

Escorting *USS Hue City*
into Mayport Naval
Station.



U.S. Coast Guard (Dena Warr)

The Fifth Side of the Pentagon

Moving the Coast Guard

By JAMES C. HOWE

The U.S. Coast Guard and its predecessor organizations have played a pivotal role in the safety and defense of the Nation for more than two centuries. The modern Coast Guard grew out of a merger of the Revenue Cutter and the Lifesaving Services in 1915 and has been a component of the Department of Transportation since 1967, when it was transferred from its traditional home in the Treasury Department. One of five military services by statute, its mandated duties run from security

tasks and Federal law enforcement to administrative and regulatory functions.

The recent terrorist attacks ushered in a new era for the military in defense of the homeland. They also led to dramatic changes in the operational priorities of the Coast Guard, creating new and lasting port security and littoral control missions. Such duties will consume up to a quarter of the overall operational effort of the service for the foreseeable future.

To strengthen the national antiterrorist posture, the administration has proposed a massive realignment to establish the Department of Homeland Security (HLS). Under this structure, the Coast Guard would be entirely moved to this new department alongside other agencies charged with

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Inspecting container
in Alaska.

U.S. Coast Guard (Marshallena Delaney)

the Coast Guard primarily operates at sea to carry out law enforcement, emergency response, and defense functions

controlling national borders. Public reaction to this proposal has been positive, with many current and former officials and members of Congress endorsing the reorganization. Still, as the proposal is debated, the exact changes remain unclear. Conspicuously absent from public discourse is whether the new departmental structure offers the most prudent place to situate the Coast Guard.

Although this transfer of the Coast Guard has merits, a closer examination reveals that there may be a more suitable arrangement—making the service a component of the Department of Defense. In that way the Coast Guard could maximize its national defense capabilities; reap benefits in doctrine, training, professionalism, and funding; and enhance execution of traditional missions as well new homeland protection duties. It is thus in the best interests of the Nation to widen the debate and to consider transferring the Coast Guard to become the fifth side of the Pentagon.

A Fish Out of Water

The purpose of moving the Coast Guard as well as other agencies to become the border and transportation security arm of a new department is institutional synergy and efficiency. Along with other organizations—the Customs Service, Border Patrol, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Transportation Security Administration, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service—the Coast Guard will be better positioned to share intelligence, respond to threats, and

protect ports of entry, transportation centers, and the coastal zone.

Such a reorganization will yield improvements, garnering closer working relations among various HLS components. But the impact of such improved partnerships will be felt primarily by civilian agencies that work together in a regulatory and inspection-based milieu. Their institutional focus is markedly different from that of the Coast Guard, which primarily operates at sea to carry out law enforcement, emergency response, and defense functions in a dynamic environment. On the water, the Coast Guard is the predominant Federal agency; ashore, its duties are typically limited to safety and pollution controls while the Customs Service, Border Patrol, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service handle the brunt of law enforcement and inspection duties.

These dual responsibilities are clearly reflected in the monumental challenge that will face the new department: inspecting thousands of sealed cargo containers entering the country each day. This task is performed ashore, spearheaded by civilian enforcement agencies, and the inclusion of the Coast Guard in the Department of Homeland Security will have little impact in generating more vigorous and desperately needed inspections.

The post-9/11 role of the Coast Guard in maritime homeland security lies in controlling the littoral, patrolling harbors and coasts, boarding and escorting vessels entering port, responding to hazardous material incidents, and providing maritime point defense of installations. This is a major responsibility given the 361 sizable ports and 95,000 miles of coastline in the Nation, requiring the Coast Guard to field highly proficient, multimission units to respond militarily to a range of crises.

Controlling the littoral requires identifying all vessels out to 200 miles or more from shore. This effort, known as maritime domain awareness, is like the detailed surveillance and tracking by North American Aerospace Defense Command of aircraft in American airspace. The tenet of maritime domain awareness—“every arriving, departing, transiting, and loitering vessel will be known and subject to a risk assessment before the vessel can become a direct threat to the U.S.”¹—will require massive offshore detection and monitoring as well as information sharing among Federal agencies and the civil sector. Since the events of September 2001, the Coast Guard has attempted to foster this awareness, admitting nonetheless that it is a “critical, yet not fully developed component, of homeland security.”²



U.S. Coast Guard (Sara Foster-Snell)

Responding to crash site in Seattle.

