

Navy League VP Kaskin: More Tankers Needed to Support a Pacific War



Gunner's Mate 2nd Class Joshua Davis fires a shot-line aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Paul Hamilton during a replenishment-at-sea with the Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler USNS Walter S Diehl on July 8. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Matthew F. Jackson

ARLINGTON, Va. – The United States needs a larger merchant fleet, including ships available for sealift and tankers to meet the challenges of the new era of “great power competition,” particularly a conflict in the Pacific, said a senior Navy League of the United States official.

Jonathan Kaskin, who spoke July 14 during a webinar, NatSec 2020: Coronavirus and Beyond, co-sponsored by the Navy League, the Association of the United States Army and Government Matters, said the “fleet itself just needs to grow.”

Kaskin, a former Navy logistics official, said “we in the Navy League would like to ... advocate for a much larger Merchant Marine in order to support the tenets of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, which says that we should have a [merchant] fleet large enough to support not only our domestic trade but a portion of our international trade to be able to maintain our commerce at all time in peace and war. I don't think we have adequate capability in both areas right now.”

Maritime Administrator Mark Buzby, a retired Navy admiral and former commander of Military Sealift Command (MSC), also spoke during the webinar.

“We need more ships,” Buzby said, noting that about 50 more vessels are needed for sealift; 87 U.S.-flag international-

trading cargo ships (of which 60 are enrolled in MARAD's Maritime Security Program, a stipend paid to keep ships available for sealift), available for mobilization for military use; and 99 large Jones Act ships.

Buzby said that the nation's Merchant Mariner workforce is short about 1,800 personnel for a sustained sealift mission.

He said he prefers to have more commercial ships operating rather than Reserve ships tied up at the pier, because they would be more ready and would have trained mariners already on board and qualified.

Kaskin said that there are two ways to grow the merchant fleet, one being an expansion of the Maritime Security Program. The other is a MARAD proposal to create a Tanker Security Program "to help mitigate a shortfall of tankers required to support a war in the Pacific."

He said only six U.S.-flag international trade tankers are available for use by the military – and three of those are already leased by the Navy to support current operations.

"The requirement that U.S. Transportation Command has shown – and earlier studies have shown – that we need more than 78 tankers. Adding 10 is not going to be sufficient," he said. "So, what we really need to do is find ways of utilizing the tankers that we have in the domestic fleet – the Jones Act [ships] – to be able to support wartime operations."