

IUU Replacing Piracy as Top Global Maritime Security Threat



Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing has both economic and security ramifications. *NAVY LEAGUE / Lisa Nipp*

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The ramifications of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are readily apparent on nations whose economies depend on fishing, but the practice has an impact on U.S. national security as well, a panel of experts said Aug. 4 at Sea-Air-Space 2021.

Moderator Whitley Saumweber, who directs the Stephenson Ocean Security Project, described a scenario in which 90% of the world's fish stocks are either at or above sustainable capacity while demand continues to increase.

"This combines with increasing global competition, particularly from China, which uses its fishing fleets both as a source of economic and food security but also as a way to project soft power on the globe," Saumweber said.

Coast Guard Vice Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan said illegal fishing is replacing piracy as the top global maritime security threat facing the nation.

"It's a sovereignty issue, it's a maritime security issue and it jeopardizes nations' economic food security," Fagan said. "It weakens the global rules-based order that we all rely on for our standard of living."

Tackling IUU, Fagan said, will require both experienced leadership and close work in both building new partnerships and fostering existing one around the globe.

"We recently had the Mohawk, a 270-foot cutter, with another

nation's coast guard on board enforcing fisheries rules," Fagan said. "It's those types of partnerships where we provide an asset and the other nation provides their expertise and authority to get after the threat."

Navy Rear Adm. Heidi Berg, the former Director 12 at U.S. Africa Command, said IUU fishing drew considerable attention during her tenure because of the challenges it created in other areas. She specifically cited the effects caused by China's growing presence and activity.

"In the Gulf of Guinea, [China] is now devastating those economies," Berg said. "They engender corruption. They continue to act to support authoritarian regimes that can ensure their continued access."

Other crimes, such as weapons and drug trafficking, are on the increase as a direct result, Berg said. Terrorist organizations such as al Qaida and the Taliban are gaining influence as well, she added.

Constance Arvis, the acting deputy secretary of state for oceans, fisheries and polar affairs, said the State Department is actively working with other agencies and 69 international partners on a "groundbreaking treaty" called the Port State Measures Agreement.

"We are seeking to build a clean value chain of seafood that only accepts authorized catch from authorized vessels," Arvis said. "If a port state believes that a vessel that wishes to come in has in fact engaged in IUU fishing, it can be denied port services and entry. Information is going to be shared with other ports to make clear that no IUU fishing enters the international market."

The Defense Innovation Unit is actively seeking ideas from academia, government and industry by which new technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning could help foster better enforcement of fishing regulations and

quash IUU fishing in the process.

“We have no pride in where the solution comes from. But it is critical that when we get things to work, we find out [if] we can use the types of data here – space-based SAR [synthetic aperture radar] – to accurately identify activity that’s indicative of IUU fishing and vessels that may be doing it,” said Jared Dunnmon, the unit’s director of artificial intelligence.

Dunnmon said that the unit is conducting a prize challenge for innovators to submit ideas for countering IUU.

“The challenge is open to anyone,” Dunnmon said. “It launches this month, and we’ll run it for about three months.”