

Statement of
Vice Admiral William A. Brown, United States Navy
Deputy Commander, United States Transportation Command



Before the House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces
On “Logistics and Sealift Force Requirements and Force Structure Assessment”
July 30, 2014

The United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) is a Total Force team of Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, civilian, commercial partners, and contractors providing global mobility to rapidly project national power and influence anywhere, anytime.

During large-scale operations, sealift is the primary means for deploying the majority of equipment and sustainment for ground forces, and is essential to building up combat power to meet Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) requirements. In a typical combat operation, over 90 percent of all cargo is delivered by a combination of organic and U.S.-flagged commercial vessels, crewed by U.S. Merchant Mariners. USTRANSCOM could not accomplish its global mission without the capabilities provided by the U.S. strategic sealift fleets and our steadfast merchant mariners. As the Department of Defense (DOD) postures its forces for the future, sealift will continue to be a key component in ensuring strategic agility and dynamic presence for our nation's military forces.

Prepositioning

Our afloat prepositioning program is managed by our Navy Component Command, Military Sealift Command (MSC), and is an essential element in the DOD's readiness strategy. Afloat prepositioning strategically places military equipment and supplies aboard ships located in key ocean areas to ensure rapid availability during an incident. The 24 vessels in the prepositioning fleet support the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Defense Logistics Agency, and include U.S. government-owned ships and chartered U.S.-flagged commercial vessels. While most ships in the prepositioning fleet strategically place combat equipment at sea, other vessels provide unique capabilities. These unique capabilities include the Mobile Landing Platform, which serves as a mobile option to provide our forces with a critical access capability supporting the flexible deployment of troops, equipment, and supplies, and an offshore petroleum discharge system that can deliver fuel from up to eight miles offshore. Additionally, two aviation logistics support ships from the Maritime Administration's (MARAD) Ready Reserve

Force (RRF) are available as needed to provide the Marine Corps with at-sea maintenance for fixed and rotary wing aircraft.

Government-Owned Strategic Sealift

The government-owned Surge Fleet consists of 60 total “organic” vessels including Roll-On/Roll-Off (RO/RO) vessels managed by MSC and the RRF managed by MARAD. All 60 vessels are critical to DOD’s ability to surge and meet global requirements.

The organic fleet is maintained and operated by American ship management companies. These companies conduct all organizational level maintenance, manage the U.S. citizen Merchant Mariners who man the ships, and oversee the lifecycle maintenance of the vessels under MSC and MARAD governance. All of DOD’s organic vessels are required to undergo dry-docking overhauls in U.S. shipyards every 5 years to maintain their regulatory certifications. The maritime industrial base, beyond providing shipbuilding capacity for the U.S. Navy, provides this capability. Maintaining these companies and their capabilities, as well as the experienced workers in the various maritime trades, is essential to fostering a competitive environment when soliciting affordable ship management and maintenance contracts.

USTRANSCOM is working with our U.S. Government sealift partners to find cost effective means to maintain and recapitalize the organic fleet. With the average age of the RRF exceeding 40 years, and approximately 1.6 million square feet of RO/RO capacity scheduled to retire over the next 10 years, it is important to begin the planning for recapitalization to prevent a significant loss of capability in meeting DOD’s enduring sealift requirements. The preponderance of our surge fleet, once activated, is required to be underway within four (4) days or 96 hours of notice; without this state of readiness, our fleet would not be sufficiently responsive to meet the deployment timelines called for in GCC war plans. We are

continuing to work with the Navy, MARAD, and our commercial partners to find the best long-term solutions to maintaining sealift readiness.

Commercial Strategic Sealift

Although our organic assets are vital, we rely on our commercial partners to augment the organic fleet during the initial surge of combat power and for the vast majority of sealift in peacetime and in the sustainment phases of contingency operations. Access to the commercial fleets is formalized through MARAD's Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA), the Maritime Security Program (MSP), and the Voluntary Tanker Agreement (VTA). Through these programs, DOD gains critical access to U.S. commercial capabilities while ensuring the availability of a viable U.S.-flag maritime industry crewed by U.S. citizen Merchant Mariners in times of national emergency.

VISA and MSP have been extremely successful programs since their inception in the mid 1990's and provide the federal government assured access to the required amount of capability. Specifically, MSP provides a fleet of 60 military-useful commercial vessels operating in international commerce, with intermodal networks throughout the world and jobs for U.S. Merchant Mariners. A significant percentage of our required sealift capacity needed in response to a national emergency will come from the 60 vessels operating within the MSP.

Currently, there is downward pressure on the number of qualified U.S. mariners because the flag fleet is shrinking. We remain concerned with the loss in the number of U.S.-flagged vessels in the international trading sector, specifically ocean going vessels in excess of 1,000 tons. Since 1990, the size of this segment of the U.S.-flag fleet has been reduced from 193 to 85 as U.S.-flag companies struggle to remain competitive with companies operating under foreign flags at lower operating costs. Although operations in Iraq and Afghanistan temporarily slowed the decline, the Nation's transition out of Afghanistan and current economic conditions may exacerbate the decline. Vessels continue to participate in the MSP because the combination of government impelled cargoes and the MSP stipend

offset some of the operating cost differential. The loss of government-impelled cargos, however, may cause participants to rethink their participation in MSP as the stipend alone may not provide enough incentive to remain under U.S. flag.

The VISA program, MSP, and government-impelled cargoes support the U.S. Merchant Mariner base, a vital national asset that provides the manpower for the government-owned organic fleets during surge operations. With the responsibility to manage the global mobility enterprise, USTRANSCOM is dependent on a healthy U.S. Merchant Mariner pool. U.S. Merchant Mariners are critical to USTRANSCOM's ability to meet its military requirements, and their training and proving ground are the commercial vessels of the U.S. flag fleet. As the numbers of vessels decrease, fewer opportunities exist for future generations of mariners to gain critical experience. It takes an average of 8-10 years to gain the requisite knowledge and experience needed to perform at the management level on a vessel. Fewer opportunities, combined with increasing costs to maintain a merchant mariner's credentials, serve as disincentives to the mariner base and increase the potential for contraction of the manpower pool. The end result is fewer merchant mariners available to operate our organic fleet in time of need.

Because DOD's organic fleet is maintained with partial crews until needed for real world operations, a loss of merchant mariners in commercial industry could limit our ability to bring some ships to Full Operating Status when the need arises. We are engaged with MARAD in its development of a National Maritime Strategy that is intended to grow the U.S. flag fleet and ensure the ability of the U.S. Merchant Marine to meet national security needs. We must ensure the continued support of the U.S.-flag fleet and retention of critical merchant mariner skill sets.

Final Thoughts

As our nation's military rebalances following the war in Afghanistan, USTRANSCOM remains prepared to support our warfighters at any time around the globe. Despite an uncertain future and a

dynamic strategic environment, USTRANSCOM will continue to collaborate closely with our partners to ensure we meet the nation's needs in peacetime or in conflict.