Exerting control over the littoral will highlight a structural inconsistency that will confront the Coast Guard if it is shifted to the Department of Homeland Security. No other agency slated for incorporation into the new department offers significant resources to patrol or respond to threats in coastal waters. But with 300-plus naval ships, myriad surveillance aircraft, and various land and space-based sensors, the Pentagon could vastly augment the Coast Guard-led effort. As the littoral control mission matures, it will require close teamwork and coordination—not primarily between the Coast Guard and HLS counterparts, but between the Coast Guard and the Department of Defense.

Growing Defense Missions

The requirement for Coast Guard-DOD cooperation to control coastal waters reflects a trend that has seen the service playing a progressively larger and more formal defense role over the past two decades. The national strategy released in 1985 assigned command maritime defense zones to the Coast Guard with responsibility to oversee

coastal naval operations in time of war. In the late 1980s the service formalized its capability for expeditionary port security by creating 120-man port security units, which were used to great effect during the Persian Gulf War and now have become a regular component of joint military operations. Peacetime engagement, in support of combatant commanders or at the request of the Department of State, has grown impressively. Since 1995, four major cutters have been deployed each year under U.S. Southern, Pacific, and European Commands, while Coast Guard trainers have conducted hundreds of overseas visits to teach foreign naval personnel various skills. Furthermore, in recent years three high endurance cutters have deployed to the Persian Gulf to assist the Navy and multinational forces carrying out economic sanctions against Iraq.

The Coast Guard relationship with the Pentagon was defined in 1995 under a memorandum of agreement between the Departments of Transportation and Defense that addressed support of

national military strategy and stressed deliberate planning and doctrine to include the Coast Guard. The memo listed five contributions: maritime interception operations; port operations, security, and defense; coastal sea control; peacetime engagement; and environmental response operations. This agreement was the most significant step in peacetime toward integrating the Coast Guard into the joint warfighting establishment.

The bulk of the defense capability of the Coast Guard lies in deepwater cutters, designed to operate more than fifty miles from shore. Although not equipped for high-end naval combat, these ships are well suited for low-intensity mis-

because of its mandate, the Coast Guard bridges the gap between civilian and military operations

sions like coastal sea control and maritime interception, in recent years becoming relatively more important in support of DOD naval missions. According to Admiral James Loy, a former commandant of the Coast Guard, "In the era of a 600-ship Navy, 40 or so cutters were a virtual afterthought. But today with regional instability and strife around the world and 116 surface combatants in the Navy, cutters . . . take on a new significance."³

During a major war or sustained crisis, the Coast Guard is a force multiplier for the Navy, providing cutters, aircraft, and expeditionary units in support of combat operations. World War II and the Vietnam War demonstrated the significance of this responsibility. While recent conflicts have been short lived or modest in scope, requiring minimal Coast Guard participation, America is faced with the global war on terrorism, increased tension in the Middle East, and an unpredictable situation on the Korean peninsula. It does not stretch the imagination to envision contingencies where service assets would be needed in strength.

The urgent issue is preparing the Coast Guard to fill these national defense responsibilities while maximizing the effectiveness of maritime homeland security and other mandated missions. During thirty-five years as the only military service in the Department of Transportation, the Coast Guard experienced an erosion of its military capabilities as its defense role increased. The danger of a transfer to the Department of Homeland Security is that a similar pattern will emerge: in a tight budgetary environment, the new department may only receive funding for its top priorities, to the detriment of broader defense capabilities.

A properly managed move to the Pentagon could avoid this eventuality. Homeland security and other duties can be regarded as a lesser included set of missions when compared to

defense-oriented responsibilities. A Coast Guard that is programmed, budgeted, equipped, manned, and trained for national defense missions will also be able to conduct low-intensity and less complex operations. The reverse, however, is not true.

