

## Original Paper

# Protection of Citizens' Rights in Maritime Law Enforcement

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### Abstract

*With the increasing development of marine resources and maritime trade, maritime law enforcement has become increasingly important, yet the protection of citizens' rights during law enforcement faces numerous challenges. Maritime law enforcement and the protection of citizens' rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. On one hand, maritime law enforcement must fully safeguard citizens' rights and interests to avoid abuse of power and illegal law enforcement. On the other hand, citizens' rights and interests need to be effectively maintained and protected to ensure that their legitimate rights and interests in maritime activities are not infringed upon. Therefore, strengthening the protection of citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement is not only conducive to enhancing the credibility and authority of maritime law enforcement, but also to maintaining social stability and harmony. This paper mainly explores the issues concerning the protection of citizens' rights during maritime law enforcement.*

### Keywords

*maritime law enforcement, protection of citizens' rights*

### 1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization and the exploitation and utilization of marine resources, maritime law enforcement plays an increasingly important role in safeguarding national security, protecting maritime rights and interests, and combating maritime crimes. Meanwhile, illegal activities such as maritime crimes, piracy, and smuggling are on the rise, posing a serious threat to maritime security. To maintain maritime safety and order, maritime law enforcement has become an indispensable and crucial means. However, the issue of protecting citizens' rights in the process of maritime law enforcement has become increasingly prominent. How to fully safeguard citizens' rights and interests while maintaining maritime security has become an urgent problem to be solved. This paper aims to explore the current situation, existing problems and countermeasures of protecting citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement, so as to provide certain reference for relevant practices.

Legitimate and lawful maritime law enforcement is of great significance to the protection of citizens' rights. Firstly, protecting citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement is an important embodiment of safeguarding human rights. Human rights are the cornerstone of modern society, including basic rights such as the right to life, liberty, and property. In the process of maritime law enforcement, full respect and protection for citizens' human rights should be ensured to avoid abuse of power and illegal law enforcement. Secondly, protecting citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement helps to enhance the credibility and authority of maritime law enforcement. Only when maritime law enforcement authorities conduct themselves in a fair, transparent and lawful manner in protecting citizens' rights can they win public trust and support, and enhance the credibility and authority of law enforcement. Finally, protecting citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement is conducive to maintaining social stability and harmony. In the process of maritime law enforcement, full consideration and balance of the interests and demands of all parties should be taken, communication and cooperation with relevant parties should be strengthened, and unnecessary disputes and conflicts should be avoided.

## **2. Current Situation of Protecting Citizens' Rights in Maritime Law Enforcement**

At present, all countries emphasize the protection of citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement, yet certain problems still persist in practical operations. On one hand, when combating maritime crimes, law enforcement agencies often face complex and volatile marine environments as well as unforeseen dangers, which may lead to infringements on citizens' legitimate rights and interests during the law enforcement process. On the other hand, due to the inadequacies of laws and regulations and the uneven professional competence of law enforcement personnel, there are also instances of abuse of power and illegal law enforcement. In summary, current maritime law enforcement practices are confronted with the following three prominent predicaments.

### *2.1 Diversified Establishment of Local Law Enforcement Agencies*

Institutions serve as the carriers and foundations for performing duties, and the scientificity of their establishment is crucial to the ultimate effectiveness of law enforcement. The diversified establishment of local maritime law enforcement agencies is manifested in at least three aspects: First, in terms of the existence of institutions, some regions have set up certain types of law enforcement agencies while others have not. For example, Hainan and Tianjin have established Coast Guard Corps (Coastal Security Corps) within their provincial public security systems, whereas such agencies are absent in other regions. Second, in terms of internal structure, even institutions that perform similar law enforcement functions differ in their nature of identity and management systems (Cui, Y., 2022, pp. 14-25). Third, at the prefecture-level city level, the differences in the establishment of maritime law enforcement teams are even more pronounced. Some scholars have conducted a comparative study on 39 maritime law enforcement teams in different regions of Fujian Province, among which 17 are affiliated to marine and fishery departments, 10 to agriculture and rural affairs departments, 4 to natural resources departments, 1 is an independently established maritime law enforcement team, and some

regions have no such teams at all (Yang, Y. Z., 2019). The diversified landscape of institutional establishment is thus evident.

