

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
STATEMENT OF THE MARITIME ADMINISTRATION  
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND  
STRATEGIC AND CRITICAL MATERIALS  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEALIFT EFFORT DURING THE PERSIAN GULF CONFLICT

April 16, 1991

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee:

I appear before you today to present an overview of the sealift effort which supported the coalition forces during the Persian Gulf conflict and which continues today as equipment and vehicles are returned to the United States and Europe. At the outset of my statement, allow me to repeat briefly how proud I am of our domestic shipyards, seagoing unions, ship operators, port terminal operators and the hardworking MARAD employees who participated in this massive sealift effort. From the beginning, there has also been cooperation between MARAD, the U.S. Transportation Command (U.S. TRANSCOM), the Military Sealift Command (MSC), the Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC), the U.S. Coast Guard, and all other branches of the armed services. The teamwork and unselfish performance consistently demonstrated throughout Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM have been exemplary. All who served have earned our gratitude,

and they will be the focus of our thoughts on May 22, 1991, as we reflect on the importance of sealift on National Maritime Day.

The MSC is responsible for obtaining sealift resources and directing operations of those resources for the movement of materials and supplies for U.S. military forces. MSC has drawn on both Government-owned and privately-owned sources for ships to meet sealift requirements to the Persian Gulf. MARAD's principal focus has been to activate a large portion of the Ready Reserve Force (RRF) ships in response to MSC requests for vessel breakout. The phased breakout of RRF ships permitted work to be spread among U.S. shipyards and activation facilities. However, simultaneous activation of all 96 RRF ships would clearly have resulted in substantial delays due to shipyard limitations and crew shortages.

MARAD began activating ships from its RRF on August 10, 1990, at the request of the Secretary of the Navy. A total of 78 of the 96 RRF ships eventually participated in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. These ships carried about one-third of sealift dry cargo transported by U.S.-flag ships. Together, all U.S.-flag ships engaged in this crisis carried over 75 percent of the total sealift dry cargo. These operations clearly confirm that adequate and reliable U.S.-flag sealift capacity is indispensable to national security. About 95 percent of the cargo needed to support military operations in the Persian-Gulf has been provided by sealift. As noted by U.S. TRANSCOM officials, when the first two fast sealift ships arrived in Saudi

Arabia on August 28, 1990, they carried more tonnage than the entire airlift up to that point.

While some problems were encountered and activation delays occurred, Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM have clearly and unequivocally validated the role of and the need for the RRF. The United States simply cannot project its interests overseas without adequate sealift, and our sealift capability rests in part on the RRF and the private citizen mariners who crew these ships. The sophisticated state-of-the-art weapons systems which worked so well during the combat stage of the conflict must be rapidly deployed during initial or surge lift so that our airlifted troops are adequately supported.

Now that the United States and the coalition forces have successfully liberated Kuwait, four RRF tankers activated for Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM are being deactivated, but all the other RRF ships remain in operational status to assist in the return of large vehicles, tanks, and equipment. It is imperative that comprehensive deactivation and lay-up procedures be completed on RRF vessels when they are returned from service to assure that no mechanical problems or voyage repairs go unattended.

It would be simple at this stage to declare the sealift effort a success and return to a business-as-usual approach after months of hard effort, but our task must be to learn from this

experience. We must identify areas of sealift shortfall and pursue ways to improve our performance.

As my colleagues from DOD can better attest, while Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM severely challenged the sealift and logistic limits of the system, they certainly did not represent a worst case scenario. Briefly, the wide-spread coalition support, the modern port facilities in the Persian Gulf to off-load cargo, the phased activation of the RRF, the availability of petroleum fuels in the area, and the limited enemy threat to naval and shipping operations all contributed toward establishing a favorable environment to orchestrate the sealift effort over the almost six months preceding actual combat operations.

Before this most recent crisis, DOD had an RRF inventory goal of 142 ships by the end of FY 1994. Because of the Congressionally mandated Mobility Requirements Study and the surge lift requirements of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, DOD is reexamining the size and mix of ships in the RRF. While I suspect that the goal in terms of numbers of ships may change slightly, it is clear that DOD desires more roll-on/roll-off (RO/RO) ships than the previous goal of 24. Currently, there are 17 RO/ROs in the RRF which all began activation in August at the first phase of the sealift effort. Full funding of the RRF budget request by Congress for FY 1991 has enabled MARAD to pursue the long-planned fleet expansion as well as initiate several readiness efforts previously curtailed due to budgetary

limitations. [ Congress has provided \$20 million in the FY 1991 Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM supplemental appropriations bill for upgrade of two or three National Defense Reserve Fleet vessels to RRF status. This work is to be performed in public shipyards. It will also help MARAD to increase the RRF inventory, but at 96 ships we are a long way short of the 142-ship goal. ] I can only implore Congress to continue its support and fully appropriate our FY 1992 RRF budget request.

