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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

April 7, 2010

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Chairman  
The Honorable George V. Voinovich  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable David E. Price  
Chairman  
The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives

*Subject: Coast Guard: Deployable Operations Group Achieving Organizational Benefits, but Challenges Remain*

This letter formally transmits the enclosed briefing in response to congressional direction accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008 to report on the Coast Guard's Deployable Operations Group.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we are reporting on the extent to which the Deployable Operations Group achieved its intended benefits and the challenges it faces as it continues to mature. For a summary of the results of our work, see enclosure 1, slides 9-10. Based on the results of our review, we are not making any recommendations for congressional consideration or agency action.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees. We are also sending copies to the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Coast Guard. This report will also be available at no charge on our Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. Should you or your staff have questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9610, or [caldwells@gao.gov](mailto:caldwells@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page

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<sup>1</sup> H. Comm. on Appropriations, 110th Cong., Committee Print on H.R. 2764/Public Law 110-161 at 1059 (2008), and S. Rep. No. 110-84, at 69-70 (2007).

of this report. Key contributors to this report were Christopher Conrad, Assistant Director; Danny Burton; Lara Kaskie; Stanley Kostyla; Ryan Lambert; and Jeremy Rothgerber.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen L. Caldwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a checkmark-like flourish at the end.

Stephen L. Caldwell  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

Enclosures (3)

cc: Mr. Scott Nance  
Ms. Rebecca Davies  
Mr. Will Painter  
Mr. Ben Nicholson

# Enclosure I: Briefing on the Coast Guard's Deployable Operations Group



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## Coast Guard: Deployable Operations Group Achieving Organizational Benefits, but Challenges Remain

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Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

**Briefing for the  
Subcommittees on  
Homeland Security,  
Committees on  
Appropriations,  
U.S. Senate and House  
of Representatives**



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## Briefing Overview

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- Introduction
- Objectives, Scope, and Methodology
- Summary
- Background
- Findings
- Agency Comments

## Introduction

The U.S. Coast Guard's Deployable Operations Group (DOG) was established in July 2007 to align all of the service's deployable specialized forces under a single unified command. Creation of the DOG was an integral part of the Coast Guard's modernization program—a major, ongoing effort to update its command structure, support systems, and business practices.<sup>1</sup>

According to Coast Guard officials, the DOG is intended to enhance operational effectiveness and interagency coordination in responding to a wide range of national emergencies and events, such as terrorist threats or natural disasters.

Figure 1: Deployable Operations Group Seal



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

<sup>1</sup>In 2009, we completed an assessment of the Coast Guard's overall modernization program. See GAO, *Coast Guard: Observations on the Genesis and Progress of the Service's Modernization Program*, GAO-09-530R (Washington, D.C., June 24, 2009).



## Introduction

### Deployable Forces under Command of the DOG

With a total of approximately 3,000 personnel, the Coast Guard's deployable specialized forces (DSF) consist of five types of teams or units, as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- National Strike Force. The three teams—Atlantic Strike Team, Gulf Strike Team, and Pacific Strike Team—have incident-management skills and specialized equipment to respond to oil spills and other hazardous substance pollution incidents.<sup>3</sup>
- Tactical Law Enforcement Teams (TACLET). The Coast Guard's two TACLETs deploy units known as Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDET) aboard U.S. Navy vessels to enforce U.S. and international laws. Typically, the interdiction of illicit narcotics is a primary mission.
- Port Security Units (PSU). The Coast Guard's eight PSUs are expeditionary forces responsible for maintaining security in overseas ports during U.S. military operations.
- Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSST). The Coast Guard's 12 MSSTs constitute a domestic force for mitigating or responding to terrorist threats or incidents. Teams have deployed, for example, to national special security events such as the presidential inauguration, the Olympics, and the Super Bowl.
- Maritime Security Response Team (MSRT). The MSRT is a counterterrorism unit trained to conduct advanced interdiction operations in hostile environments—such as vertically inserting team members from a helicopter to a ship's deck to neutralize potentially hostile personnel.

<sup>2</sup> See enclosure II for further details on the deployable specialized forces.

<sup>3</sup> A related entity, the National Strike Force Coordination Center, provides support and standardization guidance to the three strike teams. 4



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# Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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## Objectives

In accordance with congressional direction accompanying the Coast Guard's fiscal year 2008 appropriations,<sup>4</sup> and as agreed with your offices, this report addresses the following questions:

- To what extent has the Deployable Operations Group achieved its intended benefits?
- What challenges, if any, does the Deployable Operations Group face as it continues to mature?

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<sup>4</sup>H. Comm. on Appropriations, 110th Cong., Committee Print on H.R. 2764/Public Law 110-161 at 1059 (2008), and S. Rep. No. 110-84, at 69-70 (2007). 5



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# Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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## Scope and Methodology

To answer the objectives, we analyzed:

- DOG charter documents, relevant Coast Guard reports and documents—including briefing materials and journal articles—and congressional testimony to identify the primary origin and intended benefits of the DOG;
- DOG policy doctrine; workforce plans; recruiting and training initiatives; scheduling and force apportionment procedures; strategic plans; and documents regarding the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures;
- After-action reports for key operations or exercises conducted since the DOG's inception; and
- Briefing materials and background documents for each of the five types of deployable specialized forces.