The diversified establishment of local law enforcement agencies does bring about certain practical predicaments. The main ones are as follows: First, non-standardized institutional establishment: In the absence of unified establishment standards, there are significant disparities between local law enforcement agencies across different regions. Some areas may suffer from overlapping institutions and intersecting responsibilities, while others may have regulatory gaps. This not only increases the difficulty of coordination and cooperation but may also result in inadequate or ineffective supervision. Second, inconsistent law enforcement standards: Due to differences in the legal basis and procedures adopted by local law enforcement agencies, law enforcement standards may vary from region to region. This may not only trigger contradictions and conflicts between regions but also undermine the authority and impartiality of laws and regulations. Third, scattered and wasted resources: The diversified setup of local law enforcement agencies may lead to the dispersion of resources, including human, financial, and material resources. This could cause some institutions to lack the necessary resources to perform their duties effectively, while others may face resource surplus. Fourth, uneven professional competence of personnel: The varying professional competence of law enforcement personnel in local agencies may affect the impartiality and effectiveness of law enforcement. Some institutions may suffer from insufficient staffing and weak professional skills, while others may have redundant staff and a problem of overstaffing. Fifth, inadequate supervision and oversight: The diversified establishment of local law enforcement agencies may result in insufficient supervision and oversight. Some institutions may have regulatory loopholes and lack of oversight, while others may be subject to excessive supervision that hinders their normal performance of duties.

To address these predicaments, it is necessary to strengthen the standardized, normalized, and professional construction of local law enforcement agencies, promote institutional reform and functional integration, enhance coordination and cooperation, and improve the effectiveness of supervision and oversight. Meanwhile, it is also essential to strengthen the training and education of law enforcement personnel to improve their professional quality and law enforcement capabilities.

## *2.2 Slow Progress in Integrated Maritime Law Enforcement*

The diversified establishment of law enforcement agencies reflects a more far-reaching predicament: the slow progress of integrated maritime law enforcement. Precisely because of this predicament, differentiated establishment of law enforcement agencies and enhanced inter-departmental collaboration have become alternative approaches.

Integrated maritime law enforcement is the extension and application of the integrated law enforcement theory in the maritime domain. Integrated law enforcement itself is a new concept proposed alongside the establishment of the system for the relatively centralized exercise of administrative penalty power, representing an innovation in China's promotion of administrative system reform (Zhang, L. Z., 2016, pp. 144-152). It is generally believed that integrated law enforcement refers to a new type of law

enforcement system in which a single administrative organ incorporates relevant administrative law enforcement powers and exercises these powers in a comprehensive manner (Li, G. Q., 2008, pp. 73-76). In other words, one organ is authorized to uniformly perform multiple law enforcement functions originally belonging to various departments.

The core reason behind the slow progress of integrated maritime law enforcement lies in the lack of strong support from national-level top-level design. In 2014, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted The Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Advancing the Rule of Law, which proposed prioritizing the implementation of integrated law enforcement in ten key areas, including food and drug safety, industry and commerce supervision, quality inspection, and marine fisheries; cross-departmental integrated law enforcement was encouraged in eligible fields. However, the Plan for Deepening the Reform of Party and State Institutions issued in 2018 explicitly listed only five major areas for integrated law enforcement and corresponding team establishment—market regulation, ecological and environmental protection, cultural markets, transportation, and agriculture—with the maritime sector notably absent from the list. It is thus evident that the status of integrated maritime law enforcement has declined on the national policy agenda. In the near term, its development can only rely on bottom-up local exploration and experimentation, rather than receiving top-down support and guidance from national-level top-level design. This constitutes the biggest obstacle restricting its full-scale promotion and implementation.

Currently, the slow progress of integrated maritime law enforcement is mainly manifested in the following aspects: First, inadequate laws and regulations. Compared with onshore law enforcement, maritime law enforcement is supported by relatively fewer laws and regulations, with certain gaps and deficiencies. This leaves law enforcement personnel lacking sufficient legal basis and guidance in practice, undermining the effectiveness and impartiality of law enforcement. Second, imperfect coordination mechanisms. Maritime law enforcement involves multiple departments and stakeholders, requiring effective coordination and cooperation mechanisms. Yet, the current coordination mechanisms remain inadequate in some respects, leading to overlapping responsibilities and poor information flow among departments, which impairs law enforcement efficiency and quality. Third, fragmented law enforcement forces. At present, maritime law enforcement forces are relatively scattered across various departments and regions. This fragmentation results in resource waste and increases the difficulty of cross-regional and cross-departmental law enforcement cooperation. Fourth, backward technical means. Maritime law enforcement requires support from appropriate technical tools, such as communication and monitoring equipment. However, some current technical means are relatively outdated and unable to meet the practical needs of law enforcement, affecting the accuracy and timeliness of law enforcement actions. Fifth, low public awareness. Integrated maritime law enforcement remains a relatively unfamiliar concept to the general public, resulting in low social recognition. This may lead to insufficient public understanding and support for the necessity and

importance of such law enforcement, thereby compromising its social acceptance and effectiveness.