We are working closely with the Navy to identify program enhancements which can assure improved readiness of the RRF for years to come. While it is very early in the planning stage, we are considering various options to improve the program. Any initiatives will be considered in context with the findings of the ongoing DOD Mobility Requirements Study.

Let me address a few other aspects of U.S. sealift besides the size and material condition of the RRF. A related issue which concerns the industry, MARAD, DOD, and this committee is the availability of an adequate number of trained personnel to crew RRF and other sealift ships in a crisis. We have testified many times about the negative effects on emergency vessel manning resulting from the long-term downward spiral of shipboard employment opportunities. The number of active seafarers has declined about 40 percent in the last decade in response to decreased job opportunities. MARAD and DOD agree that, within the next decade, we will reach a point when there will be an

insufficient number of trained officers and seamen working in the deep-sea American merchant marine to crew the RRF in an emergency. Expanding the base of jobs in the active fleet would, of course, be the preferred solution, but even a reinvigorated private merchant fleet is unlikely to result in more shipboard jobs given the larger ships and smaller crews that have become the norm. As a result, we are working with DOD to evaluate future requirements for emergency personnel.

Over 3,000 civilian mariner jobs were created by Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. All of the seagoing labor unions participated in this activity, and in our view they did an exceptional job in filling so many shipboard jobs on short notice. The union response was gratifying, but the problems they faced in finding personnel were daunting. Many potential mariners were unable to fill these jobs due to their inability to leave private sector employment for temporary work on sealift vessels. The Administration has included in its "Uniformed Services Employment Rights Act" (USERA) a proposal to provide reemployment rights for merchant seamen who respond to a request of the Secretary of Transportation to crew merchant ships in a national emergency. We hope Congress will act favorably on such a proposal which would enhance our ability to obtain additional civilian manpower for the merchant marine to meet national requirements.

Despite their best efforts, the unions were not able to fill this massive call for people from among their active membership.

They were forced to go to their retirees, many of whom were no longer active and without any recent seagoing experience. In some cases, these "old" but experienced "hands" provided valuable assistance due to their previous work on these old vessels. In other cases, seamen and officers reporting to ships were unfamiliar with shipboard systems, both deck and engineering. Short activation periods leave virtually no time for on-the-job training. Despite the resulting delays, we were able to crew our ships. We also experienced severely unequal demand for labor from the various labor sources, a by-product of both the RRF ship manager selection process and the type and sequence of RRF ships activated by the military. These and similar significant problems with personnel need to be addressed.

Another major part of this effort involved the loading of equipment onto U.S.-flag, government-owned or -chartered ships at 12 U.S. commercial ports. An emergency port operation system, developed by the interagency National Port Readiness Network over a six-year period, enabled these ports to handle this effort successfully, albeit with some intrusion on commercial operations. The success of this system stemmed from established procedures tested in repeated training exercises. Next month, representatives from these ports will meet with the Military Traffic Management Command and MARAD to begin reviewing procedures needed to upgrade the emergency strategies in light of current conditions.

Another area of close cooperation between MARAD and MSC that was quite successful during the Persian Gulf conflict was the activation of MARAD's Title XII war risk insurance program under the Merchant Marine Act, 1936. At the request of the Secretary of Defense in August 1990, President Bush gave authority to activate the war risk insurance on vessels being utilized in the sealift effort in the employ of MSC. At MSC's request, MARAD has written war risk insurance on over 325 vessels totaling almost one thousand policies. Although it would be quite difficult to determine the actual savings in premiums, since the MARAD war risk insurance under its statutory terms was provided at no premium, a reasonable guess is that the savings in war risk premiums have exceeded \$75 million, since August. This was another emergency stand-by program that had not been tested for more than 30 years, but responded with outstanding results, when called upon.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, experts in and out of Government will continue to examine the lessons learned from our Persian Gulf experience for quite some time. However, it already is clear that adequate and reliable U.S.-flag sealift capacity remains indispensable to national security. The key roles of both the RRF and the private, U.S.-flag merchant fleet have been clearly validated. This is all too clear in time of war, and too often forgotten in time of peace. We must seize the opportunity

to act while widespread public attention and support remain focused.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement, and I will be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.