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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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### Scope and Methodology (continued)

We also conducted interviews with Coast Guard officials and interagency partners, to include:

- DOG officials and senior program officials at Coast Guard headquarters;
- commanding officers and key personnel from Maritime Safety and Security Teams in San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles/Long Beach; Port Security Unit San Pedro; Pacific Tactical Law Enforcement Team; Pacific Strike Team; the National Strike Force Coordination Center; and the Maritime Security Response Team;<sup>5</sup>
- representatives from all three of the Coast Guard's field command levels (Area, District, Sector). Specifically, we visited Pacific Area and Atlantic Area, two District offices, as well as Sector Hampton Roads, Sector San Francisco, Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach, and Sector San Diego; and
- interagency liaisons to the DOG from the Department of Defense (DOD) Special Operations Command, Customs and Border Protection, and a Navy unit that routinely deploys with the Coast Guard's Port Security Units.

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<sup>5</sup> Field locations were selected based on the availability of units during the time frames of our planned visits. In addition, the proximity of several different units in these locations provided an opportunity to maximize travel resources.



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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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### Scope and Methodology (continued)

- To obtain additional information regarding the mission and skill sets of individual deployable units, we also observed demonstrations of specialized capabilities, such as the detection of explosives by canines, the use of vertical insertion for boarding vessels at sea, and an interagency exercise conducted in preparation of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, in which Maritime Safety and Security Teams and the Maritime Security Response Team were involved.
- We conducted this performance audit from July 2009 to April 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



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## Summary

### Key Benefits Achieved Since Establishment of the DOG

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The unified command structure established by the creation of the DOG has achieved its intended benefits by facilitating the Coast Guard's ability to standardize training and processes while using deployable specialized forces as centrally managed global assets, rather than local or regional assets. Specifically, the unified command structure has achieved four key benefits:

- (1) standardized tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP);
  - (2) standardized the process used to allocate deployable resources and based those allocations on specific capabilities rather than entire units;
  - (3) implemented an employment schedule that provides dedicated training periods for DOG units to maintain operational readiness, among other improvements; and
  - (4) enhanced management and oversight functions, such as establishment of dedicated program managers for each type of deployable unit, and collaborative working groups to help improve standardization and develop TTP.
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## Summary

### Challenges Facing the DOG

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As the DOG continues to mature, the command faces various challenges that may impact its ability to ensure that each deployable unit is staffed and trained and that the DSF community is prepared to meet its broad range of responsibilities.

- In particular, DSF units face human resource challenges associated with assessing and selecting qualified candidates. Other challenges involve achieving and maintaining qualifications for capabilities that are critical for maritime interdiction missions, such as vertical insertion from a helicopter onto the deck of a ship.
  - The Coast Guard is generally taking, or has plans to take, actions to address the issues that we identified. For example, it has developed partnerships with other agencies to better leverage potential training assets and has requested additional billets for selected units, where applicable. Further, to address potential gaps in its ability to prevent high consequence attacks, such as those involving weapons of mass destruction, the Coast Guard is also considering options for expanding select capabilities to other U.S. regions. Although such actions should help mitigate identified challenges, in many cases it is too soon to tell the potential impact. In addition, these challenges will be affected, in part, by the Coast Guard's fiscal year 2011 budget, which proposes a reduction in the total number of deployable units available.
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## **Background**

### **Origin and Intended Benefits of the DOG**

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As part of the Coast Guard's overall modernization effort, the DOG was created on July 20, 2007, as an independent Coast Guard command intended to integrate deployable specialized forces, provide a single community of interest, improve organizational efficiencies, and enhance mission effectiveness. The creation of the DOG was also intended to improve the process by which operational and tactical commanders request deployable forces and the Coast Guard can assess its ability to support and allocate forces to best meet those requests.

Based partly on lessons learned following the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Coast Guard identified actions that it believed were necessary to enhance its ability to surge forces and better leverage the unique operational capabilities of deployable specialized forces. Specifically, the Coast Guard intended to:

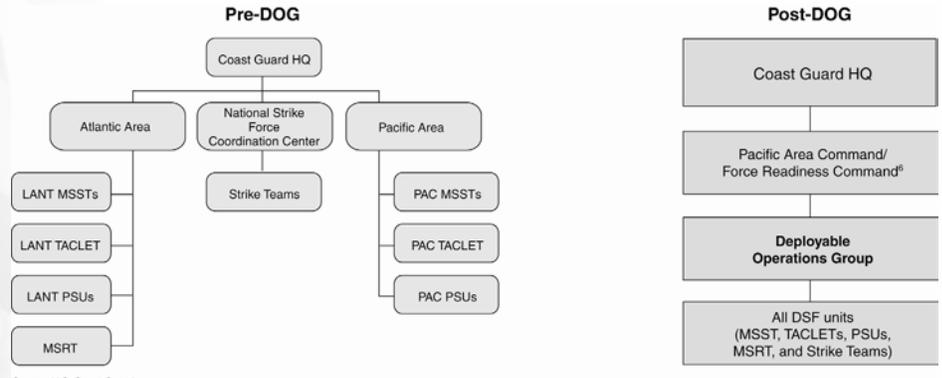
- establish a unified command structure under which all deployable specialized forces would operate;
  - group deployable capabilities into tailored force packages;
  - enhance standardization across the deployable units to permit national and global employment; and
  - optimize the employment of specialized force packages when responding to maritime threats and disasters.
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# Background

## Deployable Specialized Forces Command Structure

Prior to the DOG, deployable specialized forces were aligned under a geographically divergent command structure—Atlantic (LANT) Area and Pacific (PAC) Area, respectively. The DOG now serves to integrate these forces under a single command entity, as illustrated below.

**Figure 2: Comparison of Deployable Specialized Forces Command Structure, Pre- and Post-DOG**



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

<sup>6</sup> The DOG is currently under the operational control of Pacific Area Command. However, the DOG is to report to the Force Readiness Command, or FORCECOM, pending enactment of a legislative change proposal intended to enable the Coast Guard to establish additional three-star vice admiral positions. While several current bills (e.g., H.R. 2650, H.R. 3619, and S. 1194) contain the Coast Guard's legislative change proposal provisions, as of April 1, 2010, such bills were pending.



