate the chance to hear from this distinguished witness panel and – and have a chance to

get to record the importancy of the presence of the US Coast Guard in the South Pacific. Whether it be for patrolling our waters, training how like Coast Guard detachments.

or performing search and rescue operations, the Coast Guard's ability to act like a Swiss Army knife is essential to carrying out a wide variety of necessary mission across the blue continent. First question, General Richardson, Guam is 4,000 miles from Hawaii, 6,000 miles from California, and 8,000 miles from Washington DC. One thing we discuss a lot in the islands is the tyranny of distance.

I wonder briefly very briefly, you can elaborate on how that affects planning and logistics for all INDOPACOM operations.

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Thank you, sir, for the question. As you know, Guam and its 170,000 American citizens is essential to US security and we take that seriously. Guam is also critical for the staging and deploying of forces west of the International Dateline and throughout the region to deliver combat credible and integrated deterrence.

In General Aquilino sees the initiative approach, the idea is to pool assets and

people forces west of the international dateline to – to cut the transit time, to cut the response time, to be able to support and defend in that area. With that, the logistics and the planning would also follow. So we do expect to see some decrease in that.

But as you mentioned earlier, distance there, it's all water, so it's either naval or air assets that have to – to support that.

JAMES MOYLAN:: Thank you, General. Vice Admiral, if you were informed that the Coast Guard was going to receive increase in your budget, what additional resources do you feel would help you most specifically in the Pacific region then and in general across your areas of responsibility? Briefly please.

ANDREW TIONGSON: Briefly answer the questions. I mentioned the unfunded priorities list that we have with four FRCs that are on that list. There is also one maritime patrol aircraft that's on that list. Those types of things, coupled with the potential of a second of these Indo-Pacific support cutters would help increase our presence towards being a trusted partner.

JAMES MOYLAN:: Thank you. So basically the six cutters are not enough to cover the nautical area equivalent to the size of the continental United States. All right. Thank you. As a follow up, as I said earlier my question, Guam is 4,000 miles away from Hawaii and I'm an advocate for having decision makers as close to the ground as possible because only there can they get the holistic view necessary to do the job to the best of their ability.

So Vice Admiral, do you think that the Coast Guard's District 14 headquarters in Hawaii is close enough to Guam and the South Pacific Islands to ensure adequate distribution of resources?

ANDREW TIONGSON: As you know, the D14 headquarters is there, but there is also a sector Guam and patrol forces Micronesia right there in Guam. And with all of those things, I do believe it is enough to provide that support that's necessary. What we need is more assets like those FRCs to provide more persistent presence.

JAMES MOYLAN:: Thank you. Next question, Ms. Dawson, in recent years State has neglected the Pacific Islands to the detriment of our relationship in the region. Currently, there is no bureau for the Pacific Islands at State, instead, they are under the East Asia Bureau, which also handles **China**, Japan, as well as North and South Korea.

The East Asian Bureau is clearly in dire need of restructuring. Why hasn't the Department of State organized a bureau for the Pacific Islands and shown the reason – region the focus necessary to ensure our relationships are properly maintained?

CAMILLE DAWSON: Thank you for the question. So the – the bureau is actually the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and we do have an office specifically focused on Oceania, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands is the name of the office. We have a deputy assistant secretary with oversight of our work in the Pacific Islands.

And I would note that in just the past two years, we have seen a huge increase in the attention and focus of the administration to the Pacific Islands. Just this week, the White House hosted a summit with the Pacific Islands Forum. And we have, as I'm sure you are all tracking, opened new embassies in the Pacific Islands,

opened two new embassies this year –**JAMES MOYLAN:** Thank you. Ms. Dawson, I'm sorry, shortness of time, but basically let's not group the Pacific Islands along with **China**, Japan, North and South Korea. Let's have that our own island – these groups together as one – as we continue to do the work of the administration. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Gentleman yields back. We have time for a second round and I now recognize the Ranking Member from Michigan, Mr. Thanedar.

SHRI THANEDAR: Thank you, Chairman. The climate change represents the greatest existential threat to small Pacific island nations facing rising sea levels and depletion – depleting fishing stock. The Coast Guard and its partners must be prepared for the security ramifications of a changing climate in the Indo-Pacific.

My question to Ms. Dawson is how does climate change factors into the diplomatic work the United States is doing in the region and how will climate change continue to affect strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific in the future?