### *2.3 Incomplete Legal System for Maritime Law Enforcement*

As mentioned above, since the 2018 maritime law enforcement reform, China has accelerated the formulation and improvement of maritime-related laws, regulations, and policy documents. This has laid a foundation for maritime law enforcement activities to be “conducted with legitimate grounds” or “supported by law”. Nevertheless, when compared with the strategic goal of accelerating the construction of a maritime power, China’s maritime legal system still suffers from insufficient completeness and weak systematicity. It faces problems such as a multiplicity of law enforcement subjects, inconsistent law enforcement effects and measures, numerous internal contradictions and conflicts, and varying levels of legislative hierarchy and scope of application.

The current status of missing key laws and outdated legal content in maritime law enforcement is mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, an incomplete legal and regulatory framework. The existing legal system for maritime law enforcement still has gaps and deficiencies, lacking specialized laws and regulations targeting certain key areas. For example, laws and regulations governing maritime traffic safety, marine resource protection, and the punishment of maritime crimes are not yet fully refined, leaving law enforcement personnel without adequate legal basis and guidance in practice. Second, outdated legal content. Existing maritime laws and regulations may have become obsolete, failing to adapt to the rapid development and changes in maritime law enforcement. For instance, with technological advancement, new maritime security issues have emerged, such as cybersecurity threats and drone interference, which are not adequately addressed by current laws and regulations, rendering law enforcement personnel unable to respond effectively. Third, insufficient law enforcement basis. Due to the absence of key laws and outdated legal provisions, law enforcement personnel may face the problem of insufficient legal basis in practice. This can lead to challenges to the authority and credibility of law enforcement, undermining its effectiveness and social acceptance. Fourth, insufficient international cooperation and exchange. Maritime law enforcement is a global issue that requires cooperation and exchange among countries. However, international cooperation and exchange on maritime law enforcement remain insufficient at present. Differences in laws, regulations, and law enforcement practices among countries hinder coordination and effectiveness in this field.

To change this situation, it is necessary to strengthen the formulation and improvement of laws and regulations for maritime law enforcement. First, we should establish a sound legal and regulatory system, fill existing gaps and remedy deficiencies, and provide sufficient legal basis and guidance for maritime law enforcement. Second, we should strengthen the updating and improvement of laws and regulations, revise and update obsolete legal content in a timely manner to adapt to the practical needs and development trends of maritime law enforcement. Meanwhile, we should enhance international cooperation and exchange, learn from successful international experiences and practices in maritime law enforcement, and improve the domestic legal system for maritime law enforcement. Through continuous improvement of the maritime law enforcement legal system, we can enhance the

effectiveness and impartiality of law enforcement, and provide solid legal protection for safeguarding maritime security and rights and interests.

### **3. Problems in Protecting Citizens' Rights in Maritime Law Enforcement**

Laws and regulations on protecting citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement serve as an important basis for safeguarding citizens' legitimate rights and interests. The Chinese government has always attached great importance to formulating and improving relevant laws and regulations. At present, China has issued a series of laws and regulations related to maritime law enforcement, including the Marine Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China and the Regulations on Maritime Administrative Penalties of the People's Republic of China. These laws and regulations clearly define the procedures, powers, methods and responsibilities of maritime law enforcement, providing strong legal support for protecting citizens' legitimate rights and interests. Meanwhile, the Chinese government has also actively promoted the revision and improvement of relevant laws and regulations to adapt to the constantly changing situation and task requirements of maritime law enforcement. In addition, the government has strengthened the supervision and administration of maritime law enforcement activities, established and improved relevant regulatory mechanisms and inspection systems, so as to ensure the legality and impartiality of law enforcement actions. In summary, the Chinese government has taken a series of measures to protect citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement and continuously improved the relevant legal system, laying a solid legal foundation for safeguarding citizens' legitimate rights and interests. Despite the certain achievements made in this regard, there are still some problems remaining:

#### *3.1 Inadequate Laws and Regulations*

The inadequacy of laws and regulations on maritime law enforcement is a major problem faced by China's current maritime law enforcement work. First of all, the Shipping Law, a fundamental industry law, has long been absent. As a major maritime shipping country in the world, China has not yet formulated the Shipping Law to this day, and only relies on some administrative regulations and departmental rules to regulate corresponding legal relations. This results in a lack of comprehensive and unified management and regulation for maritime law enforcement at the legal level, which is prone to legal gaps and loopholes. Secondly, the existing laws and regulations are overly outdated. For example, the Maritime Traffic Safety Law was formulated in the 1980s, and some of its provisions are so obsolete that they can no longer meet the needs of modern maritime traffic management. In addition, some laws and regulations lack clear law enforcement procedures and standards, making it difficult for maritime law enforcement personnel to operate and implement them in practice. Finally, the enforcement of laws and regulations is not strong enough. Although China has formulated a series of laws and regulations related to maritime law enforcement, in actual implementation, due to the impact of various factors, the enforcement of some laws and regulations is insufficient, leading to the failure to effectively crack down on and sanction some illegal acts.

To solve these problems, the Chinese government needs to strengthen the formulation and improvement of laws and regulations on maritime law enforcement. On the one hand, it should expedite the enactment of fundamental laws and regulations such as the Shipping Law to fill legal gaps and improve the legal system. On the other hand, it should comprehensively sort out and revise existing laws and regulations, update outdated content, clarify law enforcement procedures and standards, and enhance the operability and enforcement of laws and regulations. At the same time, it is also necessary to strengthen the publicity and popularization of laws and regulations, improve citizens' legal awareness and literacy, and strengthen social supervision and evaluation mechanisms to jointly maintain maritime safety and stability.

### *3.2 Non-standardized Law Enforcement Procedures*

The non-standardization of maritime law enforcement procedures constitutes another major problem confronting China's current maritime law enforcement work.

First and foremost, there is a lack of unified standards and norms for maritime law enforcement procedures. Owing to China's vast maritime territories, maritime law enforcement involves multiple departments and regions, and the absence of centralized management and regulation has led to discrepancies and confusion in law enforcement procedures across different localities. This not only undermines law enforcement effectiveness but also facilitates the abuse of power and improper law enforcement practices. Second, maritime law enforcement procedures lack transparency and openness. In some regions, maritime law enforcement agencies have engaged in non-transparent and non-public practices during law enforcement, which fails to effectively safeguard citizens' rights to know, participate, and supervise. This not only erodes public trust in maritime law enforcement but also breeds opportunities for rent-seeking and corruption.

Finally, maritime law enforcement procedures lack effective oversight and restraint mechanisms. Some maritime law enforcement agencies suffer from inadequate oversight and restraint frameworks in their operations, resulting in delayed detection and correction of illegal acts and creating room for power abuse and improper law enforcement.

To address these issues, the Chinese government must enhance the standardization and regularization of maritime law enforcement procedures. On one hand, it should formulate unified standards and norms for maritime law enforcement procedures, clarifying law enforcement processes, powers, methods, and responsibilities to ensure the standardization and consistency of maritime law enforcement practices nationwide. On the other hand, it should boost the transparency and openness of maritime law enforcement procedures, safeguard citizens' rights to know, participate, and supervise, and improve public trust and satisfaction with maritime law enforcement. Meanwhile, it is imperative to establish and improve oversight and restraint mechanisms for maritime law enforcement, strengthen the supervision and evaluation of law enforcement activities, promptly detect and rectify illegal practices, and prevent power abuse and improper law enforcement.

### *3.3 Inadequate Remedies for Citizens' Rights*

The insufficiency of remedies for citizens' rights in maritime law enforcement is an urgent issue that China needs to resolve. First, the channels for citizens to seek remedies for infringed rights in maritime law enforcement are limited. At present, such remedies in China mainly rely on administrative reconsideration and administrative litigation. However, due to the particularity and complexity of maritime law enforcement, these channels often fail to meet citizens' practical needs. Additionally, some citizens lack legal awareness and knowledge and are unaware of how to pursue right remedies, which also hinders the effective implementation of remedy work. Second, the efficiency of rights remedy in maritime law enforcement is relatively low. Maritime law enforcement involves multiple departments and regions, and the cumbersome remedy procedures lead to inefficient rights relief. In the process of seeking remedies, some citizens have to endure long waiting periods and complicated procedures, which increases their costs and difficulties in safeguarding their rights. Finally, the safeguard mechanisms for citizens' rights remedies in maritime law enforcement are flawed. Although China has established certain safeguard mechanisms for this purpose, practical operation reveals various problems and deficiencies. For example, some local maritime law enforcement agencies do not attach sufficient importance to rights remedy work and lack effective safeguard measures, resulting in the failure to effectively protect citizens' right to remedies.

