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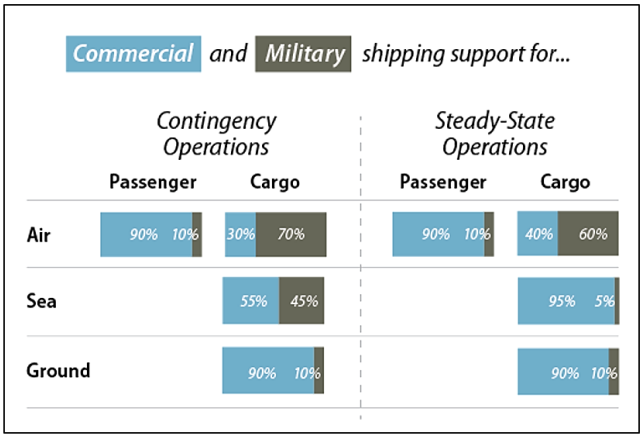
Defense Primer: United States Transportation Command

United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM or TRANSCOM) is a Department of Defense (DOD) *functional combatant command* responsible for providing air, land, and sea transportation to meet national security needs. TRANSCOM's assigned mission is to "conduct globally integrated mobility operations, lead the broader joint deployment and distribution enterprise, and provide enabling capabilities to project and sustain the Joint Force." It is the centerpiece of the Defense Transportation System, which comprises U.S. military, U.S. commercial, and foreign transportation resources.

Established in 1987, TRANSCOM is located at Scott Air Force Base (AFB), Illinois. Historically, the command has provided strategic mobility in support of several major contingency operations from Operations Desert Shield / Desert Storm, to Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. It has supported peacekeeping initiatives such as Operations Restore Hope (Somalia), Uphold Democracy (Haiti), and Support Hope (Rwanda). It has also aided humanitarian relief operations in response to natural disasters such as Hurricanes Dorian, Florence, and Michael.

TRANSCOM has a workforce of over 138,000 personnel, of which about 50% are in the Reserve Component. The command reports that on any given day it conducts more than 240 air missions, has 30 ships underway, and sends 1,200 ground shipments. As well, TRANSCOM manages over 597,000 personal property shipments each year associated with Permanent Change of Station, or PCS, moves as part of its steady-state operations (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. USTRANSCOM Shipping Providers



Source: CRS analysis of USTRANSCOM data (March 2020).

TRANSCOM operates in over 85% of the world's countries. To accomplish its extensive array of missions, the command uses military assets (organic assets), but also relies heavily on its commercial-sector partners (non-organic assets). TRANSCOM's commercial partnerships are reflected in its large volume of contracting activities.

See **Table 1** for TRANSCOM's steady-state contracting estimates for FY2020.

Table 1. USTRANSCOM Contracting Portfolio

Division	Programs	FY2020
Airlift Division	10	$2.3B
Sealift Services	6	$877M
Specialized Transportation & Support	15	$2.5B
Information Technology & related services	60	$251M

Source: USTRANSCOM

Note: FY2020 estimated expenditures on all contracts.

Component Commands

TRANSCOM's Transportation Component Commands (TCCs) fulfill roles in training, equipping, and resourcing the forces necessary to carry out TRANSCOM's global missions. TRANSCOM is composed of three TCCs, one each from the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. A description of each follows.

Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC)

SDDC, headquartered at Scott AFB, is TRANSCOM's Army component that is responsible for all defense surface transportation. SDDC connects "surface warfighting requirements through distribution network nodes to the point of need, responsively projecting power and delivering desired effects in support of the Combatant Commands [COCOMs] and the Total Joint Force." SDDC is also involved in planning and executing the surface delivery of equipment and supplies to all deployed service members.

Military Sealift Command (MSC)

MSC is TRANSCOM's Navy component headquartered at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia. MSC operates 125 civilian-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships, provide logistics support and strategic sealift, and perform specialized missions around the world. MSC is responsible for the ocean transportation of military cargo and supplies used by deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners. During contingencies, MSC also exercises operational command over the Maritime Administration's (MARAD's) *Ready Reserve Force* (See CRS Report R45725, *Shipping Under the Jones Act: Legislative and Regulatory Background*, by John Frittelli).

Air Mobility Command (AMC)

AMC, TRANSCOM's Air Force component headquartered at Scott AFB, provides airlift and aerial refueling services

for all U.S. armed forces. AMC also provides rapid transportation services in response to humanitarian crises and natural disasters.