Two examples illustrate this case. Cutter crews trained for maritime interception, and thus expert in conducting visit, board, search, and seizure operations in a high-threat environment, are inherently ready to prosecute the less demanding functions of maritime law enforcement or coastal zone security. Ashore, Coast Guard pollution response forces, when trained, equipped, and ready to respond to incidents involving weapons of mass destruction, are far better at handling the less hazardous responses to oil and chemical spills. In both examples, training to the lower capability would not generate the expertise needed to prosecute more challenging defense-related missions.

Because of the diversity of its mandate, the Coast Guard bridges the gap between civilian and military operations. However, its core functions have tilted heavily toward law enforcement and national defense over the last three decades, with the 2001 terrorist attacks adding new security missions that firmly set the long-term focus on military or military-related duties. Though transfer to a security-oriented organization such as the Department of Homeland Security will undoubtedly yield gains in interagency coordination, the single focus of such a department may not allow the Coast Guard to reach its full potential as a military force.

Would the transfer of the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security make that service stronger and more capable? In most respects the move would be sound for the service. But its incorporation in the Department of Defense would provide greater capabilities for the Nation.

A More Capable Service

Moving the Coast Guard to the Pentagon would produce significant gains and efficiencies. First, it would strengthen the service as an institution. The transfer would allow the Coast Guard to "gather organizational strength through the camaraderie of residing in an undivided house" with the other services according to Admiral Loy.⁴ Within the Department of Transportation, and almost certainly if transferred to the new Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard stands alone as a military entity, with subtle (sometimes overt) cultural, structural, and institutional differences creating frictions that could add a degree of difficulty in communications, resource allocation, and unanimity of effort between the service and its civilian counterparts. Common



U.S. Coast Guard (Tom Sparduto)

Port security boat on Hudson River.

sense dictates that the Department of Defense offers the only safe haven in government where the Coast Guard could reap the benefits of full-time alignment with the Armed Forces.

For instance, the Coast Guard lacks a body of dedicated written doctrine, and attempts to establish a doctrine system have failed. Integration into the Pentagon would provide access to other military doctrine programs, facilitating development of a service-specific system. Similar benefits could be obtained in training, career development, and joint professional military education, where adopting the programs of the other services would lead to a more knowledgeable force and more effective operational capabilities. Such advantages would not be available within the Department of Homeland Security.

Fiscally, the Coast Guard would align well with the DOD budget system, wherein funding and acquisition is keyed to cutting-edge military capabilities. Though unable today to keep abreast of advances in technology, the Coast Guard would benefit from compatible research, development, procurement, and experimentation in the development of new ships, aircraft, command and control systems, and operational tactics. In addition, becoming a part of the Department of Defense would align pay and compensation among all services, eliminating entitlement surprises that occur when Congress mandates increased compensation for military members but does not provide the funding to the Department of Transportation.

Another benefit is strengthening the military ethos. It is the culture of the Coast Guard like that of other services that enables its personnel to perform challenging duties—responsibilities that

have grown since 9/11 and require “strong police and warrior attributes.”⁵ Unfortunately, decades spent under the Department of Transportation offered no incentive to stress military values and led to a stagnation of military culture.

A transfer to another civilian-dominated organization such as the Department of Homeland Security would do little to bolster the warfighting ethos or capabilities of the Coast Guard at a time when it is most needed. Only a move to the Pentagon would strengthen the service by surrounding it with the best professionals in the world, rekindling military culture and enhancing effectiveness across a range of missions. Even though the Department of Homeland Security would maintain the institutional status quo for the Coast Guard, the opportunity to grow in both capabilities and responsiveness to national needs lies within the Department of Defense.

A Stronger Defense

As much as a move to the Pentagon would provide America with a stronger Coast Guard, the converse is also true: the service would bring capabilities that would improve national security. In peacetime the Coast Guard would add value to the theater security cooperation plans developed by combatant commanders through closer coordination of international engagement efforts. Some 70 percent of the navies around the world perform missions similar to those of the Coast Guard, giving the service great influence among foreign counterparts. This security assistance role will be amplified over the next twenty years as the Coast Guard acquires new cutters and aircraft for its integrated deepwater system, which also is expected to generate extensive sales to friendly nations. As other countries purchase components of this system they will forge closer training, operational, and doctrinal links, enhancing military-to-military ties with the United States and supporting engagement initiatives.