To tackle these problems, the Chinese government needs to strengthen the work of citizens' rights remedies in maritime law enforcement. First, it should improve the channels for such remedies, increase their diversity and accessibility, and make it more convenient for citizens to seek right relief. Second, it should enhance the efficiency of rights remedy, optimize remedy procedures, reduce cumbersome and unnecessary steps, and shorten the cycle of rights relief. Finally, it should strengthen the construction of safeguard mechanisms for citizens' rights remedies in maritime law enforcement, improve relevant safeguard measures, and ensure the effective protection of citizens' right to remedies. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen legal publicity and education, raise citizens' legal awareness and ability to safeguard their rights, and promote the impartiality and fairness of maritime law enforcement.

### *3.4 Insufficient International Cooperation*

Inadequate international cooperation in maritime law enforcement is another problem faced by China's current maritime law enforcement efforts. First, international cooperation mechanisms are incomplete. At present, China's maritime law enforcement cooperation with relevant countries mainly relies on bilateral agreements or memorandums of understanding. However, these agreements or memorandums often only cover cooperation in specific fields and lack a comprehensive and systematic cooperation framework and mechanism, resulting in limited cooperation effectiveness. Second, there is a shortage of practical experience in international cooperation. Compared with some major maritime powers, China started relatively late in international cooperation on maritime law enforcement and has relatively insufficient practical experience. This leads to problems such as poor communication and



ineffective coordination when China conducts maritime law enforcement cooperation with other countries, hindering the in-depth development of cooperation. Finally, the awareness of international cooperation is weak. Some local maritime law enforcement agencies do not fully recognize the importance of international cooperation and lack initiative and enthusiasm, making it difficult to effectively advance international cooperation. Meanwhile, the existence of interest conflicts and differences among some countries also impedes the progress of cooperation.

To resolve these problems, the Chinese government needs to strengthen international cooperation in maritime law enforcement. First, it should establish and improve international cooperation mechanisms, build comprehensive and systematic cooperation frameworks and mechanisms with relevant countries, and ensure the normalization and sustainability of cooperation. Second, it should strengthen the accumulation and exchange of practical experience in international cooperation, learn from the advanced experience and practices of other countries, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation. Finally, it should strengthen the cultivation and education of international cooperation awareness, enhance maritime law enforcement agencies' understanding of the importance of international cooperation, boost their initiative and enthusiasm, and promote the in-depth development of cooperation. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen communication and consultation with other countries, properly handle interest conflicts and differences, seek common interests and cooperation points, and promote international cooperation and development in maritime law enforcement.

### *3.5 Insufficient Use of Force by China Coast Guard in Maritime Law Enforcement*

From the perspective of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), there are no explicit regulations governing the military activities of other countries within exclusive economic zones (EEZs) (Jin, Y. M., 2011, p. 22). Some foreign scholars argue that maritime law enforcement in EEZs, where restrictions are minimal, requires greater prudence than law enforcement on land (Hyun, J. K., 2019, pp. 148-156). Therefore, the use of force in maritime law enforcement is not precluded in EEZs. Domestic scholars hold different views, among whom some propose that "EEZs are different from territorial seas, and the use of force is not allowed in EEZs". Such cognitive differences have sparked a debate on whether it is necessary to establish differentiated norms for the use of force in maritime law enforcement based on the nature of maritime areas.

## **4. Countermeasures for Protecting Citizens' Rights in Maritime Law Enforcement**

Improving the laws and regulations governing maritime law enforcement is the key to enhancing the quality and efficiency of maritime law enforcement.

### *4.1 Improve Basic Laws and Regulations*

Efforts should be made to strengthen the formulation and revision of basic laws and regulations such as the Shipping Law and the Maritime Traffic Safety Law, ensuring that they meet the needs of modern maritime traffic management. Meanwhile, it is imperative to fill legal gaps and improve the legal

system, so as to provide comprehensive and unified management and regulation for maritime law enforcement.