CAMILLE DAWSON: Thank you. So we start with conversations with partners and allies, that is really the heart of our diplomatic work, and in those conversations we ask countries, what are your greatest needs? How can we partner with you most effectively. And very frequently, it is about climate change. They are asking for solutions to address the challenges presented by climate change.

So we are working through not only our bilateral relationships to provide assistance where feasible, but also through multilateral engagements including the Quad and other arrangements. So we ask countries to identify their most pressing needs and then collectively with likeminded countries we are seeking to find the ways that we can most effectively address those needs and bring the required resources to bear.

SHRI THANEDAR: All right. Thank you, Ms. Dawson. And Mr. Chair, I

yield back.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Gentleman yields back. And I recognize myself for another five minutes. No – I don't know who – who – who will answer this. Fishing – the fishing stocks there in the Pacific, not only there in the South Pacific, but also in the Eastern Pacific. I know that's maybe outside of your realm, but I – tell me about the problem of fishing and illegal fishing, and who's conducting it, and how much of the fish stock is being depleted because of the activity of illegal fishing and the fishing fleets, you know, around the Pacific?

If you have any estimation and I don't know who can answer that, probably you, Vice Admiral, if you could do that for me, I appreciate it.

ANDREW TIONGSON: Sure. You mentioned the Eastern Pacific and fishery stocks. As we speak, I have two -two cutters that are in the Eastern Pacific right now conducting IUU fisheries, high seas boardings, and inspections. We do that underneath the auspices of the Regional Fisheries Management Organization. This particular one is a South Pacific one.

We are conducting those operations. That fleet is usually around anywhere from 350 to 600 fishing vessels.

They are vessels that are – are **Chinese** vessels and they bring all kinds of problem sets into that region. First, they're – they're fishing in the waters Ecuador's – Ecuador and taking away and displacing Ecuador's fishermen from that.

Those fishermen have – have to find other types of livelihoods. They usually are associated with things like forced labor and human smuggling. They could also be associated with environmental causes, a lot of their trash and ware that's on those ships just gets tossed right into the oceans, wrecking our pristine areas throughout the world.

There's a lot with IUU fishing. We are enforcing those as we speak in the east – East Pac, as you mentioned, that is within my AOR.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Would you – would you characterize the **Chinese** fishing fleets in the Eastern Pacific and probably all around the Pacific as having a devastating effect on fish stocks in the Pacific?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Throughout this Pacific, I would say throughout the world.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Throughout the world. And because what do they do? They just – they don't care about quotas, they don't care about the numbers, they just fish. And I guess, look, the problem with – with the CCP

and the **PRC** is that they are – they are food dependent. They need 30 percent – 30 percent of their – they’re 30 percent short on – on food independence.

And so they go around the world – and fish is one of the staple foods. So they go around the world and they fish. But the way they do it, do you think that it’s – it’s reckless? Do you think that it – it poses a threat to world fish – fisheries around the world?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Absolutely. It is depleting fishery stocks, it is – it is robbing sovereign nations of their economies as well as their protein source. And this is a problem of which the United States Coast Guard through our – our illegal, unreported, unregulated fishery strategy, they say we’re going to try to take the lead of this and work our way with many other interagency players and partner nations to get after this.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Now somebody said something about climate change and fisheries. What’s causing a more devastating effect, climate change or human activity?

ANDREW TIONGSON: I am certainly not – not an expert on all of those sciences. What I can mention is that some places even in and around the United States, say up in the Alaska region, what we see is fisheries moving – fisheries stocks moving further north for colder water.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Interesting. Ok. That’s – that’s all I have for now. I now recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Pfluger, for five minutes.

AUGUST PFLUGER:: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the ability to – to waive on a very important topic. Thank the witnesses for being here for your service. This hearing, it really couldn’t be more timely in the Indo-Pacific region, obviously valuable to our national security and in a time of increased aggression from adversaries like the **Chinese Communist Party** as well as the – Putin’s regime, the United States must be patient in our advances and maintain our ability to project all different types of instruments of power.

And additionally, the US Coast Guard recently announced that they will increase the number of maritime patrols and training operations in the Indo-Pacific, which I believe is – is good. Since the shift from countering violent extremism in our national security and national defense strategies to more of a great power competition, Russia has used private military companies to illegally seize territories, the **PRC** is employing coercive economic practices through their Belt and Road Initiative.

We see this playing out all throughout the world, not just in the Indo-Pacific, but I think the epicenter of it is in the Indo-Pacific. I happened to spend a large amount of time in my career in the Indo-Pacific at Kadena Air Base and had a

front row seat early in the stages of this desire to not just be a regional hegemon, but also to -to have a more global impact, which I think that they are rightly doing.

