

U.S. Coast Guard concludes participation in multinational PANAMAX exercise



PANAMA PACIFIC0, Panama – U.S. Coast Guard deployable specialized forces personnel and the U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel-class cutter Robert Ward (WPC 1130) crew concluded participation in the PANAMAX 2026 exercise in-port and offshore of Panama City from Aug. 3-13.

Panama hosted participants from 18 partner nations, including the United States, for PANAMAX 2026. The exercise provided participating nations an opportunity to conduct combined security and stability operations to enhance their joint-operations capabilities.

U.S. Coast Guard personnel from Port Security Unit (PSU) 301, Maritime Security Response Team (MSRT) – West, District Southwest enforcement, and the Robert Ward conducted joint training and simulated exercises with partner nations throughout the exercise.

PSU 301 conducted Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) and small boat operations alongside U.S. Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance and partner forces from Panama, Mexico, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. The unit conducted a full-mission-profile exercise raid of the Amador Cruise Terminal and participated in integrated waterside and shoreside security operations. PSU 301 also employed command-and-control, common operating picture and unmanned aerial systems technologies to provide real-time video and communications in support of joint and combined forces.

MSRT West integrated with U.S. special operations forces and commando units from Panama, Argentina and Peru to prepare for complex maritime security missions. The exercise provided an opportunity to refine multinational tactics and coordination while demonstrating the ability of special operations forces to respond to maritime threats in the region.

Coast Guard Southwest District enforcement staff concluded an expansive eight-month planning process in conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard liaison officer in Panama, to lead the Combined Maritime Forces Pacific Task Force through 12 separate exercise events. The Robert Ward and crew conducted these integrated at-sea and in-port exercises with partner nations throughout PANAMAX 2026, including boardings, escorts and search-and-rescue operations. These exercise events culminated in a real-world multinational escort of a commercial cargo vessel as it exited the canal, followed by a complex final exercise. This exercise involved live assets simulating an aggressive action against a security formation, and ultimately concluded with effective turnover to PSU 301 for final boarding. This training tested a coordinated coalition response, strengthening the ability of multinational forces to operate together across a range of maritime security missions.

“The performance of the Combined Maritime Force was exceptional and the regional partnerships strengthened will endure beyond PANAMAX,” said U.S. Coast Guard Cmdr. Patrick Frost, deputy chief of enforcement, U.S. Coast Guard Southwest District. “The U.S. completed six full days of integrated exercises; including interdictions, boardings, security escorts, and search-and-rescue. The success of PANAMAX was a result of joint planning efforts dating back months, heavily attributed to the hospitality of Panama’s aeronaval service, and effectively laid groundwork for further collaboration to build off training events and achieve advanced real-world operations.”

Participating nations included Panama, Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Netherlands, Paraguay, Peru, the United Kingdom and the United States. The scope of nations represented in this year's exercise reflects a collective recognition of the importance of the Panama Canal as a vital maritime waterway, and the ever-increasing collaborative partnership between public security and defense forces in the region.

Panama served as the exercise host, and the United States co-led the four force components. Alongside their U.S. counterparts, Argentina co-led the special operations forces component, Chile co-led the maritime component, Colombia co-led the air component, and Peru co-led the ground component.

This year marks the first time in 14 years that PANAMAX was conducted as a live multinational exercise in Panama as well as a command post exercise, both in Panama and the U.S.

For updated information about PANAMAX 2026, visit the PANAMAX 2026 DVIDS page at www.dvidshub.net/feature/Panamax26.

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