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## Background

### Primary DOG Roles and Responsibilities

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The DOG was created through the internal transfer of existing Coast Guard billets and is intended to function as:

- a **force manager**, with responsibility for standardizing, as appropriate, the staffing, equipping, and training of the Coast Guard's deployable specialized forces;
- a **force provider**, with responsibility for providing operational commanders with adaptive force packages drawn from the service's deployable specialized forces, and coordinating and executing all deployments of these forces; and
- a **force integrator**, with responsibility for developing partnerships and facilitating interoperability with Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, DOD, and other agencies.

As a collateral duty, two 21-person teams within the DOG are also trained to help support on-scene operational commanders during major events. These subject matter experts, collectively referred to as the Deployable Element, are available to integrate into an incident command post or may help coordinate tactics and logistics for deployed force packages as needed.

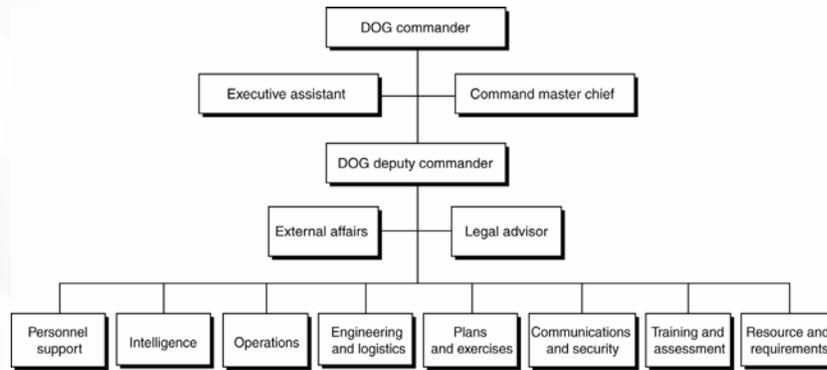
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## Background

### DOG Organizational Chart

The DOG is composed of 113 personnel, who are organized among eight distinct divisions, a command cadre, and related support staff (see figure 3):

**Figure 3: Organizational Chart of the Deployable Operations Group**



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.



## Background

### Fiscal Year 2011 Coast Guard Budget Proposal

The Coast Guard's fiscal year 2011 budget request of \$9.87 billion is approximately \$35.8 million less than the fiscal year 2010 enacted budget. The budget request also includes several initiatives which, if implemented, will impact the structure and resources of the deployable specialized forces. Specifically, the budget calls for:

- (1) Decommissioning the National Strike Force Coordination Center;
  - Intended to eliminate redundant functions already provided by the DOG, this initiative is to eliminate 9 billets and relocate the remaining 17 billets.
- (2) Decommissioning five Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSST);<sup>7</sup>
  - The seven remaining MSSTs are to deploy regionally to mitigate the highest prevailing port security risks in the nation's critical ports.
- (3) Increasing the capacity of Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDET);
  - The Coast Guard is to reinvest some of the MSST billets to grow each LEDET from 11 to 12 members and establish a new 12-person team (for a total of 18). The proposed changes to MSST and LEDET programs are expected to result in a net reduction of approximately \$18.2 million.
- (4) Permanently relocating two H-60 helicopters from the Maritime Security Response Team (Elizabeth City, N.C.) to the Coast Guard Air Station in Traverse City, Mich.
  - The H-60 helicopters are intended to replace existing H-65 assets which have a more limited range and reduced capability to operate in extreme weather.

<sup>7</sup>This initiative proposes decommissioning existing MSST teams in New York; Anchorage; San Francisco; New Orleans; and Kings Bay, Georgia.

## Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved

### Enhanced Standardization and Development of Common TTP

#### DOG Standardized Assets and Training for the Deployable Specialized Forces

- Prior to establishing the DOG, Pacific Area and Atlantic Area commands did not have a standardized process to manage DSFs and, as a result, independently allocated resources and prioritized operations.
- The DOG now functions as a single force manager to train and equip all DSF units.
- Officials stated that assets such as boats, weapons, and personal protection equipment are in the process of being standardized across DOG forces where applicable (see figure 4).
- DOG also established a training division to provide oversight on training activities and ensure adequate training time is apportioned to all DSF units.

**Figure 4: Member of a Deployable Unit Wearing Standard Protective Equipment**



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.



## **Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved**

### **Enhanced Standardization and Development of Common TTP**

#### **Development of TTP Enhances DOG's Ability to Meet Operational and Tactical Requirements**

- Establishment of the DOG helped eliminate procedural variations that existed between deployable specialized forces regarding how to perform specific duties.
  - Coast Guard officials noted that prior to the DOG, utilizing deployable specialized forces across geographical regions was challenging because of procedural differences between the two Area Commands. For example, MSST units on the West Coast operated with three-person boat crews, while MSST units on the East Coast operated four-person boat crews for the same vessel.
  - Coast Guard officials further noted that no specific TTP existed for deployable specialized forces prior to the DOG, which is now responsible for developing all TTP related to advanced capabilities for its deployable specialized forces.
    - The DOG established a TTP working group, where DOG personnel and unit representatives meet quarterly to continue to develop TTP, identify needs, review policies, and update or reprioritize TTP.
    - In 2008, the DOG developed TTP addressing various aspects of waterborne insertion/extraction operations, vertical insertion, and unannounced nighttime boardings.

## Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved

### Adaptive Force Packaging

#### Adaptive Force Packaging Allows DOG to Better Target Resources to Operational Needs

- Prior to the DOG, deployable specialized forces were usually requested by sectors as an entire unit. However, the sectors generally needed specific capabilities within that unit, which resulted in excess capacity and unnecessary costs.
- The DOG now allocates resources based on specific capabilities rather than by entire units. Officials stated that as a result, assets are utilized more effectively and are targeted to operational needs. For example, the DOG may send a single boat crew and a dive team rather than an entire MSST.
- As a dedicated force provider, the DOG is able to pull from the entire range of capabilities available among its units to create adaptive, tailored packages of resources to respond rapidly to a range of environmental, safety, and security threats.

Figure 5: Members of MSST Unit Conducting Boarding Tactics Training



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

## Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved

### Employment Schedule and Request for Forces Process

#### Employment Schedule Provides Dedicated Training Periods for DOG Units to Maintain Operational Readiness

- Prior to the establishment of the DOG, the frequent deployment of some units adversely impacted training and leave schedules. The DOG developed and standardized an employment schedule that identifies when units are either deployed, on standby, available, or are slated for required training or leave periods.
- According to officials, the DOG training division actively manages training by evaluating requirements and identifying gaps in training schedules to ensure all training requirements for deployable specialized forces are met.
- Further, the DOG training division coordinates recurring training courses for advanced skills for deployable specialized forces, such as close quarters combat, vertical insertion, and high-speed vessel interception.

Figure 6: Members of Deployable Unit Undergoing Close Quarters Combat Training



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.



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## Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved

### Employment Schedule and Request for Forces Process

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#### **Request for Forces Process Allocates DOG Resources Based on Capabilities**

Coast Guard officials noted that the Request for Forces (RFF) process works more efficiently for both planned and unplanned events since the DOG was established.

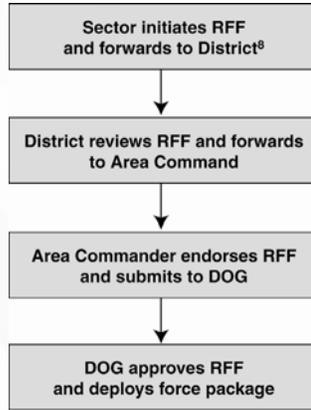
- For example, an annual planning process exists to identify planned events that may require DSF support and resources. Specifically, the Sectors/Districts/Areas identify resources they have available and request any additional requirements through the DOG. These requests are prioritized and the DOG allocates DSF assets based on availability and other priorities.
  - Under the DOG, there is also enhanced visibility of the scheduling of units and greater recognition of these resources as centrally managed assets. For example, officials stated that the response to unplanned events is quicker and more organized because dedicated personnel at the DOG are responsible for prioritizing requirements and allocating resources.
  - The DOG also provides a process by which officials from other federal agencies, including DOD, Department of State, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the U.S. Secret Service, can request deployable forces. Further, since DSF resources are placed under a single command, the DOG can better provide the status and availability of specified capabilities.
  - The streamlined internal and external RFF process captures the utilization of DOG capabilities and helps maintain awareness of potential impacts on operational readiness (see figures 7 and 8).
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# Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved

## Schedule and Request for Forces Process

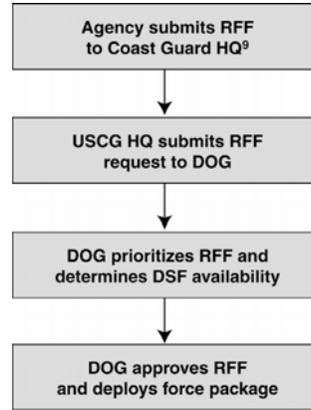
### Request for Forces (RFF) Process Allocates DOG Resources Based on Capabilities

**Figure 7: Internal Coast Guard Request for Forces (RFF) Process**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data.

**Figure 8: Other Federal Agency Request for Forces (RFF) Process**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data.

<sup>8</sup> The Request for Forces process applies to all DOG units except the National Strike Force, which can also be requested directly by the Sector to mitigate the effects of hazardous substance releases, oil discharges, and other environmental emergencies.

<sup>9</sup> The Request for Forces is sent directly to the DOG or Area Commander if forces are needed in less than 48 hours.



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## **Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved**

### **Management and Oversight Functions**

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#### **Unified Command Structure Enhances DOG Management and Oversight**

DOG officials cite streamlined management functions and enhanced oversight as benefits to a unified command structure. Specifically, DOG officials stated the following:

- Having a dedicated program manager at the DOG for each of the deployable specialized forces provides increased attention to unit needs, including training constraints and potential resource gaps.
  - Input and feedback from DOG units has been enhanced through increased collaboration and communication, specifically the TTP working groups and annual meetings with commanding officers and executive officers.
  - The DOG headquarters Deployable Element provides command and control/incident management support to government agencies during incidents requiring a multi-agency coordinated response, such as the coordinated interagency response to Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.
  - Development of the Maritime Enforcement Specialist rating, which was established in January 2010, should enhance opportunities for personnel to transition through and remain within the DSF community without jeopardizing promotion potential. Additionally, the new rating may improve recruiting and retention of personnel and the training and readiness of the DSF community.
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## Objective 1: Key Benefits Achieved Coast Guard Haiti Response Operations

### Haiti Response Operations Illustrated Ability of the DOG to Mobilize and Deploy Adaptive Force Package in Support of U.S. Federal Response Efforts

According to DOG officials, several successes were identified during the Haitian relief effort. For example,

- The DOG provided liaison officers from the Deployable Element to applicable Coast Guard and DOD units to ensure unity of effort and help support development of plans to apply targeted DSF assets.

The Coast Guard's response in Haiti also provided an example of deployment of an adaptive force package comprised of several different DSF units. Specifically, the DOG deployed

- 33 TACLET members
- 118 PSU members
- 5 DOG staff and 11 MSST members
- 4 Strike Team members

Figure 9: PSU Members Deployed to Haiti to Support Response Efforts



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.



## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG

### Human Resources and Personnel Issues

#### **DOG Headquarters Staffing Likely to Remain Static for the Foreseeable Future**

- As of December 2009, the DOG was staffed with 113 billets, 12 more than when it was initially established in 2007.
- Although the Coast Guard envisioned full operating capacity for the DOG to be 147 billets, DOG officials do not anticipate additional staffing growth given the budget climate and other Coast Guard resource priorities.
  - DOG officials noted that, at current staffing levels, they remain capable of performing all designated responsibilities; however, some functions may take longer than originally anticipated. That is, any additional billets would be used to grow the capacity of existing functions rather than assume any new roles.
  - For example, a single five-person team is currently responsible for conducting annual readiness audits at each of the DSF units. According to DOG officials, with additional billets, a second team of five would be created to mitigate travel demands and quicken the pace of these ongoing audits.
- The Coast Guard's FY 2011 budget proposes decommissioning the National Strike Force Coordination Center, which, if implemented, is to relocate 13 existing billets to Washington, D.C. However, officials noted that any personnel transferred to the DOG are expected to continue performing their current duties, rather than assuming new principal responsibilities at the DOG.



## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG

### Human Resources and Personnel Issues

#### Development of Assessment and Selection Program for DSF Personnel Is Ongoing

According to DOG officials, there is no mandatory screening process for application to DSF units, largely because there is not sufficient demand to allow for a rigorous selection program.<sup>10</sup> DSF assignments are based on a combination of personnel preferences and service needs identified during transfer season.<sup>11</sup>

- It is possible that, due to organizational needs, personnel may be assigned to DSFs that they did not list as a preference, or they may have difficulty meeting physical or other requirements. Officials noted that unit morale or readiness may be impacted whenever personnel are unable to perform their assigned roles.<sup>12</sup>
- To facilitate the assignment and selection process, the DOG sponsors a voluntary weeklong course to help assess basic physical fitness and other requirements for DSF billets. According to officials, the course has been attended by 30 to 60 individuals each year.
- DOG officials, however, are also planning to take advantage of additional opportunities for DSF recruiting and assessment through outreach to candidates of the new Maritime Enforcement Specialist rating, over 40 percent of whom are expected to be assigned to DSF billets.

<sup>10</sup> However, Strike Team units do conduct personal interviews to assess suitability for assignment to those billets.

<sup>11</sup> The Coast Guard's personnel manual outlines basic qualifications necessary for enlisted personnel to be assigned to these positions.

<sup>12</sup> Coast Guard officials noted that this issue is not unique to DOG assignments and occurs service-wide.

## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG Training Capacity Constraints

### Vertical Insertion Training Presents Substantial Demand for Helicopter Assets

- MSSTs, TACLETS, and MSRTs are each designated as capable of performing vertical insertion from a helicopter onto a target vessel, which requires considerable training to develop and maintain necessary qualifications (see figure 10).
- San Diego and Cape Cod provide the primary training platforms; however, the DOG does not own any required helicopter assets. Therefore, the DOG requests aviation resources from Coast Guard Area commands and interagency partners and must remain prepared to assemble DSF teams quickly when limited training opportunities arise.

Figure 10: Members of a Deployable Unit Conducting Vertical Insertion Training



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.



## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG Training Capacity Constraints

- To address this issue, the DOG has taken steps to better leverage training resources by bringing DSF units together for training whenever possible, as air assets become available. In addition, DOG officials noted that they are working with interagency partners to conduct joint training. For example, MSST Honolulu has used DOD assets and the DOG is currently looking to develop similar partnerships with Customs and Border Protection, Los Angeles Police Department, and the California National Guard.
  - Given the existing limitations on Coast Guard helicopter assets, these interagency partnerships appear to be a reasonable approach to leveraging available resources and may potentially reduce travel and associated costs whenever training can be conducted closer to the home port of a DSF unit.
- Coast Guard field officials with whom we spoke also offered several additional options that could potentially be used to help address these training constraints, including reevaluating the need for all designated DSF units nationwide to be capable of vertical insertion; training additional pilots to perform at least basic vertical insertion training; and allocating designated training hours on helicopters to DOG units. Further consideration of some of these approaches may be important to help mitigate ongoing training constraints, particularly in light of the reallocation of two H-60 helicopters proposed in the Coast Guard's FY 2011 budget.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Officials noted that the proposed reallocation of two H-60 helicopters from Elizabeth City to the Great Lakes region will impact the Coast Guard's ability to train qualified pilots required to perform vertical insertion operations and conduct training for MSRT and other DSF units. 27

## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG Training Capacity Constraints

### Limited Resources Available to Meet Demand for TACLET/LEDET Aerial Use of Force

- According to Coast Guard officials, the aerial use of force (AUF) capability—comprised of a combination of an aerial gunner and, under some circumstances, a supporting “controller”—is extremely important for interdicting illicit drug trafficking (see figure 11).
- However, officials stated that a lack of dedicated flight hours for AUF makes it difficult to obtain training for additional gunners and controllers.
- With counternarcotics funding provided in FY 2010, the Coast Guard expanded the number of qualified gunners to 13, as of November 2009. However, DOG officials stated that they would like to have a qualified gunner assigned to each of the 17 LEDETs.
- The DOG plans to increase each LEDET from 11 to 12 team members by reinvesting billets resulting from the decommissioning of 5 MSSTs.<sup>14</sup> According to officials, this increase will help ensure that additional gunners and associated trainers are available.

