

Changing Global Security Environment Challenges U.S. Logistics Advantage

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The United States' ability to project military power on a global scale is an "unparalleled" strategic advantage, but that capability is being challenged by the rapidly changing global security environment, cyber threats to defense command and transportation management networks, and a badly aged sealift fleet, senior logistics and transportation officials said Oct. 23.

The extent of the threats was highlighted by Army Gen. Stephen Lyons, commander of the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), who quoted former Pacific Fleet commander Adm. Scott Swift saying: "If we forget about logistics, we can forget about victory."

The responses to those challenges include greater coordination and integration of the multiple service and national defense transportation and logistics operations, intensified cyber security efforts within TRANSCOM and its industry partners, and a three-pronged program to recapitalize the Maritime Administration's and the Military Sealift Command's fleets.

In a video presentation to the annual conference jointly sponsored by TRANSCOM and the National Defense Transportation Association, an industry-oriented organization, Lyons said: "Our ability to project military power at a time and place of our choosing is a strategic advantage unparalleled in the world."

But, he said, the new National Defense Strategy warns that the rapidly changing global security environment "challenges the traditional assumption that the joint global logistics network will operate with impunity."

Delivering the keynote address for his boss, TRANSCOM Deputy Commander Marine Lt. Gen. John Broadmeadow said the command's mission "depends on our end-to-end global logistics network, a systems of systems" with multiple modes of transportation and an integrated command and control system.

Although that global transportation network has been tested in the past, "the challenges of tomorrow will require a new approach, because the problems have become more complex, more nuanced," he said.

Broadmeadow noted how dependent the command is on its service and industry partners and said, our adversaries seek to exploit "the cyber vulnerabilities" where the military and commercial networks meet.

To counter that, the command is moving aggressively into the cloud to protect its data and the transportation management system, he said. It also has added contract requirements for its commercial partners to conduct cyber security assessments and to report any cyber intrusions to TRANSCOM.

"We also must ready our organic sealift fleet for the future fight," he said, noting that by 2034, 54 of the 76 organic sealift ships will average 60 years old. "We cannot wait until then to take action on recapitalizing our fleet."

To address that problem, TRANSCOM and the Navy have agreed on a three-pronged program that would extend the service life of some of the current vessels, buy retired commercial ships that would be modified and updated in U.S. shipyards, and build new vessels in U.S. yards, he said.

Recent congressional defense budgets actions have authorized life extensions for 31 existing ships and purchase of two of the 26 planned used commercial vessels. Funding for construction of 10 new ships is anticipated, he said.

"Ultimately, we will create a balanced approach to delivering

our combat power,” Broadmeadow said.

Retired Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, administrator of the Maritime Administration, amplified the problem with the aged sealift fleet, saying the cost to maintain the ships “has skyrocketed” and they had to take one ship out of service because they could not afford to fix it.

Although the plan to recapitalize the fleet is good, Buzby observed that the Navy “will be challenged by a number of funding challenges,” including replacing the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines.

Busby also detailed a new program to build new training ships for the six state-run Merchant Marine academies, which currently are using badly outdated vessels. The program provides for hiring a commercial construction manager who will contract with a shipyard to design and build the ships and be paid when they are turned over to the Navy.