

DAILY BRIEFING

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Coast Guard chief seeking new maritime security strategy

By Chris Strohm, [CongressDaily](#)

The Coast Guard is **developing a maritime security strategy** that will guide its decision-making, rulemaking, technological requirements and requests for legislation into the future, the agency's chief said Friday.

Coast Guard Commandant Thad Allen said he hopes to unveil the new strategy within four months, adding that it will serve as the basis for making decisions. "It's going to provide us a template of how you increase maritime security," Allen told reporters during a briefing sponsored by *Defense Daily*.

Allen said the strategy is needed because the Coast Guard has had such a high operations tempo since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. "I don't think we've had a chance to sit back and assess ... what is the end-state," he said. He did not say, however, whether the agency would need any new authorities or legislation from Congress to implement the plan.

The strategy will **focus on the agency's core mission areas of security, safety and stewardship of waterways**, Allen said. Allen said he hopes to create a "strategic trident" that will govern shore-based operations, off-shore capabilities and a new "deployable operations group."

This unit has yet to be developed, but it would tap port security units, marine safety and security teams and mobile hazardous materials teams to give the agency increased capability to surge into action during a disaster, Allen said.

The strategy will provide a model for how the Coast Guard deals with transnational threats and those who are not connected to a specific country or government, Allen said. One of the biggest threats for the agency is watercraft coming close to U.S. ports or ships with improvised explosive devices.

Allen said the Coast Guard is looking toward technology to help detect those kinds of threats. For example, radio frequency identification tags could help identify what containers hold and long-range tracking devices can help spot potential threats before they reach U.S. coasts. Allen said the Coast Guard also has to determine what types and size of vessels should be required to have transponders.

On related matters, Allen said the Coast Guard expects to see an increase in the number of boats used for human smuggling as the government cracks down on illegal immigration at land borders. The agency is now doing contingency planning for such a development and has already seen a rise in human smuggling from Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Allen also weighed in on the debate over reforming the Federal Emergency Management Agency, saying he does not think it should be removed from the Homeland Security Department. FEMA and the Coast Guard benefit from and mutually support each other by being in the same department, he said.

Some lawmakers have proposed making FEMA an independent, Cabinet-level agency. The Senate's version of the fiscal 2007 Homeland Security appropriations bill, approved last week, keeps FEMA inside the department but transforms it into a more empowered organization. House lawmakers have yet to reach agreement on what to do with the agency.