Major Subordinate Units

In addition to the TCCs, TRANSCOM has one subordinate command and one joint directorate. Subordinate commands are established in an area or functional role to exercise operational control within the assigned operational area. The Joint Enabling Capabilities Command, or JECC, is TRANSCOM's subordinate command that "provides mission-tailored capability packages on short notice to assist Combatant Commanders to plan, prepare, establish, and operate Joint Force Headquarters in globally integrated operations." The Joint Reserve Component Directorate is a joint directorate under TRANSCOM that provides trained reserve component forces to support TRANSCOM's mission. This directorate includes the Joint Transportation Reserve Unit, or JTRU, which augments TRANSCOM in providing air, land, and sea transportation for DOD.

Non-Organic Assets

The Commander of TRANSCOM, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense, has the authority to develop and maintain contractual relationships between DOD and the commercial transportation industry to cultivate concepts, requirements, and procedures that provide responsive strategic mobility capabilities. Examples of DOD airlift, sealift, and surface transportation programs involving the commercial transportation industry are as follows.

Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF). The CRAF "is a cooperative, voluntary program involving the [Department of Transportation] DOT, DOD and the U.S. civil air carrier industry in a partnership to augment DOD aircraft capability during a national defense related crisis." The program derives its authority from the Defense Production Act of 1950, but was instituted by Presidential Executive Order 10219 in February 1951. DOD and DOT work collaboratively to manage the CRAF program to meet DOD airlift requirements in emergencies when the need for airlift exceeds the capability of the military's aircraft fleet. All CRAF aircraft must be U.S.-registered carriers that are fully certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. To provide incentives for civil carriers, the participating airlines are given preference in carrying commercial peacetime cargo and passenger traffic for DOD. As of January 2020, 25 carriers and 436 aircraft are enrolled in CRAF. These numbers change on a monthly basis.

Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA). Secretary of Defense William Cohen approved creation of the VISA program on January 30, 1997. Similar to CRAF, VISA is a partnership between MARAD and the U.S. maritime industry to provide DOD with assured access to commercial sealift and intermodal capacity to support the emergency deployment and sustainment of U.S. military forces. Established under DOT in 1981, MARAD has responsibility in areas involving ships and shipping, shipbuilding, port operations, vessel operations, national security, environment, and safety. Through the VISA program, DOD develops transportation solutions in anticipation of its wartime requirements.

Voluntary Tanker Agreement (VTA). The VTA is another program established by MARAD that derives its authorities from the Defense Production Act of 1950. It enables volunteer U.S. commercial tanker owners and operators to make their vessels available to satisfy DOD needs. The VTA helps meet contingency or wartime requirements for point-to-point petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) movements. It is not applicable to peacetime resupply operations normally addressed by commercial-type charters.

Defense Freight Transportation Service (DFTS). DFTS is a collaboration between TRANSCOM, the Defense Logistics Agency, and the Defense Contract Management Agency that provides "a single touch point for DOD shipments by allowing a commercial third party firm to manage and coordinate transportation" using all forms of surface transportation. TRANSCOM is responsible for execution of the program, which is designed for high-volume, repetitive shipments between fixed locations.

Considerations for Congress

- **Cyber security.** As reflected in **Figure 1**, TRANSCOM relies heavily on commercial providers for shipping. This results in approximately 90% of TRANSCOM's communications occurring over unclassified networks. Consequently, TRANSCOM assumes a degree of mission risk resulting from threats and vulnerabilities to the cyber security postures of its commercial providers and their associated networks and systems. While TRANSCOM actively manages the risk to its own systems, it depends on external organizations to manage the risk to its commercial providers.
- **Fuel price volatility.** TRANSCOM's operations and annual budget are affected greatly by even small changes in fuel prices, which are subject to multiple factors such as supply and demand, value of the dollar, and geopolitical risks and events (see CRS In Focus IF11202, *Oil Price Volatility and the Department of Defense*, by Heather L. Greenley). TRANSCOM uses a Defense Working Capital Fund to mitigate price volatility, however the fund serves multiple purposes (see CRS In Focus IF11233, *Defense Primer: Defense Working Capital Funds*, by G. James Herrera).

Relevant Statutes

Title 10, U.S. Code, Chapter 157 – Transportation

Title 10, U.S. Code, Chapter 961 – Civil Reserve Air Fleet

Title 10, U.S. Code, §2218 – National Defense Sealift Fund

Other Resources

DOD Directive 5158.04, USTRANSCOM

Defense Transportation Regulation 4500.9-R

Joint Publication 4-01, *The Defense Transportation System*

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