And General Richardson, I want to start with you. In your testimony, you say it's going to take a whole of government approach. And in addition to what the maritime strategy is, in addition to what air power is doing, talk to me about what that whole of government approach looks like and notably where are we falling short on that whole of government approach.

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Thank you, sir, and appreciate the question. The whole of government approach, as has been mentioned in this forum so far, really it starts with diplomacy. As we work through the diplomacy, then we can use the other instruments of national power as well, which is where the Coast Guard is a valuable partner comes into that discussion.

And this is mostly in the – the Micronesia, Oceania area that I'll refer to here initially. Because of those small nations and their inability to create a navy, an army, and air force, in many cases, most of those don't have air forces, their navies more represent the Coast Guard and so they're a key player in that.

From the DOD perspective, you know, we need to have a persistent presence in the area at all times. So again, going back to Admiral Aquilino's sees the initiative approach, pulling assets and personnel west of the international dateline to create that persistent presence through exercises and operations is key to what we do to counter the malign influence of the **PRC**.

AUGUST PFLUGER: We recently sent a letter from a caucus that we have called the MACH 1 Caucus about the concerns of having a lack of air power at Kadena Air Base, in particular, a place that I am familiar with. Can you update me on the permanent presence of a fighter presence there at Kadena to have what you just mentioned,

which is presence?

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Yes, sir. It is my understanding that we still have the – probably the same that you saw when you were there. I believe it's about 48 of the F-15s and a number of KC-135s in the area.

AUGUST PFLUGER: So is there a plan to pull those F-15s out as was mentioned in the fiscal '22 budget request from DOD?

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Sir, I believe that the Air Force does have some plans to rebuild the force from – from those terms, but I can't speak specifically to what the number will be into the future.

AUGUST PFLUGER: Sorry to keep on with you here. In your testimony, you mentioned that many of our partners and allies see climate change as the number one existential threat. Is that a view that is shared by the DOD?

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Sir, just exactly what I said, when we speak to the – to the nations themselves, they share that as one of their number one security threats. From the DOD perspective, we are focused on all of the threats, but primarily we're still focused on the **PRC** as our pacing threat and will continue to go – go after that.

AUGUST PFLUGER: I hope that we will stay focused on the **PRC**. If you're **Xi Jinping** and you're looking at the vulnerabilities that we have right now, and I appreciate the presence that you guys bring to this region, you're looking for signs of weakness. And I think that we don't have to get into the discussion of my own personal views of the weakness that we have displayed over the last couple of years.

But you guys are standing in the gap, the Coast Guard, the Blue Water Navy, the Air Force, the air power, the triad that we have to hold these threats accountable and to deter. We're in a very tough time right now. I don't have to tell you that. This is your profession. I'm very worried about this region.

And I hope that any discussion of climate change or things that would distract us away from what the **PRC** intends to do, which is to reunify Taiwan with **China**, and that is a stated goal of **Xi Jinping**, I hope that we will focus on that and focus on the threat and keep our heads down to deter so that we don't get into a bad situation.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to go a little bit over time. I yield back.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Gentleman yields back. Ms. Radewagen do you – do you want another round of questions?

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Ok. I recognize the gentlelady from the American Samoa.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: So Admiral Tiongson, what types and numbers of cutters would be needed to prevent a large fishing fleet of like the 300 fishing ships seen in the waters around the Galapagos Islands back in 2020?

ANDREW TIONGSON: That is the same exact fishing fleet that I was just speaking about. So as I mentioned -

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: That'll do the job?

ANDREW TIONGSON: I'm sorry, ma'am.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: And you think that'll do the job? What you mentioned.

ANDREW TIONGSON: I think what we have done over time is we have become very good at working with our interagency partners and collecting the intelligence that enables us to go ahead and target vessels -

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: So that's a yes. Thank you. So as a follow up, what existing information and coordination mechanisms do you have in place to mitigate your force shortfalls and other regional allies like Australia, France, and New Zealand? And what is needed to better utilize these partnerships in safeguarding our own waters in the Pacific?

Yes, Admiral. If the other two want to jump in, feel free.

ANDREW TIONGSON: We work very closely with the Australians and the other countries that you mentioned.

We share information back and forth. For example, in Australia, we have an attache that's there in – and within their joint forces, we have a liaison officer that keeps us abreast of all of their types of operations and all of the

operations that we're running.