Closer alignment of the Coast Guard and Navy would boost the ongoing effort to organize a vital national fleet, a concept developed in the late 1990s to improve the effectiveness of the two sea services across a range of maritime missions. A national fleet would ensure that both services developed complementary and interoperable ships, aircraft, communications, and support systems. The potential of a national fleet will not be realized with the services residing in different quarters, forced to cross interdepartmental lines to coordinate every facet of the program. There is evidence that the national fleet initiative is foundering, primarily because of a lack of aggressive departmental advocacy and murkiness in congressional oversight. A move to the Pentagon

Boarding vessels,
Enduring Freedom.



Fleet Combat Camera Group, Atlantic (Johnny R. Wilson)



Fleet Combat Camera Group, Atlantic (Johnny R. Wilson)

would eliminate this fractured relationship and shore up this vital program.

The Coast Guard would bring extensive expertise to the Department of Defense in dealing with the civilian agencies on all levels of government. With more than 400 small units nationwide, the Coast Guard has extensive daily contact with these agencies in matters relating to emergency response, border patrol, police functions, and maritime industry. The Joint Staff has indicated that for homeland defense “unprecedented cooperation and understanding (vertical and horizontal) will be required between local, state, and Federal agencies and the DOD.”⁶ This is obviously an area in which the Coast Guard

could assist the other services and boost national maritime security.

The most important advantage would be putting the Coast Guard and the other services on the same footing. Interface will be important between U.S. Northern Command, which is charged with the military defense of the Nation, and the Coast Guard, which is the prime maritime patrol agency operating in American littoral waters. For control of the coastal zone, the interface with the new command must be seamless for surveillance and tracking, preventing loss of intelligence, and swift action against vessels threatening U.S. territory.

With homeland defense at the top of the national agenda, there is no more compelling logic for transferring the Coast Guard to the Department of Defense than the need to establish a reliable and mutually supportive relationship among the five military services.

Moving to the Pentagon

One notional arrangement would be designating the Coast Guard as the third sea service in the Department of the Navy, a structure modeled on the existing Navy-Marine Corps relationship.

USCGC *Tahoma*,
September 2001.



U.S. Coast Guard (Tom Spender)

tools for expeditionary missions and protecting the homeland and also militate in favor of the Pentagon obtaining resources, operational assignments, and budgetary support for the Coast Guard. For integration, it would be imperative for DOD leadership to make support of a multimission Coast Guard a lasting priority.

Another argument against moving the Coast Guard to the Department of Defense is that it may weaken lines between civil and military authority, erode the provisions of posse comitatus, and draw the Armed Forces into a direct law enforcement role. This concern could be addressed in legislation by preserving the law enforcement authority of the Coast Guard while prohibiting direct police efforts by the other services.

The strict codification of this relationship would have major benefits. The last two decades witnessed a blurring of the line between law enforcement and military operations, first with the DOD role in counterdrug efforts, and today in the complex relationship between homeland defense (a military mission) and homeland security (led by civilian agencies). Moving the Coast Guard to the Pentagon could clarify this distinction by establishing a strong barrier against a police role for the other services. Any homeland security or law enforcement actions would support a designated civilian agency or the Coast Guard, which would provide both expertise and an institutional buffer to ensure that other services remained clear of direct law enforcement entanglements.

A final argument against transferring the Coast Guard to the Department of Defense is that the safety and regulatory missions of the fifth service would not fit well into the overarching functions of the Pentagon. This is not true: most duties of the Coast Guard have equivalent DOD functions, and folding such missions into the Pentagon would be relatively easy. Search and rescue, one of the major duties of the Coast Guard, is a prime example. Although some hold that this mission has no place in the Department of Defense, the other services play a key role in the national search and rescue effort. The Air Force oversees inland search and rescue coordination for the contiguous United States, operates the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center for nationwide around-the-clock response, and sends instructors to the National Search and Rescue School run by the Coast Guard. In the field, the other services regularly perform search and rescue missions in a combat mode or at the request of the Air Force or Coast Guard. A search and rescue culture exists among the services and the Navy is a logical home for Coast Guard maritime search and rescue responsibilities.

