



MAN WITH A PLAN

New Coast Guard Commandant **Adm. Thad W. Allen** charts a future focused on improved emergency response, tighter ties with the Navy and better equipment for missions far out to sea.

By Katherine McIntire Peters Photograph by James Kegley

In December 2004, then-Coast Guard Chief of Staff Vice Adm. Thad W. Allen gave a speech at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., in which he discussed the galvanizing effect the failed 1980 Iranian hostage rescue attempt had on the U.S. national security establishment. The doomed mission,

along with other Defense Department failures, propelled Congress to pass the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, a watershed law that substantially reoriented Defense and forced the military services into greater cooperation.

“It occurred to me after 9/11 that there was that kind of clarion call for that type of cohesiveness inside the [non-Defense]

world,” Allen says. “We did not have that same unity of command you see in military operations,” a shortcoming he worried would have substantial consequences during any future calamity. Eight months later, Hurricane Katrina laid waste to more than 90,000 square miles of Gulf Coast territory and shattered Americans’ confidence in the federal government’s ability to respond effectively to cata-

strophic events. If anybody missed the clarion call of Sept. 11, surely they heard it Aug. 29, Allen says.

In late May, with a fourth star on his shoulder making him a full admiral, Allen became commandant of the Coast Guard, the only agency with dual military-law enforcement status and one many believe provides a critical bridge spanning the wide gap in capabilities between traditional national security agencies and the fledgling Homeland Security Department, of which the Coast Guard is a part.

Allen, whose father was so eager to join the Coast Guard as a 16-year-old during World War II that he lied about his age to enlist, brings to the job a clear notion of where the service is headed and what it

needs to accomplish to get there. He plans to substantially realign the service’s special operations units that respond to security and environmental emergencies so they can work more effectively with other Homeland Security agencies; move forward aggressively on the Coast Guard’s long-term recapitalization plan, known as Deepwater; and forge a closer relationship with the Defense Department, especially the Navy.

Allen clearly understands the challenges the Coast Guard and Homeland Security face. He played a pivotal role in the response to both the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, which led to the creation of Homeland Security, and to Katrina. As Atlantic Area commander during 9/11, he oversaw the Coast Guard’s substantial response, which included shutting down New York Harbor and participating in what might be the largest boatlift in history—moving more than a million people trapped in lower Manhattan to safe ground. During Katrina, after a dismal initial government response, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff designated Allen the principal federal official in charge and assigned him to coordinate operations on the ground. In fact, the Coast Guard was one of the few agencies to emerge from Katrina with its reputation intact, if not enhanced. Within hours of Katrina’s landfall, while many other federal and state officials waited for someone to take charge, Coast Guard helicopters had begun rescuing survivors. Applying 40 percent of Coast Guard aircraft to the challenge, air and boat crews rescued nearly 34,000 people.

Expanding Mission

The Coast Guard has one of the broadest missions in government. As a maritime law enforcement agency, it conducts search-and-rescue missions, is the lead agency for port security and a key player in counternarcotics and anti-smuggling operations, and administers safety regulations. As a military service, it has participated in every major war. Coast Guard boats now conduct boarding and interdiction opera-

The Allen Doctrine

The new Coast Guard commandant looks ahead.

In a wide-ranging interview with *Government Executive* May 2, Adm. Thad W. Allen discussed his view of the Coast Guard’s evolving security role and his plans for the service upon becoming commandant at the end of the month. Excerpts follow:

On reorganizing deployable Coast Guard units:

We have for different reasons over a number of years built teams and detachments that are deployable that have always been stovepiped into different mission areas. My goal would be to take all of those and put them under one force structure and use that force structure to integrate with the Department of Homeland Security and create a more agile, flexible force that could deploy in advance of an event if you knew it was coming, or after an event to mitigate any threats or hazards. [It’s] a more efficient way to organize, a more effective way to deploy in a post-[Hurricane] Katrina environment and a better way to mesh with the other operating agencies in DHS.

