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Defense Primer: U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM)

Background

U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) is a *functional combatant command* responsible for providing air, land, and sea transportation to meet national security needs. The command was established in 1987 and is located at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. TRANSCOM is comprised of more than 138,000 personnel including more than 45,000 active duty military members, members of the U.S. Coast Guard, and more than 19,000 civilian employees. About 50% (73,000) of the TRANSCOM workforce is reserve component personnel.

TRANSCOM operates in 75% of the world’s countries. To accomplish this array of mobility missions, TRANSCOM uses military assets but relies heavily on commercial partners during peacetime and contingency response. Their commercial partnerships are reflected in a large volume of contracting activities. See **Table 1** for TRANSCOM’s steady-state contracting estimates for FY2018. Responding to an extended contingency operation would likely increase the amounts significantly.

Combatant Command Structure

For more information see CRS In Focus IF10542, *Defense Primer: Commanding U.S. Military Operations*, by Kathleen J. McInnis

TRANSCOM’s stated mission is to provide full-spectrum global mobility solutions and related enabling capabilities for supported customers’ requirements in peace and war. The command provided transportation (air, sea, and ground) in support of past contingencies such as Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom as well as peacekeeping endeavors, such as Restore Hope (Somalia), Support Hope (Rwanda), and Uphold Democracy (Haiti). Likewise, the command supports humanitarian relief operations in response to natural disasters. In addition to providing transportation support for DOD’s global response, TRANSCOM annually manages over 550,000 personal property shipments associated with personnel permanent change of station moves. TRANSCOM reports that during an average week they conduct more than 1,900 air missions, have 25 ships underway, and send 10,000 ground shipments.

Table 1. USTRANSCOM Contracting Portfolio

Division	Programs	FY2018 Value*
Airlift Division	9	\$2.0B
Sealift Services	6	\$1.1B
Specialized Transportation & Support	54	\$1.9B
Information Technology & related services	54	\$221M

Source: TRANSCOM

Notes: FY2018 estimated values of all contracts.

Component Commands

Component commands fulfill roles in training, equipping and resourcing the forces necessary to carry out TRANSCOM’s global missions. TRANSCOM is comprised of three service component commands one each from the Army, the Navy and the Air Force:

Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC)

SDDC is located at Scott AFB, Illinois, is the Army component of TRANSCOM. It is responsible for surface transportation and is the interface between DOD shippers and the commercial transportation carrier industry. SDDC is also involved in planning and executing the surface delivery of equipment and supplies to all deployed service members.

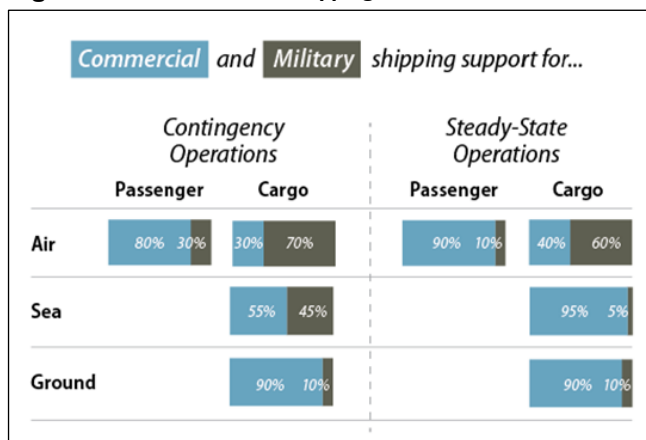
Military Sealift Command (MSC)

MSC, headquartered at the Naval Station Norfolk, VA, operates 110 non-combatant, civilian-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships, provide logistics, strategic sealift, as well as specialized missions anywhere in the world. MSC is responsible for sealift of military cargo and supplies used by deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners. MSC also exercises operational command over the Maritime Ready Reserve Force ships during contingencies.

