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Safety & Security**

Beyond the Dateline

*Coast Guard challenges
and opportunities in
the Asia-Pacific region.*

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Kon-nichi-wa (Greetings) from Tokyo, Japan. U.S. Coast Guard Activities Far East (FEACT) is a forward-deployed Coast Guard operational command co-located with Commander, United States Forces Japan at Yokota Air Base in Japan. FEACT is responsible for executing a

casualty investigation) program for all U.S. flag vessels operating in the region, including the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command fleet. To meet the unique challenges of operating outside the United States in this dynamic international arena, the FEACT command

cadre consists of a commander and deputy commander, located with the majority of the members at the command headquarters in Japan, with detachment supervisors at the smaller Singapore and Seoul, South Korea offices. FEACT is modeled after a Coast Guard sector and has three major departments: prevention, response/security, logistics.

The prevention department is led by the Singapore detachment supervisor, with marine inspectors in both Japan and Singapore. They are charged with the inspection, examination, and certification of all U.S. flag vessels

operating in the Activities Far East officer in charge, marine inspection zone. A large percentage of all U.S.-flag, deep-draft commercial vessels are dry-docked and repaired in Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and China. Indeed, these have become the centers for world shipbuilding and repair. This marine safety mission includes new vessel construction, major reflag, and conversion projects. FEACT is also responsible for monitoring the construction/fabrication of the majority of all Coast Guard-approved primary lifesaving equipment for U.S. flag vessels.



The members of Coast Guard Activities Far East gather in Japan for annual training and orientation. With staff members spread throughout three countries, gathering once a year is a critical part of communications and alignment. USCG photo.

full spectrum of Coast Guard activities and missions across a vast 41-nation Asia-Pacific region with 47 nations and territories stretching from Russia to New Zealand, and from Madagascar to French Polynesia. This area of responsibility contains the world's largest commercial ports and strategically important shipping routes, as well as the maritime industry's largest shipbuilding and repair centers.

FEACT executes the Coast Guard's International Port Security and marine safety (inspection/certification/



The Commandant's plane lands on an Air Force runway in Tokyo, Japan, for a visit illustrating FEACT's unique operating environment. USCG photo.

The response/security department is headed by the International Port Security Program coordinator, with a team of 10 international port security liaison officers (IP-SLOs) spread across the Japan, Singapore, and Seoul offices. (See related article.) In addition, FEACT must occasionally coordinate Coast Guard response operations such as stowaways on U.S. flag vessels or joint operations with visiting Coast Guard cutters. FEACT also responds to foreign assistance requests, such as the December 2007 South Korea oil spill response.

The logistics department, led by the logistics chief, is located at the Tokyo office, and deals with procurement, orders, travel, and a host of other process requirements common to administrative staffs at all units. The department also deals with issues unique to overseas missions, such as obtaining travel visas and the country clearance approvals required for all international travel, specialized training for foreign deployment, protocol with our industry and government officials, and maintaining critical relationships with our Department of Defense (DoD), the U.S. Embassy, and foreign nation hosts.

Modernization

Coast Guard modernization will likely impact the way FEACT and all forward-operating units execute operations. Modernization will streamline decision making and reduce the number of layers between the decision maker and the field.

While direct but geographically distant command structures may be new for some units, this organizational concept has been in place for FEACT since the unit was established in 1994. The existing FEACT reporting structure should further strengthen under the planned OPCOM modernization and the expansion of the 14th



LT Ken McCain of FEACT's prevention department often flies thousands of miles to inspect vessels in other countries. USCG photo.

District commander's role as Commander for International Engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.

The modernization initiative will likely impose time and distance challenges for U.S. mainland units that forward-deployed commands, such as FEACT, have long experienced. Depending on the complexity of the issue,

Uniquely FEACT

A unique aspect to the FEACT mission is the sheer number of cultures and various customs and traditions that must be respected if we are to be successful. Expected diplomatic behavior varies widely from country to country and region to region. At a minimum, a member of FEACT has to learn how to relate to his or her host country. To be successful, officers must be at least somewhat familiar with the cultures of all the countries they visit. One week you might be greeting a Fijian with a hearty "Bula," and the next week it's "Annyong haseyo" in Korea. In one country you might shake hands, while in another it is only culturally proper to bow. Keeping it all straight week after week can be a tiring and complicated process, but getting it wrong may undermine the success of the mission.

In several of the FEACT countries, the Coast Guard officer might be one of the few Americans the locals ever see. Leaving a good impression is part of being diplomatic, and part of being a diplomat is knowing at least some of the local language. This is great in theory, but how do you handle countries like India, which has more than 22 official languages? Learning that many languages is not an option for most of us. However, solid understanding of the country's culture and the ability to identify critical factors help each of our members avoid cultural pitfalls.



Having knowledge does not necessarily equate to understanding.

seeking clarity up the chain can be a complicated affair. For example, suppose a member of FEACT needs a policy clarification at 9:00 a.m. on the ground in Mumbai, India. At that time, it would be 1 p.m. in Tokyo, 5 p.m. the previous day in Honolulu, 9 p.m. in Alameda, and midnight in Washington, DC. While modernization cannot change time zones, it will reduce and consolidate the number of stops a policy clarification requires on its way up the command structure.