We share that information back and forth.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: Thank you. And Admiral, following up on the Chairman's earlier question, what is the estimated value of fish stocks in ours and other compact waters? And what do our island and waterfront communities tell you that is needed to safeguard their livelihoods?

ANDREW TIONGSON: What they need is presence and they need help from the Coast Guard and through the bilaterals that you – you spoke of earlier, our bilateral ship rider agreements. We're able to do that because of -they do not – they may not have the capacity and/or the resources to do their own sovereignty. We do that for them.

And we have blossomed a great deal in our relationships to a point where two of those nations are enabling us to enforce their sovereignty without having a ship rider just calling into them. We call that the enhanced ship rider program.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN: And lastly, why has there not been a permanent Coast Guard presence in American Samoa? American Samoa relies on fishing for its livelihood. As you know, we are a one industry economy and it's all about fishing for its livelihood. As competition for fish stocks heats up, it has a deleterious impact on these Americans' lives.

What is the Coast Guard doing now to safeguard these Americans' livelihoods and safety in our own waters?

And I understand from somebody in the Coast Guard that you will be ratcheting up your activity over the course of the next year out in our area. I don't know exactly what that means, but sounds hopeful.

ANDREW TIONGSON: With the – with the addition of the Indo-Pacific support cutter, we will be ratcheting up more because that will provide more presence, assets for more presence. But what we have there are essentially fast response cutters and some – and a buoy tender that enables us to go ahead and have episodic presence in and around places like American Samoa.

We need to increase that and that's why on our unfunded priorities list there are four FRCs, fast response cutters.

AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN:: Thank you, Chairman. I yield back.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Gentlelady yields back. I have some follow up questions. American Samoa is American territory and I'm concerned that – that we have episodic presence in American territory. So whatever the Coast Guard can do to have a permanent presence in American Samoa, especially in light of the fact that we see much more aggressive action by the CCP, the **PRC**, the fishing fleets that are ravaging fish stocks around the world.

We don't want that to happen around American Samoa or any American territory. Got a question. Ok. So I'm ignorant about this. So you find – you found a 350 fleet fishing fleet off of – in the eastern – Eastern Pacific illegally fishing. What does international law allow you to do?

ANDREW TIONGSON: What we work through is the auspices of a regional fisheries management organization.

Those organizations are comprised of several nations that come together and they signed CMMs, or conservation management measures, and that tells them how much to catch, what types of catches, rules on defining, and those types of things.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: That's – that's not really what I'm going after. What I'm going after you find fishing vessels that are violating those restrictions, laws, etc. What can you do about it? What do you do? What do you do about it?

ANDREW TIONGSON: I'll give you – I'll give you a great example from – from last year that same fishing fleet run by **China** in the Eastern Pacific. We conducted boardings on some of them. We saw that there were violations. We reported those to the Fisheries Management Organization who reported them the

flagged states of those vessels.

Those vessels actually 30 plus of them were deflagged. They had no home at that point. We're able to seize a catch, take those catches away. But in addition to that, there was a willing partner in the partner who was the

country of – of Panama and they went ahead and talked with other willing partners in Ecuador and they took action against the actual companies in the fish production companies as well.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: What about the vessels themselves? What happened to them?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Stateless vessels have no rights in those types of things and they are subject to any type of boardings and inspections throughout the world. What happened to those particular ones is a few of them have been reflagged in different places, but they are on our watch list.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: So – but you don't seize the vessels themselves?

ANDREW TIONGSON: No, sir, we do not.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: So as soon as you leave the area, they can go ahead and start doing whatever they were doing before?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We watch them extremely closely and provide – and provide that enforcement that's necessary to prevent and deter that type of activity.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Have you ever seen or boarded vessels on numerous occasions doing the same thing?

Repeat offenders.

ANDREW TIONGSON: We have – once we have them and they we – we watch them very closely. And have there been repeat offenders, I'm almost positive that there have been.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Ok, interesting, are they – you said they were – they were – they were **Chinese** flagged vessels? They were homeported in **China** or where were they? Where were they from? They're **Chinese** – they're **Chinese** vessels, right?

ANDREW TIONGSON: They were – **Chinese** vessels flagged in another nation.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Ok, that's interesting too. So there are **Chinese**

vessels. I mean, I know we have, you know, I used to be the mayor of Miami-Dade. So I know we have a bunch of like cruise ships that are flagged somewhere else, but they're really American cruise ships. So they just look for another home, another flag, and then fly that flag until they get caught again.