Figure 11: Aerial Gunner Targeting a Suspect Vessel



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

<sup>14</sup>The Conference Report (H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 111-298, at 84 (2009)) accompanying the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2010, (Pub. L. No. 111-83, 123 Stat. 2142 (2009)) contained direction by the Conferees authorizing additional funding to enhance Coast Guard counternarcotics enforcement efforts that was used to increase the number of personnel on each LEDET from 9 to 11. According to officials, as of March 2010, this change was in the process of being implemented.



## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG Proposed MSST Decommissioning

### Decommissioning of Five Maritime Safety and Security Teams Likely to Impact Operational Capacity of the Coast Guard's Deployable Specialized Forces

- Coast Guard officials stated that the decommissioning of five MSSTs, as proposed in the FY 2011 budget, would represent a shift towards a more regionally based approach.
  - Officials noted that MSSTs stood up quickly after the September 11th attacks and no comprehensive analysis was conducted at that time to determine the optimal number of teams and locations.<sup>15</sup> However, they noted that MSSTs are national deployable assets and are not intended to be used exclusively at any individual sector or port.
  - Officials stated that the remaining MSST locations were chosen primarily to provide sufficient regional coverage. However, they noted that operating costs and presence of other Coast Guard assets also played a role in decommissioning decisions.
- A reduction in MSST capacity will present greater demands on the DOG to ensure optimal DSF employment and rapid mobilization during an emerging incident.
  - Though remaining MSSTs are to maintain readiness to respond to emerging events and are to continue performing routine security operations (vessel escorts, critical infrastructure patrols, and law enforcement aboard high-interest vessels), their ability to support local sectors in meeting operational activity goals may be diminished.<sup>16</sup>
  - A reduction in MSST locations may also increase the potential for time and distance challenges when mobilizing and deploying forces for rapid response operations.

<sup>15</sup> The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General is conducting a review of the MSSTs which is to address the decision process used to form the teams and select initial locations, among other objectives.

<sup>16</sup> MSST units on the west coast are currently allocated to local sectors up to 10 days per month, and routinely assist them in meeting designated targets for monthly sector security activities.



## Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG Future of Advanced Interdiction Capabilities

The Coast Guard originally envisioned MSRT-type teams on the East, West, and Gulf Coasts. To date, the Coast Guard has established one East Coast team, which is dedicated to conducting high-risk law enforcement and counterterrorism operations nationwide.<sup>17</sup>

- In 2009, the Coast Guard developed a Concept of Operations document, which, according to officials, includes considerations to establish advanced interdiction capabilities in other U.S. regions.
  - Officials stated that the Concept of Operations is undergoing review within the Coast Guard but no established timeline exists, as it remains subject to continued discussion and input from interagency partners.<sup>18</sup>
- In contrast to units such as MSSTs, which are used routinely during daily operations, it is difficult to assess the need and requirements for an additional MSRT team because the unit is generally designed to respond to low probability but high consequence events. However, officials noted that MSRT personnel are also used as part of adaptive force packages, where applicable. For example, MSRT components have been deployed to help support U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

<sup>17</sup> Lacking a dedicated MSRT team on the West Coast, Pacific Area developed a rotating team of MSST personnel to provide enhanced readiness for potential interdiction and antiterrorism activities. The team serves on a 2-week rotation schedule.

<sup>18</sup> Officials noted that some options addressing expanded advanced interdiction capabilities were guided by language and principles set forth in the DOD Contingency Plan 7500—a classified document of plans to address the Global War on Terror.



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## **Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG**

### **Demand Likely Increasing, but Not Always Documented**

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#### **Coast Guard Officials Cite Increase in Worldwide Demand for PSU, MSST, and TACLET/LEDET Capabilities**

- In addition to the PSU team deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, a second PSU was requested by DOD Southern Command and deployed to meet security needs at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.
  - However, because PSUs are reserve units and typically cannot perform consecutive deployments, DOG officials are currently rotating MSST units to meet this ongoing demand.
- Further, the Coast Guard may be required to activate additional PSU teams in response to global events, such as recent recovery operations in Haiti, for which a PSU team was recently deployed for 35 days.
- According to officials, the existing eight PSUs have already been programmed and allocated through the next 6 years, and it will be difficult to meet any additional demand for these assets over this time period.



## **Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG**

### **Demand Likely Increasing, but Not Always Documented**

#### **Limited Capacity Makes It Difficult for LEDETs to Meet High Operational Tempo**

- According to DOG officials, an average of 7 LEDETs are detailed to Navy vessels at any given time.
  - Collectively, the 17 LEDETs perform approximately 40 deployments per year, with each detachment averaging over 185 days away from its home base.
  - LEDET deployments since 2007 include (1) drug interdiction operations under DOD Southern Command; (2) Operation Iraqi Freedom activities under DOD Central Command; and (3) anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the eastern coast of Somalia conducted as part of a multinational task force.
- DOG officials reported that the high operational tempo for LEDETs can make it difficult to assemble a full, qualified team, particularly when illness or injury occurs.
  - For example, to meet minimum team readiness requirements, some LEDET members have served multiple consecutive deployments—impacting training and/or scheduled leave—and some LEDETs have been replaced with other DSF personnel.
- Officials noted that the planned increase in the size of LEDETs in 2011 should help mitigate this challenge. DOG officials also stated that they are working to increase the total number of LEDETs to help address the rise in demand for these units.