The Tyranny of Time and Distance

When FEACT members get ready for work on Monday morning, they may get dressed watching the final minutes of the Sunday afternoon football game. When we finish work on Friday, many workers at headquarters are still getting ready for their Friday morning commute. In practical operational terms, asking for policy guidance from headquarters involves FEACT making late-night or very early morning phone calls. As a necessity, many issues are dealt with locally and later back-briefed.

This level of autonomy and empowerment can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, having a fully staffed unit forward deployed means the speed and confidence of actions is high; however, engagement with other governments and agencies is at a generally higher level. It is normal business for a FEACT officer in the response/security department to engage directly with the head of the Ministry of Transportation in a country on Monday, work directly with the owner and operators of



CDR Yuri Graves of FEACT's security department, right, visits a foreign port as the international port security liaison officer. FEACT's nine liaison officers make 40 country visits per year, covering 105 million square miles of the Asia-Pacific region. USCG photo.

multimillion-dollar port facilities from Tuesday to Thursday, and out-brief the American ambassador on Friday.

This type of access to the highest levels of multiple governments and multinational corporations has the potential to create international friction. The fact that the Coast Guard empowers the FEACT commander to engage in these activities shows the confidence Coast Guard leadership has in their people. However, international engagement has the potential to put the Coast Guard, Department of Defense, and Department of State (DoS) in a risk position for international relations. After all, what is good for the Coast Guard may not benefit or be in alignment with the DoD or U.S. Pacific Command and could be counter to DoS regional goals.

FEACT's strategic goal for 2009-2010, in conjunction with District 14, is to develop and deploy a coordinated and strategic international engagement plan for Coast Guard missions in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mitigation and Coordination

Given the frequency of foreign government and agency interactions, one might ask, "How is it that conflict does not arise more often?" As it turns out, the same operational strengths that allow success as a forward-deployed and geographically disbursed command are fundamental to successful international engagement: communications, confidence, understanding, respect, and patience. This has been of utmost importance to the FEACT International Port Security Program in the Asia-Pacific region, where cultivation of long-term relationships has been key to our success.

Exceptional communication skill is the most important element in the internal and external success equation. Often, communications are thought to be verbal; however, much of our communications with policy makers is written. Clear and concise policy guidance from various programs within the command structure, including the Coast Guard Director of International Affairs and Foreign Policy; Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security and Stewardship; Assistant Commandant for Human Resources; Pacific Area; and District 14 is necessary for FEACT to succeed. Strategic policy guidance from within the Coast Guard, as well as other agencies, helps our members understand the regional context involved in engagement with foreign governments.

Clear and concise communication and policy are critical for forward-operating commands. This effort will help unify operational command and control and place new emphasis on readiness and doctrine. Development

of doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) are a must for units operating autonomously at a distance. Internally, adherence to doctrine, standard operating procedures (SOP), TTP, solid introductory training, and a good on-the-job training program help ensure that Coast Guard offices and FEACT members are in full accord on policy issues.

With a shorter command structure and greater distance from policy makers, there is less opportunity for immediate clarification. Additionally, as consequence increases, so does risk. Knowledge and experience are the best ways to manage risk in such an environment. On-the-job and indoctrination training are critical for creating confidence and consistency at the field level and within the chain of command.

Having knowledge does not necessarily equate to “understanding.” Knowing what to do is likely to be subordinate to knowing why it is done. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard international strategic guidance document contains 12 pages of regionally specific, high-level guidance complete with strategic context, goals, and measures of effectiveness that overseas personnel must be well acquainted with. Seeing the complexities of a given situation is a skill based on experience. Lessons learned and after-action analyses are integral parts of this experience and understanding. With experience comes the ability to prioritize and coordinate critical issues.

On the Horizon

Because of FEACT’s close, long-standing relationships in our Asia-Pacific region, we find ourselves in a good position to help the Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security move forward with a consolidated and comprehensive international engagement strategy for the region. U.S. Coast Guard Commandant ADM Thad Allen wants to consolidate operational command and control while reducing layers of bureaucracy and operational friction.¹

This vision for the Coast Guard is analogous to the command structure developed for FEACT to manage issues of location, time, and distance. Having overcome the dilemma of the dateline, FEACT is already operating under the principles of modernization, and we offer this advice based on our own lessons learned.

As leaders in the Coast Guard, it is our responsibility—no matter what our rank—to help new unit members develop the confidence and understanding to operate in this changing environment. In order to be successful, we will need to stay flexible and realize that the Coast Guard

is embarking on a new era.

Much of this process is still unknown. As our new organization unfolds, it is our responsibility to keep moving forward with our mis-



FEACT’s prevention department staff inspect a dry dock facility in the Asia-Pacific region. USCG photo.



Proliferation Security Initiative 2007 exercise at Yokosuka, Japan. The U.S. officers (from left) CDR Mark Eyer, LT Gregg Maye, LCDR Rich Kavanaugh, and LCDR Wes Bringham, USN, demonstrated how the USCG and USN work together during joint operations aboard a Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force ship. USCG photo.

sions, leveraging the opportunities of our new structure to their fullest potential.

Arigato gozaimasu! (Thank you!)

About the authors:

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Endnote:

¹ ADM Thad Allen, Keynote Address to the 16th Annual Florida Sterling Conference in Orlando, Fla., May 28, 2008.