I don’t intend to move them, but put them under the same command. The working title is Deployable Operations Group. These forces will still be owned by the field commanders, but [the new command] will build a common doctrine between them and create deployable logistics support for them. We would create packages that are capable of being airlifted in C-130s. The new command would train, equip and provide those forces to whoever needs them.

The Coast Guard’s new home within Homeland Security:

Contrary to what may be believed by the public, the media and some other folks, I think our presence in the Department of Homeland Security significantly enhanced our ability to respond [during Katrina] and significantly enhanced the department’s ability to respond.

When you start thinking about the capabilities resident in the department

that can be married up with the Coast Guard, it’s a very effective force if we just adapt it to the situation. If you look what [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] brings to the fight in terms of resources that can come in after an event, and I’m speaking specifically about urban search-and-rescue teams, the national disaster medical system, deployable medical teams, and you think how you can hook those up with say an agency that could provide security—the Federal Protective Service or Customs and Border Protection—and then you have ways to get in with Coast Guard small boats, for instance, that’s where everything becomes very valuable because you get synergies with all those capabilities and competencies.

The failure of the federal response to Katrina:

The problem with Katrina was that [the National Response Plan] was a nascent strategy that just didn’t deliver. There was insufficient training with the state and local levels to understand it and [Homeland Security was] in the process of reorganizing under Secretary [Michael] Chertoff’s second stage review when the hurricane hit. So there was never any benefit from the work that had been done, starting with the creation of the department, to bring to bear when we had the most catastrophic natural disaster that we’ve encountered.

The flooding of New Orleans was the equivalent of a weapon of mass effect without criminality. We were pulling forces into [New Orleans], but there basically was not a capable authority—in terms of having radios that worked, a command center, etc.



LOOKING GOOD The Coast Guard’s reputation was enhanced by its post-Katrina performance, guarding and rescuing civilians.

U.S. COAST GUARD

tions in the Persian Gulf in support of military operations in Iraq, for example.

“We’ve been doing this kind of work since 1790,” says Allen, referring to then-Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton’s creation of the Revenue Marine, to which the Coast Guard traces its roots. “I would say the modern counterterrorism mission

patrol, or a large cutter operating in the Bering Sea on the boundary line between the United States and Russia, our commanders are deployed out there to do a mission and they’re provided the resources and the authority to execute the mission,” says Allen.

To be able to perform all these missions,

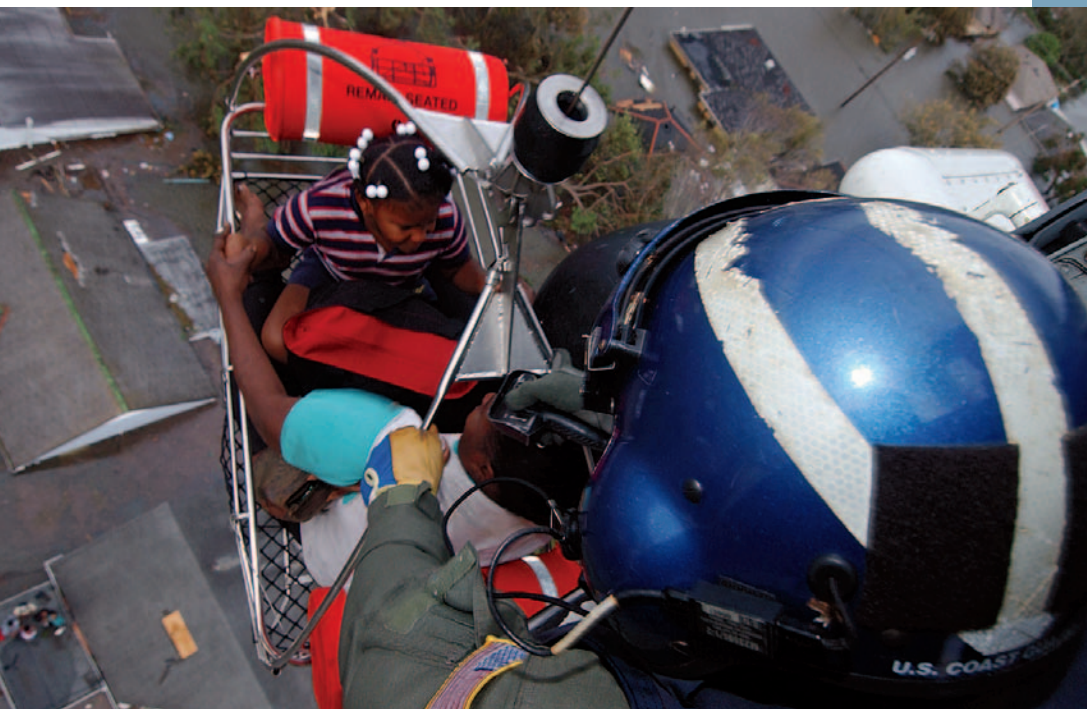
Those were the things I addressed when I got to New Orleans. Those are the things that are being addressed before this hurricane season.