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## **Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG**

### **Demand Likely Increasing, but Not Always Documented**

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#### **Demand for DOG Resources Not Always Documented, and Deployment of Forces May Occur in Advance of the RFF Process**

- DOG and DOD officials noted that some potential requests for forces are not documented through an RFF because they are outside the scope of normal operations or preliminary inquiries to the Coast Guard indicate that resources are not likely to be available.
    - For example, DOD officials noted that Coast Guard DSF units would be well suited to assist with security and other training with international partners, but they recognize that the DOG does not have the capacity to assume a much greater role at this time.
      - DOG officials stated that international assistance is likely an area of latent demand and they are awaiting development of a national policy to help determine their future role.
    - DOG officials also noted that DSF forces may be required to deploy with little or no notice in some cases, such as in supporting the U.S. Secret Service to protect the president, and may occur in advance of the RFF process.
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## **Objective 2: Challenges Facing the DOG**

### **Impact of Force Readiness Command Still Unknown**

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- As previously noted, while FORCECOM has been established, it will not become fully operational without enactment of a legislative change proposal intended to realign senior leadership and organizational positions.
  - As a result, the Coast Guard has reported that some role ambiguity currently exists due to the combination of both new and legacy organizational components operating concurrently.
    - For example, some personnel originally designated to FORCECOM have been temporarily reallocated to Pacific Area, and other FORCECOM staff are performing functions for both commands concurrently. According to a senior FORCECOM official, while staff are currently able to shift resources internally to meet changing demands, the situation is not sustainable. He stated that without the legislative changes, personnel will not be able to fully focus on FORCECOM duties as envisioned.
  - Despite some administrative challenges associated with the remaining two-Area structure, DOG officials reported that they have, and will retain, primary responsibility for managing and allocating DSF resources, even after the full implementation of FORCECOM.
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## Agency Comments

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We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Coast Guard for review and comment.

- The Department of Homeland Security provided no written comments.
- The U.S. Coast Guard provided technical comments that have been incorporated into the report, as appropriate.

### Deployable Specialized Forces

This enclosure provides additional information on the specific deployable specialized forces under the command of the Deployable Operations Group (DOG). The DOG is responsible for coordinating and executing all deployments of the Coast Guard’s deployable specialized forces, which consist of five types of teams or units (see table 1).

**Table 1: The U.S. Coast Guard’s Deployable Specialized Forces—Component Teams and Unit Descriptions**

Component teams or units (type, number, and locations)	Number of personnel <sup>a</sup>	Unit description
<p><u>National Strike Force:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Strike Force Coordination Center (Elizabeth City, North Carolina)<sup>b</sup></li> <li>• Atlantic Strike Team (Fort Dix, New Jersey)</li> <li>• Gulf Strike Team (Mobile, Alabama)</li> <li>• Pacific Strike Team (Novato, California)</li> </ul>	270	<p>First created in 1973, the National Strike Force is composed of a cadre of Coast Guard professionals—with incident-management skills and specialized equipment—who deploy in response to oil and hazardous substance pollution incidents (i.e., biological, chemical, and radiological response).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each Strike Team is comprised of approximately 80 personnel, of which about half are active duty personnel. The remainder includes a combination of reservists, auxiliaries, and civilians.</li> <li>• Members typically deploy for up to 21 days. If an incident extends beyond this period, additional responders are deployed to backfill positions. Responders deploy on average approximately 160 days per year.</li> <li>• The National Strike Force responded to a total of 21 oil spill incidents and 27 hazardous material release incidents in fiscal year 2008, as reported by the National Strike Force Coordination Center.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Tactical Law Enforcement Teams</u> (two teams):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific Tactical Law Enforcement Team (San Diego, California)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Eight Law Enforcement Detachments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Tactical Law Enforcement Team South (Miami, Florida)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Nine Law Enforcement Detachments</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	204	<p>Tactical Law Enforcement Teams provide specialized law enforcement and maritime security capabilities to enforce U.S. laws across a spectrum of maritime missions, including drug interdiction and vessel interception operations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Coast Guard’s two Tactical Law Enforcement Teams collectively are composed of 17 smaller units (Law Enforcement Detachments) whose average complement consists of 9 personnel with a range of capabilities—e.g., precision marksmen and law enforcement boarding officers.</li> <li>• Tactical Law Enforcement Teams collectively</li> </ul>

Enclosure II: Deployable Specialized Forces

		<p>perform around 40 deployments per year, with each detachment averaging over 185 days away from its home base.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teams typically conduct their primary mission (law enforcement) in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean. Teams have also provided training to foreign naval, coast guard, and police forces in the Caribbean, Pacific Ocean, Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle East. More recently, Law Enforcement Detachments have been deployed to the Gulf of Aden and the eastern coast of Somalia as part of a multinational task force to suppress piracy.<sup>c</sup></li> </ul>
<p><u>Port Security Units</u> (eight units):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>California (San Pedro)</li> <li>California (San Francisco)</li> <li>Florida (Tampa)</li> <li>Massachusetts (Cape Cod)</li> <li>Mississippi (Gulfport)</li> <li>Ohio (Port Clinton)</li> <li>Virginia (Fort Eustis)</li> <li>Washington (Tacoma)</li> </ul>	<p>1,171</p>	<p>Manned largely by Coast Guard reservists, Port Security Units conduct port operations, security, and defense in support of combatant commanders' operations worldwide. A primary mission of Port Security Units is to provide waterside protection to U.S. Navy vessels and other high-value assets, including pier areas and harbor entrances. Units are currently deployed to Kuwait Naval Base to support Operation Iraqi Freedom and in January 2010 were also activated to assist with U.S. operations in Haiti. According to the Coast Guard, Port Security Units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are deployed as 117 person teams and have sufficient equipment to sustain operations for up to 30 days; and</li> <li>operate fast, highly maneuverable and armed transportable port security boats and have land-based security forces that complement waterborne operations, and protect unit personnel, equipment, and command and control facilities.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Maritime Safety and Security Teams</u> (12 teams):<sup>d</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alaska (Anchorage)</li> <li>California (San Diego)</li> <li>California (San Francisco)</li> <li>California (San Pedro)</li> <li>Florida (Miami)</li> <li>Georgia (Kings Bay)</li> <li>Hawaii (Honolulu)</li> <li>Louisiana (New Orleans)</li> <li>Massachusetts (Boston)</li> <li>New York (New York)</li> <li>Texas (Galveston)</li> </ul>	<p>1,014</p>	<p>Created under the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002, the Maritime Safety and Security Teams constitute a maritime security antiterrorism force. The teams are managed as national deployable assets responsible for safeguarding the public and protecting vessels, harbors, ports, facilities, and cargo in U.S. territorial waters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teams are to maintain readiness to deploy to events such as terrorist threats or incidents; storm recovery operations; and routinely deploy to national special security events such as the Super Bowl and the presidential inauguration. The teams also enforce security zones during transit of high-interest vessels and at other times when additional levels of security are needed within the nation's ports and waterways.</li> <li>Among other capabilities, team elements</li> </ul>