#### *4.2 Clarify Law Enforcement Standards and Procedures*

Clear standards and procedures for maritime law enforcement should be formulated, covering provisions on law enforcement scope, powers, procedures and penalties, to ensure that maritime law enforcement personnel can operate and implement them in practice. At the same time, the publicity and popularization of laws and regulations should be strengthened to improve citizens' legal awareness and literacy, and social supervision and evaluation mechanisms should be enhanced to jointly safeguard maritime safety and stability.

#### *4.3 Strengthen International Cooperation*

We should actively participate in international maritime law enforcement cooperation, strengthen communication and consultation with relevant countries, and establish a comprehensive and systematic cooperation framework and mechanism. Meanwhile, we need to learn from the advanced experience and practices of other countries, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation, and jointly combat maritime illegal and criminal activities.

#### *4.4 Enhance Supervision and Restraint Mechanisms*

A sound supervision and restraint mechanism for maritime law enforcement should be established and improved, and the supervision and evaluation of maritime law enforcement activities should be strengthened. In addition, channels for complaints and reports should be improved to promptly detect and correct illegal acts, preventing the abuse of power and improper law enforcement practices.

#### *4.5 Improve the Professional Quality of Law Enforcement Personnel*

Training and education for maritime law enforcement personnel should be strengthened to improve their legal awareness and professional competence, ensuring that they can proficiently master and apply laws and regulations, and thus enhance the quality and efficiency of law enforcement.

In summary, improving maritime law enforcement laws and regulations requires the joint efforts of the government, law enforcement agencies, citizens and other stakeholders. Only by establishing a sound legal system, strengthening international cooperation, enhancing supervision and restraint mechanisms, and improving the professional quality of law enforcement personnel can we effectively safeguard maritime safety and stability and protect people's lives and property.

#### *4.6 Enhance the Law Enforcement Operational Capabilities of the China Coast Guard*

The use of force in maritime law enforcement under the guidance of the concept of a Maritime Community with a Shared Future aims to transcend the maritime rules and order centered on Western hegemonism and unilateralism, and build a peaceful and secure maritime domain characterized by joint consultation, joint governance and shared benefits. The traditional maritime order dominated by sea power emphasizes naval control over maritime shipping lanes and trade, and ultimately pursues maritime hegemony through naval warfare. This traditional order represents the reproduction of the law of the jungle in inter-state maritime relations, running counter to the international human rights order

established by modern civilization (Sun, M., 2019, pp. 29-55). The maritime order under the dominance of sea power has gradually evolved into four models: the world maritime hegemony of Britain and the United States, the challenging maritime power of Japan and Russia, the rising maritime power of India, and the developing maritime power of Southeast Asia (Zhu, Q., & Gao, L., 2021, pp. 74-84, p. 128). Yet, none of these models have escaped the Thucydides Trap.

Under the concept of a Maritime Community with a Shared Future, the use of force in maritime law enforcement is not about continuing sea power centered on navies to plunder marine resources or seek maritime hegemony. Instead, it relies on the limited use of force in maritime law enforcement on the basis of protecting human rights, so as to uphold maritime peace and sustainable development under the framework of UNCLOS. Therefore, the use of force by the China Coast Guard in maritime law enforcement is police force rather than military force. It is an indispensable means for fulfilling obligations under UNCLOS and relevant bilateral and multilateral agreements, safeguarding global maritime peace and security, protecting national sovereignty, security and maritime rights and interests, and defending the legitimate rights and interests of citizens, legal persons and other organizations.

## 5. Conclusion

Protecting citizens' rights constitutes the fundamental requirement and value orientation of maritime law enforcement. In the process of maritime law enforcement, we must always adhere to the people-oriented principle, respect and protect human rights, and ensure that citizens' legitimate rights and interests are not infringed upon. Meanwhile, we should strengthen law enforcement supervision and restraint, prevent the abuse of power and improper law enforcement practices, and ensure the legality and impartiality of law enforcement activities. Only by establishing a sound mechanism for protecting citizens' rights, strengthening education on citizens' rights, and enhancing citizens' awareness and capacity to safeguard their rights can we achieve impartial, fair and efficient maritime law enforcement, and maintain social harmony, stability and long-term peace and order.

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