

Transcom Asks Lawmakers for More Used Vessels



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To bolster America's Ready Reserve Force fleet, U.S. Transportation Command wants to buy as many as 10 used shipping vessels.

"We need to both build it here, and we actually need to buy used," Air Force Gen. Randall Reed, Transcom's commander, told

the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday while testifying on Capitol Hill.

The Ready Reserve Force fleet of ships is part of the U.S. military's strategic sealift capability that provides the ability to rapidly conduct initial resupply missions and to transport Army and Marine Corps equipment during critical surge periods.

The government-owned RRF fleet is made up of commercial vessels crewed by civilian mariners and it is ageing. The median age of the 46 roll-on/roll-off ships in the fleet is 47 years.

"These ships are really, really old," Reed said. "The reliability of them sometimes in question because of that. I take my hat off to the crews that are actually on them to keep them warm. But to give an idea of the state of the ships, some of these ships are still run by steam."

Reed said it is vital to recapitalize and modernize the RRF fleet to ensure continued credible global deterrence.

"In the short term, we would need maximum flexibility to buy used foreign ships on the commercial market, obtain those ships, them here in the states, and then put those ships to sea," Reed told lawmakers.

Already, Transcom has received permission from Congress to buy as many as 10 used ships. It's already bought seven and wants to buy two more this year, Reed said.

The most immediate need is to secure two ships on the open market, get them into a shipyard, and then reflag them within nine to 14 months, he said.

The last of the ships will be bought in fiscal year 2026, closing out the command's ability to procure used vessels. Reed told senators he'd like permission to get as many as 10

more used ships to fill out the ageing fleet.

“I am asking for the limit to be raised beyond 10 to allow us to actually shop the market,” he said. “Currently, there are 10 ships available for us to pursue.”

Permission for Transcom to recapitalize the fleet though the purchase of additional used ships needs to be written into the National Defense Authorization Act, Reed told lawmakers.

“If we can get that change, ideally, what we would need to the fleet four ships a year, and if they’re available on the market, we would pursue that,” he said. “At a minimum, we would need two a year.”

Buying used ships to recapitalize the fleet is one option. Reed said buying new is also a possibility. During an address before a joint session of Congress, March 4, 2025, President Donald J. Trump promised an expansion of American shipbuilding.

“We are also going to resurrect the American shipbuilding industry, including commercial shipbuilding and military shipbuilding,” Trump said during his address.

The president announced the creation of a new Office of Shipbuilding and made plans to create tax incentives to enhance and grow America’s domestic shipbuilding industry.

“We used to make so many ships,” Trump said. “We don’t make them anymore, very much. But we’re going to make them very fast, very soon.”