If terrorists had blown up the levees, the response would have been different:

When the city was flooded you really had a different event tactically. Had that been a terrorist attack, you would have seen a criminal investigative agency in charge of the response, most likely Department of Justice, directing the on-scene response, but at the same time you would have had the recovery-and-relief resource come to bear. The difference is if you had a terrorist attack and everybody knew that, you would have somebody on the ground there supervising the response, and FEMA’s role would have been a supporting role to deal with the consequences. In this hurricane, we kind of did it in reverse. Based on the hurricane model, we put FEMA resources in to be responsive pursuant to an emergency or disaster declaration at the request of the governor, and we backed into the second event.

Preparations for the 2006 hurricane season:

Dramatically different. Everybody’s really leaning forward. As we meet this morning, there’s a meeting going on down in New Orleans between FEMA, Coast Guard and other federal agencies, U.S. Northern Command on contingency plans on how to re-establish communications if they’re lost again. That was one of the significant problems we had during Katrina. We’re planning for the prospect that communications will be disrupted and how quickly they can be restored and we’ll test those plans before 1 June.



FLEXIBLE Coast Guard units didn't have to wait for authorization to rescue hurricane victims.

probably started with the passage of the Espionage Act in 1917, and that is basically the genesis of a lot of our captain of the port authority we have right now to protect waterfront facilities, vessels, [and] the infrastructure of ports.”

This broad and diffuse mission has fostered a culture of individual initiative, which has stood the agency well, most recently during Katrina when small boat crews were among the first responders at the scene because they weren’t waiting for direction or permission to act, says Allen. “Our cutters traditionally operate by themselves in a patrol standpoint, so whether it’s an isolated search-and-rescue station on the Outer Banks, a small patrol boat operating in the Caribbean on a drug

the Coast Guard has developed specialized units that can deploy on short notice to deal with everything from hazardous materials spills to maritime accidents to terrorist threats at ports. Allen plans to organize these units into a single command, called the Deployable Operations Group, that will be responsible for training and equipping personnel and imposing a common doctrine with unified logistics support. The units will be deployed aboard C-130 cargo aircraft wherever they are needed and their operations will be integrated with other Homeland Security missions. “When you put them all together, it gives you a multi-mission capacity to go in and either prevent something from happening or mitigate a threat,” Allen says.

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“This shore-based force has to evolve and change to meet” new threats.

—ADM. THAD ALLEN, Coast Guard commandant

While the Coast Guard is trying to enhance coordination with other elements of Homeland Security, Allen also wants to improve interoperability with the Navy. In March, Allen’s predecessor, Adm. Thomas H. Collins, and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael G. Mullen published a revised national fleet policy, essentially pledging better integration of Coast Guard and Navy operations and assets. The policy, which has been in existence since the late 1990s, has taken on greater significance as both services seek to operate more effectively at a time when missions are expanding faster than resources.