And then just – is that what they do to do? They go flag hunting once – once you catch them?

ANDREW TIONGSON: There are some of these vessels that are on that particular watch list that have looked for flags of convenience, just as you mentioned.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: But do they then take their catch and do they go back to **China**? Is that what they're doing or are they – are they – are they selling their catch everywhere around the world?

ANDREW TIONGSON: In many ways, they're – they have production vessels that are with them in that fleet.

When they – when they process the fish, those fish can go anywhere around the world, majority does go to **China**.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Interesting. Ok. Well, look, you know, we talk a lot about climate change and fish stocks and all that. But the facts are that the – the **PRC**, the – the CCP is the world's greatest polluter by a factor of two. Every week they're opening up a new coal fired power plant in **China**. They are increasing their carbon dioxide output.

As we decrease ours, they're increasing theirs. So everything that we're doing here, they're more than outdoing on the other side through their – through their efforts. So they are the greatest polluter in the world. They're the greatest carbon dioxide producer in the world. They are also and now according to this testimony, they're also the leading cause of the reduction in fish stocks from around the world.

Is that – am I exaggerating something or – or do you think that that's an accurate statement that the – the CCP, the **PRC** is raiding and destroying fish stocks around the world? That an overstatement? Am I being too dramatic or is it pretty accurate?

ANDREW TIONGSON: I would have to look at the numbers, sir, and get back to you. I can state that the – the **Chinese** distance water fleet – distant water fishing fleet is the largest throughout the world.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: And do you find them to be law abiding or do you find them to do whatever the heck they want to do just as long as you don't catch

them?

ANDREW TIONGSON: They are clearly involved with illegal, unreported, unregulated fisheries throughout the world.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Fair enough. So I guess, so do you still think that climate change is the greatest existential threat here in this area or is it the PRC and the CCP?

ANDREW TIONGSON: If you're asking me what the partner nations tell me, they list -

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Not asking you, I'm not – I didn't ask you to tell me what the partner nations feel. I say you, what do you feel? What's the greatest existential threat to – to this area?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Sir, I feel – I feel it's maritime governance. It's the ability to bolster partner nations so that they can take care of their own sovereign rights and trade in things of that nature as well as the pollution within the oceans and to be prepared for humanitarian assistance disaster response.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Ok. Since nobody else wants to ask any questions, I'm just going to continue to ask questions I guess until – until I'm done. In order for you to have – in order for you to provide the – the patrol and the resources that you need to – to adequately protect American Samoa, what do you need from the Coast Guard?

What do you need from us? What do we need to do?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We have had excellent support, but again I will refer to the four fast response cutters that are on our unfunded priorities list for FY '24. Those will enable us to have more persistent presence throughout – at American Samoa and throughout that region.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: Why don't we have a permanent presence in American Samoa?

ANDREW TIONGSON: Sir, I do not know that – the answer to that question. I know that we have that permanent presence in – in Guam, which enables us to do expeditionary deployments and we are able to patrol in and around the waters of American Samoa.

CARLOS GIMENEZ:: How far away is American Samoa from Guam?

ANDREW TIONGSON: It's a few hundred miles, to the best of my knowledge. I'd have to look that up on a chart.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: I'm going to have a colloquy. How far away is that?

UNKNOWN: Several thousand miles.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Several thousand miles.

UNKNOWN: Guam is in the Northern Pacific, we are in the [off-mic].

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Several thousand miles. So it's like from here to Wyoming?

ANDREW TIONGSON: If you're asking me, sir, I'd have to look at a chart -

CARLOS GIMENEZ: A pretty good distance, Ok?

ANDREW TIONGSON: - it is a distance.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: There's not like you're not in the hood, Ok? You know, 2,000 miles is 2,000 miles. And so again, you know, I asked it is American territory, they are American citizens, they - they deserve American protection. So why aren't we there?

ANDREW TIONGSON: We are there through -

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Something -

ANDREW TIONGSON: - vast response. Episodically, we are there.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: An inflatable boat, anything, Ok, you know, why aren't we there? We should have a presence

there. Is there any military presence there, General?

BG NEIL RICHARDSON: Sir, not to my knowledge. I don't think we have anything there on a permanent basis.

CARLOS GIMENEZ: Ok. All right. Anybody else have any - any other questions? All right, since nobody else has any other questions, this - this hearing is - is hereby adjourned. Thank you.