Enclosure II: Deployable Specialized Forces

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Washington (Seattle)</li> </ul>		<p>include canines trained to search for explosives; divers trained for underwater detection; and remotely operated submersible vehicles equipped with cameras used for a variety of underwater applications.</p>
<p><u>Maritime Security Response Team</u> (one team):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virginia (Chesapeake)</li> </ul>	<p>225</p>	<p>Charged with maintaining a high readiness posture 365 days a year, the Maritime Security Response Team is the Coast Guard's advanced interdiction force for counterterrorism and higher risk law enforcement operations. The team provides a variety of advanced capabilities or skills, including addressing threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and vertically inserting from a helicopter to a ship's deck to engage potentially hostile personnel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Maritime Security Response Team, like other Coast Guard units, may be deployed unilaterally or as part of an interagency adaptive force package.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Total personnel</b></p>	<p><b>2884<sup>e</sup></b></p>	

Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

<sup>a</sup>Includes active, reserve, and civilian billets assigned to the units as of March 2010. Total does not include any fiscal year 2010 billet additions that have not yet been staffed.

<sup>b</sup>The National Strike Force Coordination Center (NSFCC) provides support and standardization guidance to the Atlantic Strike Team, the Gulf Strike Team, and the Pacific Strike Team. The NSFCC is also home to the Public Information Assist Team, which provides emergency public information services to federal on-scene coordinators primarily during oil spills and hazardous material releases. The NSFCC is responsible for and oversees the maintenance of functions mandated by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and is comprised of 18 active duty personnel, 3 reservists, and 8 civilians. However, the Coast Guard's fiscal year 2011 budget request proposes decommissioning the Coordination Center, eliminating 9 billets, and relocating the 17 remaining billets between the Strike Teams, the Deployable Operations Group, and Coast Guard Headquarters.

<sup>c</sup>In January 2009, the U.S. Central Command created Combined Task Force 151, an international coalition consisting of command personnel from the United States, Turkey, Singapore, Greece, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Its mission is to actively deter, disrupt, and suppress piracy in order to protect global maritime security and secure freedom of navigation for the benefit of all nations.

<sup>d</sup>The Coast Guard's fiscal year 2011 budget request proposes the disestablishment of five Maritime Safety and Security Teams, and the reallocation of some of these billets to Tactical Law Enforcement Teams.

<sup>e</sup>The Deployable Operations Group also oversees and manages 49 Coast Guard reserve personnel who are assigned to work within three U.S. Navy components: Naval Expeditionary Combatant Commander; Maritime Expeditionary Security Groups; and Maritime Security Squadrons.

### Related GAO Products

*Coast Guard: Observations on the Fiscal Year 2011 Budget and Related Performance and Management Challenges.* [GAO-10-411T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 25, 2010.

*Coast Guard: Service Has Taken Steps to Address Historic Personnel Problems, but It Is too Soon to Assess the Impact of These Efforts.* [GAO-10-268R](#). Washington, D.C.: January 29, 2010.

*Coast Guard: Observations on the Genesis and Progress of the Service's Modernization Program.* [GAO-09-530R](#). Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2009.

*Maritime Security: National Strategy and Supporting Plans Were Generally Well-Developed and Are Being Implemented.* [GAO-08-672](#). Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2008.

*Maritime Security: Coast Guard Inspections Identify and Correct Facility Deficiencies, but More Analysis Needed of Program's Staffing, Practices, and Data.* [GAO-08-12](#). Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 2008.

*Maritime Security: Federal Efforts Needed to Address Challenges in Preventing and Responding to Terrorist Attacks on Energy Commodity Tankers.* [GAO-08-141](#). Washington, D.C.: Dec. 10, 2007.

*Maritime Security: The SAFE Port Act: Status and Implementation One Year Later.* [GAO-08-126T](#). Washington, D.C.: Oct. 30, 2007.

*Maritime Security: Information on Port Security in the Caribbean Basin.* [GAO-07-804R](#). Washington, D.C.: June 29, 2007.

*Coast Guard: Observations on the Preparation, Response, and Recovery Missions Related to Hurricane Katrina.* [GAO-06-903](#). Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2006.

*Maritime Security: Information Sharing Efforts Are Improving.* [GAO-06-933T](#). Washington, D.C.: July 10, 2006.

*Risk Management: Further Refinements Needed to Assess Risks and Prioritize Protective Measures at Ports and Other Critical Infrastructure.* [GAO-06-91](#). Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2005.

*Maritime Security: Enhancements Made, but Implementation and Sustainability Remain Key Challenges.* [GAO-05-448T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2005.

*Maritime Security: Better Planning Needed to Help Ensure an Effective Port Security Assessment Program.* [GAO-04-1062](#). Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 2004.

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