The intention is to ensure that each service’s ships and boats have as much common hardware and software as possible to increase compatibility. The

Coast Guard’s new *National Security Cutter*, for example, will have a gun deck similar to one used on Navy combatants. Sensor suites on new ships and boats will be the same.

“I think the national fleet policy is very significant to the Coast Guard and the Navy and the nation,” says retired Vice Adm. James Hull, whose last assignment was Atlantic Area commander in 2004. Hull is now the senior adviser for homeland security at Anteon Corp., a Coast Guard contractor headquartered in Fairfax, Va. “I think strategically the senior leadership of both services understand the importance of working together. I think on the deck plate at the waterfront everybody understands that. But sometimes in the middle, the budgetary policy arena, there’s some conflict,” Hull says.

JAMES KEGLEY

The Coast Guard’s dual military-civilian role:

We’re always military, but we can apply our law enforcement authority in a civil manner. It’s that dual character that makes us unique. Recently, we concluded a series of agreements with U.S. Northern Command and DoD and the Department of Homeland Security that allow the Coast Guard to quickly move in and become part of U.S. Northern Command forces if that’s necessary and, conversely, if we need support from Northern Command they can flow forces to the Coast Guard and we can act for NORTHCOM as a task force commander. Those are very powerful instruments that are in place that allow the Coast Guard to move seamlessly between what I would call our Title 14 world and our Title 10 world, and also allow the DoD forces to flow back and forth. It’s a really good piece of government.

The challenges of maritime security:

Entry into the air domain and space domain is pretty much inhibited by technology. But the oceans are probably the last great global commons. There are long-standing legal principles of freedom of navigation, right of innocent passage and things like that. Our challenge in a post-9/11 environment is to reconcile the use of those waters for commerce and transportation with the need to protect our nation, know what’s out there, and understand if there are threats and defeat those threats at the greatest distance. That’s a challenge. You can’t just take the airspace solution, which is [that] we have an air defense information zone that’s 200 miles off of each coast and if you penetrate that zone and you haven’t checked in or you don’t have a transponder identifying where you’re at, you get met. It’s a significant issue. We have to get better.

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SHARING THE SEAS Better integration of Coast Guard and Navy operations and assets will add efficiency at a time when missions are expanding faster than resources.

Aging Assets, Infrastructure

If the Coast Guard's authority is rooted in history, so are some of its infrastructure challenges. Allen says one of his chief goals is to replace and repair Coast Guard assets through the Deepwater program. Many are nearing the end of their useful lives.

Deepwater originally aimed to produce aircraft and boats for the Coast Guard's offshore mission over a 20-year period, replacing and upgrading old assets to meet future needs, but after Sept. 11, the service took on a significantly greater role in homeland security missions, and Coast Guard leaders revised Deepwater to reflect the new requirements. Some members of Congress have been concerned about the resulting schedule and cost changes. A Government Accountability Office April report essentially validated the Coast Guard's plan, which may mitigate those concerns.

"I'm going to look very closely at any

more requirements changes because, while requirements changes allow you to adapt to changing mission needs, at some point you're going to start feeding so many changes into the design you're going to defeat the timeline and the cost associated with this," Allen says. "If I were to give you two words that would categorize the next four years in relation to Deepwater, they would be 'ruthless execution.'"

Aging infrastructure also is a major challenge. "We've become over the years an aquatic holding company," says Allen with many facilities dating to 1915, when the U.S. Life-Saving Service was incorporated into the Coast Guard with its small search-and-rescue stations dotting the coastlines. "This shore-based force has to evolve and change to meet the new threat environment. We may have to go out and take a look to see if a particular station in a given area is the best way to deliver those services," Allen says. 