

# Coast Guard's Atlantic Commander Says More Attention to South Atlantic Nations Needed



Vice Adm. Stephen Poulin discusses what the changing security environment in Europe means for the U.S. Coast Guard. *LISA NIPP*

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The widening political and economic effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine may help focus attention on the strategic significance and strategic needs of the Atlantic Basin, a top U.S. Coast Guard commander says.

"The security environment in Europe has changed. I believe with that change will come a broad demand for the U.S. Coast Guard," Vice Adm. Stephen Poulin told a panel discussion of the maritime security needs of the region April 4 at Sea-Air-Space 2022.

"Most of our Arctic partners are in the Atlantic. We have to maintain strong relationships with our European neighbors," said Poulin, commander of the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area. There is "a growing thirst" for U.S. Coast Guard presence "in certain parts of Europe, especially in the Mediterranean."

There is an interconnectedness between Mediterranean security and Atlantic security, Poulin said, noting the Coast Guard has built ties with maritime services in Greece, Malta, Italy, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Algeria and Tunisia. Four of six Fast Response Cutters have been delivered to Bahrain, where they are based with Patrol Forces Southwest Asia, the Coast Guard's largest unit outside of the United States. The final two FRCs are slated for delivery this summer.

The Biden Administration's \$13.8 billion fiscal 2023 Coast Guard budget includes \$40 million to support maritime security issues in the Atlantic Basin, including illegal, unregulated and underreported fishing, illegal trafficking and transnational crime.

Poulin said that move would allow him to achieve more persistent engagement with all the Atlantic nations "but in particular our African partners."

"This isn't just about IUU fishing," Poulin said, noting as much as 5% of illegal narcotics flow leaves South America and winds up going through Africa or Europe. There is a growing threat of armed robbery and piracy in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, he said, adding "that is happening where there is a growing expectation in the future of higher offshore energy production."

Another panelist, Lyston Lea II, principal adviser to the U.S. National Maritime Intelligence Integration Office, said the prime security challenges facing the Atlantic Basin are climate change, illicit activities such as IUUF, and great power competition. Solutions, he said, include "meaningful unclassified data sharing and more partnerships between government, the private sector and allies."

Lea, who said IUUF was a bad acronym and he prefers calling it "evil fishing," said he was pleased to see so many policy makers taking IUUF seriously as an economic, political and environmental issue and not simply about "dead fish," as one lawmaker told him in a contentious meeting in 2014.