Air Mobility Command (AMC)

AMC, TRANSCOM’s air component, is headquartered at Scott AFB, Illinois. AMC provides rapid transportation

Figure 1. USTRANSCOM Shipping Providers



Source Created by CRS based on USTRANSCOM data.

services in response to humanitarian crises and natural disasters. AMC also provides airlift and aerial refueling for all of U.S.'s armed forces.

Subordinate Commands

In addition to TRANSCOM's component commands, there are two assigned subordinate commands. Subordinate commands are established in an area or functional role to exercise operational control within the assigned operational area. The first subordinate command is the Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (JECC). The JECC provides joint planners, communications, and public affairs support to combatant commanders to facilitate the establishment of joint task force-capable headquarters. TRANSCOM's second subordinate command is the Joint Transportation Reserve Unit (JTRU). JTRU's mission is to provide TRANSCOM with trained ready Reserve Component Forces to support TRANSCOM's mission in peace and war.

Transportation 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 to provide responsive strategic mobility capabilities. Selected airlift, sealift, and surface transportation readiness programs are as follow.

Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF). The CRAF was established by a joint agreement between DOD and the Department of Commerce on December 15, 1951. The program was transferred to the Department of Transportation (DOT) upon establishment of the department in 1967. The CRAF supports DOD airlift requirements in emergencies when the need for airlift exceeds the capability of the military aircraft fleet. All CRAF participants must be U.S. carriers fully-certified by the Federal Aviation Administration, and meet the stringent standards of Federal Aviation Regulations pertaining to commercial airlines. To provide incentives for civil carriers and to assure the U.S. of adequate airlift reserves, the participating carriers are given preference in carrying commercial peacetime cargo and passenger traffic for DOD. As of April 2017, 24 carriers and 434 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, it is a partnership between the Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the commercial maritime carriers to provide DOD with assured access to commercial sealift and intermodal capacity to support the emergency deployment and sustainment of U.S. military forces. MARAD was established under DOT in 1981 and has responsibility in areas involving ships and shipping, shipbuilding, port operations, vessel operations, national security, environment and safety. Through the VISA program, transportation solutions are developed in peacetime to anticipate DOD requirements.

Voluntary Tanker Agreement (VTA). The VTA is another agreement established by the MARAD to enable U.S. commercial tanker owners and operators to voluntarily make their vessels available to satisfy DOD needs. It is designed to meet contingency or war requirements for point-to-point petroleum, oil, and lubricants movements and is not applicable to peacetime re-supply operations normally address by commercial type charters.

Considerations for Congress

- As a combatant command, TRANSCOM depends on the air, surface, sea and cyber assets provided by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard to conduct its mission. The military departments' priorities for weapon systems procurement may not fully align with TRANSCOM's priorities.
- Cyber security: As reflected by **Figure 1**, TRANSCOM relies on commercial providers for shipping. According to TRANSCOM's leadership, cyber threats remain a major concern because approximately 90% of TRANSCOM's communications travel over unclassified and unsecured commercial networks. TRANSCOM is becoming more vulnerable because commercial assets are part of national security.
- Physical security: More than 40,000 vessels operate in U.S. coastwise and inland trades; therefore, access and security at ports, railroads, and other transportation infrastructure around the world are constantly monitored as TRANSCOM operates its transportation and distribution networks.
- Fuel Price volatility: TRANSCOM operations and budget may be affected greatly by even small changes in fuel prices.
- Political stability: Past military operations in the East-West corridor from China to Europe had the effect of supporting the development of commercial infrastructure, which led to economic and political stability. Rapidly changing political environments and regional or local instability can directly impact TRANSCOM's ability to operate.

Relevant Statute

Title 46, U.S. Code, Chapter 931 –Civil Reserve Air Fleet

Other Resources

DOD Directive 5158.04, USTRANSCOM
 Defense Transportation Regulation 4500.9-R
 USTRANSCOM homepage. <https://www.ustranscom.mil/>

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