With naval forces concentrating on high-level warfare and blue water operations, the Coast Guard could provide low-intensity conflict capabilities and serve as the DOD link to the new Department of Homeland Security.

Several arguments have been raised against integrating the Coast Guard into the Department of Defense. The first is the fact that its small size could be a disadvantage within the Pentagon; with a funding level that is only 5 percent the size of the Navy budget, the status of the fifth service may suffer. Nonetheless, like the Seabees or SEALs within the Navy, the

Coast Guard has niche capabilities not found elsewhere, including coastal sea control, small vessel, and law enforcement. Such attributes could provide the Department of Defense with

most duties of the Coast Guard have equivalent DOD functions, and folding such missions into the Pentagon would be relatively easy

USCGC Midgett
alongside USS
Constellation.



U.S. Coast Guard (Alice Sennott)

This is true for other missions that appear out of place. Maritime law enforcement receives support from the Pentagon and could be easily transferred with appropriate legislative safeguards. Marine environmental protection, which comprises a tenth of Coast Guard resources and budget, fits well with the Navy, which itself has a substantial pollution response and salvage capability. Moreover, aids to navigation, waterways administration, and domestic ice operations have current parallel functions within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Wherever it is located in the Federal Government, the Coast Guard will have a mission set that is not completely aligned to its parent organization. If the Coast Guard is expected to perform as a homeland security entity, then transfer to the new department offers the most comfortable fit. But if it continues to be tasked with more demanding support of the national military strategy, then the Department of Defense provides a solid home that could allow the smallest service to maximize its capabilities.

Military Transformation

Three trends make moving the Coast Guard to the Pentagon a compelling argument. First, there is a consensus that the Nation needs this vital service. Aged resources and thin manpower far outmatch the new homeland security duties of the Coast Guard and require improved operational capabilities and institutional culture. The Department of Defense can provide that boost.

Second, there has been a steady increase in interaction between the Coast Guard and other services in drug interdiction, maritime interception, and port security. According to one analyst, "the Coast Guard's defense mission is growing,

while the national security agenda of interest to the Defense Department is widening."⁷

Third, there is a need to improve national security capabilities to both defend the Nation and fight wars abroad. Though transferring the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security would undoubtedly enhance border protection, moving it to the Pentagon would best employ service resources and capabilities to defend the homeland, enforce the law, prevent pollution, save lives at sea, and secure the borders.

Following World War II, America dramatically reorganized the Armed Forces to fight the Cold War, a strategy heralded forty years later with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The global war on terrorism marks another paradigm shift that will require changes in national security architecture to deter deadly asymmetric threats and combat an elusive foe.

Consolidating enforcement agencies into the Department of Homeland Security is a positive step in enhancing border control and safeguarding Americans. As part of military transformation, however, Congress and the Bush administration should consider transferring the Coast Guard to a position alongside the other military services.

The damage inflicted on the Pentagon in September 2001 is an apt metaphor. As reconstruction of the fifth side of that building is completed, the United States can reinforce military capabilities by adding the fifth service to the Department of Defense. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Robert G. Ross, "Maritime Domain Awareness: The Key to Securing the Blue Frontier," Office of Strategic Analysis, USCG Headquarters, information paper, September 19, 2001, p. 1.

² U.S. Coast Guard, Office of Intergovernmental and Public Affairs, *Homeland Security and the New Normalcy*, November 1, 2001, p. 1.

³ James M. Loy, "Shaping America's Joint Maritime Forces: The Coast Guard of the 21st Century," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 18 (Spring 1998), p. 15.

⁴ Loy, interview with author, January 30–February 4, 2002.

⁵ Bruce Stubbs, "Preparing for the New War," *Armed Forces Journal International*, vol. 139, no. 6 (February 2002), p. 51.

⁶ Joint Staff, Directorate for Strategic Plans and Policy (J-5), "Homeland Security, Defense, and Civil Support," briefing, December 6, 2001.

⁷ Colin S. Gray, "The Coast Guard and Navy: It's Time for a National Fleet," *Naval War College Review*, vol. 54, no. 3 (Summer 2001), p. 132.